

Challenge

THE GOOD NEWS PAPER

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Psalm 88 – A prayer for help in times of despondency

I don't know about you but there have been times when I have been praying and have really wanted God to answer my prayer there and then, but for His own divine reasons it hasn't happened that way. I sense with Heman