

Oh, for grace to trust him more. I love that old hymn. I love that sentiment. I wish I was as good doing it as I am singing it because I sound fabulous when I'm singing it, but actually doing it can be a challenge sometimes. Anyone there with me on that?

Yeah. I hold in my hand a sign up sheet, and I'm just going to briefly mention this. This is coming up in the fall, but we want to get started on this. This is a ministry that we support that goes into the prisons and meets with men, introduces them to the gospel, gives them a chance to hear it and respond to it, and then comes alongside of them to support them in their ongoing discipleship. They're having a big weekend coming up in the fall, and they are looking for people who will commit to just pray for a few minutes during that weekend.

For the guys, the leaders, the men who are going to be both receiving the gospel and those who are going to be sharing it. I'm going to leave it here on the front, and if you are willing to say, yeah, I will pray on that weekend. I don't know exactly. Robert, when is the weekend?

October 17 through the 20th. If you say, I'm willing to pray a little bit during that time for these men, I'm going to leave it here, let you come up and put your name. We just need your name and the city and state that you claim as your own. Enough on that. This is our last week in a series we've done over the summer called summer in the psalms.

Last week we talked about psalm 100, and I got to be honest with you, I was really excited about coming in and jumping into entering his gates with Thanksgiving and his gates with praise. And then on Saturday, we got some really hard news. And suddenly all the rejoicing and the gladness that I was going to be speaking of seemed just a little bit out of place. Have you been there with me? Life can turn very quickly, and it can leave us emotionally, spiritually, physically, even, just really trying to make sense of what has happened in our congregation here.

I am not going to name circumstances, but there have been life changing moments where everything we thought we knew about life and about our future changed. And I'm telling you, for a Christian, when the rejoicing and gladness are ripped away, it can leave us with a lot of questions, and we look to God for those answers. Lord, please explain. Charlotte, I understand life is tough. Life is tough.

You may prefer to be wherever you're going to be. Besides, in the sermon this morning, we have questions. I know we have questions because you've shared those questions with me. Lord, please explain. Help me understand what you were doing in this circumstance.

And oftentimes the answer we get back is not the one we want.

But I would be lying to you if I didn't say this. More often we get no answer. Are you with me? More often we get no answer.

That's the situation we find ourselves in. The psalm we're going to be digging into today. I'm going to pray and I'm going to have you guys turn to psalm 88. I think it's important, if you got your bibles to just open it up because we're going to be plowing through it. But this is a.

It's a hard one, but it's an important one. Heavenly father, as we process through the stuff that happens in our lives, things that just seem to come out into our lives from out of nowhere. For people of faith, we believe that you direct our steps and our paths. And so when that path goes wonky, it can cause lots of questions. Jesus, I pray as we open your word that you speak to us, remind us of your loving kindness and faithfulness to us from generation to generation, that you do not fail us.

We can trust in you, and it is sweet to do so, especially in those times when all is quiet. Meet us this morning in your word, in Jesus name, amen. So several weeks ago, Alan began by mentioning a guy in the old testament named Heman. Now, not the old eighties cartoon character he man. You can picture him, can't you?

This is a guy named Heman. I want to call him Herman because my eyes are bad. And when I see the e and the h and the m, I sort of see an r there somewhere, but it's not Hermende. And Heman was the grandson of Samuel. Many of you know who he was.

He was a musician. He was a songwriter. The scriptures referred to him as someone with sort of a lot of spiritual insight. They used the word seer. So this guy was wise and knew what God was doing.

It seems for others. He served under King David. He served under King Solomon, who was David's son. King Solomon is considered to be the wisest one. This is all, by the way, information Alan shared with you.

This is a catch up for those of you who weren't here. King Solomon was considered the wisest man and he is, compared with Heman. He was wiser even than Heman, the writer of one. Kings says, I wish we had more of Heman's writings, more of his songs, but we only have one. We have this psalm that we're going to read today, as Allan mentioned, it's one of the darkest.

It's one of the most difficult scriptures that we have because it speaks to the ache of trying to be faithful in the tragic and confusing aspects of life. So if you're in psalm 88, say yes, and we're going to. We're just going to dig right in. Depending on what version of your Bible you have, you might have a heading there that

says something like this. This is a maskil.

It talks about who wrote it. It talks about who it's for, how it's going to be performed. It gives you sort of a description of the tune, but then it uses this word, math, skill, maskil. And that maskil word means wisdom or insight. So as hard as this psalm is going to be to read, and we're going to read all of it, it's a long one.

We're going to read all of it. They promise us that there's insight and wisdom in this. So we're going to pray for it, and we're going to look at just what I think are a few, just a few of the multitudes of wisdoms found in there. So it's psalm 88. I'm going to read from the NIV version, and I think we've got the scripture up there.

I'm not even going to ask you to stand. It's a hard one. It's a long one to read when you're feeling good. And this is not an easy psalm, so you get a rest this morning, but read with me. Lord, you are the God who saves me day and night.

I cry out to you. May my prayer come before you turn your ear to my cry. I am overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death. I am counted among those who go down to the pit. I am like one without strength.

I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. You have put me in the lowest pit in the darkest depth. Your wrath lies heavily on me. You have overwhelmed me with all your ways. And in some translations there is a selah.

Do you remember what a selah is? We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. A selah in the psalms is a chance to stop and pause and maybe reevaluate the direction your thoughts are taking you. And so in this instance, you may hope that heman goes. Yet I know and trust in your everlasting love.

That would be great but heman pauses and thinks and reflects. And he. And he doesn't move from this sort of place. He's in the next verse. He picks right up where he left off.

You have taken me from my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape. My eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, Lord, every day. I spread out my hands to you every day.

Every day. Did you notice that? Underline that in your Bible, if you are an underliner, do you show your wonders to the dead? Do their spirits rise up and praise you? He's saying, what good is my life to you if I don't have a life?

Then he gives us another selah. Okay, here we go. Here we go. Here, the mood is going to lighten here. He's going to say, but you, our lord, are faithful from generation to generation.

You never fail, fail, fail. You won't fail. No, he doesn't. Verse eleven is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness and destruction? Are your wonders known in the place of darkness or your righteous deeds on the land of oblivion?

What's your purpose in making my life so miserable? Do you think this gives you glory? He says, do you think others so? Oh, look how good he is to Heman. I'm going to put my trust in God too.

He goes, God, you're not making sense to me. But he says, in 13. But still I cry to you for help, Lord, in the morning my prayer comes before you. He says he does it every day. Every morning my prayer comes before you.

Why, Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me? From my youth, from childhood I have suffered.

I've been close to death.

I have borne up under your terrors. But I'm in despair. Your wrath has swept over me. Your terrors have destroyed me. And all day long they surround me like a flood.

They've completely engulfed me. You've taken me from my friend and neighbor. Darkness is my closest friend.

Wow. I'm sorry about that. Last week we entered his gates with thanksgiving and this week Alan was afraid to sing it. But I'm not. Hello, darkness, my old friend.

I've come to speak with you again. But I tell you, that's how it is in life. Often when the laughter and rejoicing turn to tears and hard questions for God and for a believer, questions that can almost seem like traitorous, like how do I dare ask God the question that I'm feeling right now? But one of the things that we are told over and over and over in the scriptures and reaffirmed and reaffirmed and reaffirmed is this that God wants an honest relationship with us. Hebrews ten says that we draw near to God with a sincere heart, and sincerity is not pretending like everything is just fine and dandy.

You get that we can't fake out God because first chronicles says he searches every heart, he understands every desire and every thought. So we are invited to come nakedly, honestly to God with our pain. And that honesty is called lamenting. It's a Bible word, and there are 40% of the psalms that you will read in this scripture have lament as part of them. God is not afraid of hard questions.

One of my favorites isn't a psalm. It's in another book, a book of Habakkuk. And Habakkuk begins his book this way. He says, how long, Lord? Must I call for help?

But you do not listen. I cry out to you, look, violence, but you do not save. Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?

Lord, I know your mercies are new every morning, but right now it's really hard for me to see them. You ever been there? If you're there right now, this is a morning for you. I want you to teach how to lament. Lamenting.

It's a good thing. It's a hard thing, but it's a good thing. Heman and psalm 88 are going to offer us wisdom and insight on how to do this. Well. And the first thing in the first verse is the place we start.

If you remember, he starts this way. Verse one. Psalm 88. Lord, you are the God of who saves me. That right there is the place to start.

Heman might have had a lot of questions, but he knew where to take them. He knew where to take them to the only one who had them. Even if he wasn't handing them out, he still is the one who has them. It's tempting, when you were going through suffering, to talk to everyone but God, your friend, your neighborhood checkout guy at Walmart who's just asking to be polite.

Heman would tell us, first and foremost, address your confusion to God, the God who saves you, and do so with humility. In verse two, we get a picture of what Heman's humility looks like, and it says this. May my prayer come before you turn your ear to my cry. What can happen often when we are experiencing horrible, horrible things is that we get offended with God. Do you know what I'm talking about?

We get offended with God, and we may not say it but it's like the person we avoid in the grocery store. We just avoid God. We may not run to a room and slam the door, but in effect, we cut ourselves off from any connection with God. And Heman doesn't do this. He doesn't hide away.

He doesn't avoid God. He continues to move into God. Humble yourself and press in. James tells us this. He says, if you will humble yourself in God's sight, what will he do?

He will lift you up. That's in James. James is the brother of Jesus, and I think James knew what he was talking about. So we approach God with humility. After all, he's God and we are not.

But be honest, it's no good at this point, trying to choose your words

carefully when lamenting. This is not the time to form a flowery prayer. This is just anguish. And Heman pulls no punches. He says, sister God, you have put me in the lowest pit.

You have put me in the darkest depths. You have taken me away from my closest friends, and you have made me repulsive to them. And we want to say, haman, go easy on God. But God says, no, I can handle it.

So let's take our own little selah here just for a little bit, because I think this is something I'm learning, and you probably know this, too, but let's just say it again. Pain is often the path that God chooses to bring us closer to him. Someone said it this way. Pain is the path to his presence. Say that with me.

Pain is the path to his presence. Alan spoke about how the darkness sometimes that we're going through allows us to see the majesty and beauty of the stars. The darkness can allow us to see the majesty and glory of goddess. It can bring us into a deeper encounter with God. Psalms 34 says this.

The Lord is close to those who are in the pit, those who are brokenhearted, and he saves those who are crushed in spirit. Pain is the path to his presence. Pain positions us to experience Jesus in a deeper, realer way. I love the songs we sing. I love this time together.

And we can certainly experience Jesus here together. But there's a deeper presence that you do not experience among a lot of people. It's a deeper presence that you experience when you're by yourself in Jesus. Sometimes in a pet. Cs Lewis said this, we can ignore even pleasure, but pain insists upon being attended to.

God whispers to us in our pleasures. He speaks in our conscience, but he shouts in our pain. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. It is his megaphone to rouse us. See, Jesus wants all of us.

And so don't be surprised if he uses a pathway of pain to draw you closer to his presence. Now, okay, that's our selah back to the psalm. The last thing I think Heman tells us to do is choose to trust. Now, you look at this psalm 88 and you may go. I don't see a lot of Heman choosing to trust in this psalm.

It took me a while to see it, too. But I know that this is the path of lament. And so where do I see trust in Heman's psalm? All over it. All over it.

It may seem like Heman is doing anything but trusting. But every accusation he makes at God, every accusatory point that he brings out and lands at the feet of Jesus, he is making a very bold, faithful declaration of his trust. Because here's what he's saying. He says,

lord, this is painful. This is confusing.

I don't understand it. And I'm angry because I know you are the God of my salvation. Verse one, remember that. This is why it's so frustrating to me, Jesus. It's because I know that you are the God of my salvation.

He says, if I didn't believe that, I would have given up a long time ago. But no, no, I keep coming daily, every morning into your presence, pressing into this relationship that you call me to, this relationship of trusting God.

Trust is not waiting patiently until God gives you what you want. That's just trying to wait patiently. Trust. Trust is deciding a long time before the bad stuff gets there that you're going to keep going.

I had lunch with a guy this week and he said, yeah, I don't understand. I'm just going to keep struggling through it with Jesus. That's a beautiful statement of trust. I'm going to keep struggling through it with Jesus. That's a level of commitment and trust that is so rare that even in the scriptures.

I can't think of a lot of examples of it. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that's one of them. Remember, those of you who know that story. Before they walked in the fiery furnace, the king said, are you ready to bow down to me? And they said, no.

We believe that he is the God of our salvation. He's going to deliver us. But you know what? If he doesn't, we're going to praise him anyway. That is trust.

Haman says, if I didn't believe you were going to save me, then I would just shut up and die. But I know you're the God of my salvation. This lament is a crazy, deep declaration of his trust. We will all face this moment where God does something that we didn't expect him to do, usually something that we don't even understand why he would do it. Heman isn't a one off.

I've told you guys about my time in Reno where I had a lot of questions before God and I lamented. I didn't even know that word really at the time, but I lamented and I asked God, what is your plan? Why is this happening the way it's happening? And finally the response I got and I've detailed that in the past, so I'm not going to go into it. But what I heard from goddess is, Tim, it may seem like I'm being neglectful, but here's the deal, buddy.

You're focused on this thing right here. I'm taking care of all this over here.

I love you, but I'm dealing with all of this. You are part of all of

this. You are part of my big grand plan. I want you to be part of it. I've planned for you to be part of it.

You get to be part of it, but you don't get to control how this plays out.

So what are you going to do, Tim? Well, I'm going to. I guess I'm going to praise you anyway. At least I get to be part of your plan no matter how horrible it is.

Remember Habakkuk? He's the one that looked around and said, God, what's going on? I cry out violence and you do nothing about it. I see injustice and you seem to turn a blind eye. God responds to Habakkuk in this way.

In verse five of chapter one, he says, I'm going to do something in your days that you would not believe even if I told you about it. In other words, even if I explain to you what my plan was, you cannot comprehend it. You're human. You're not God. So I don't feel the requirement to explain it to you.

Secondly, I'm not asking your permission. Habakkuk, here's what's going to happen, though. I'm going to fill you in a little bit. I love this about God. He goes, I can't tell you everything, but here's what I can tell you.

He goes, here's what it's going to be like. There's going to be famine. There's going to be destruction. The economy is going to go belly up. Your life is going to go into upheaval.

Aren't you glad you asked Habakkuk?

And then Habakkuk decides to do something radical while he's there in the pit, struggling through it with Jesus. He decides to praise God anyway. And at the end of this book that he writes is this absolutely astounding song of faith. Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus. He says this.

Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vine. Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food. Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls. Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation.

If you're in a place this morning where the ending to your story is very uncertain and very scary. I'm sorry. I know that place really, really well. I don't like it either. But I want you to know that I believe what human believed.

I am learning what Habakkuk learned. That God is not blind or absent, but his ways are not our ways. His timing, his purposes do not always align with our timing and our purposes. And he may very well put you in a pit for a while. Like he did Heman.

Like he did Joseph. Like he did Daniel. Like he did Shadrache, Meshach and Abednego. You could say that God is the God of the pits.

He's certainly the God in the pit with you. He is the God of your salvation. He doesn't leave us there. I wish I knew. That's why I wish I knew more about Heman's story.

I'd like to figure out what happened to Heman. I will someday. I believe. But I know what happened to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I know what happened to Daniel.

I know what happened to Joseph in their pits. And I know what I see him do in my pit time and time and time again. He doesn't leave us in the pit. As Alan says, the last thing. The worst thing is not the last thing.

That's right. The worst thing is not the last thing. He leads us through valleys and shadowy ones at that, but he's faithful. He's trustworthy. He's caring.

He'll not fail.

He won't fail. He won't. Keep going. Keep going. Every morning, bring your prayers before the Lord.

Every morning. Keep going. Move forward. Even in your pit. We're getting ready for a time of communion.

Communion is another sort of selah moment where we get to pause and reflect, to be still and experience God's presence among us, to be still, even in our pit, and know that he is goddesse today. The moment is the opportunity to be still and remember why Jesus lamented. Did you know that Jesus lamented?

One of the key laments that Jesus prayed was the lament of psalm 22. Do you remember what that one is? It says this. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He was on a cross, not a pit, but still, it was a place where he had to trust Jesus. He had to trust God. Jesus had to trust his father all the way to the cross. Now, how could he do that? How can he trust?

Because he had a relationship with his father. He knew his father. He said, my God, my God, today, as we come to communion, do you have a relationship with the father? Jesus made all that possible through the

cross. We can live now in this marred and broken world, tainted and colored by sin.

Knowing him, we can live in this pit that we call life. And it can be because we know who the God of our salvation is, because he laid down his life for us on the cross. And as the old song says, the blood from the cross will never lose its power, even in the pit. If your story this morning and your future is uncertain, Jesus invites us into the only real confidence that we can have on this planet in this lifetime. It's in him.

If you don't know Jesus, he is the God of your salvation, whether you know it or not. Accept him. Be baptized. Follow him in obedience wherever he may lead you. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this moment. I know the stories in this room. I know the pain in this room. I know the questions in this room, very, very many of them. And I know that some of us are still dealing with your silence.

But I pray that we can experience this like the silence of deep, deep friends who do not need to chatter but can simply be with each other. Help us to rest, to trust.

Help us to know that you are goddess, that you are the God of our salvation. I pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

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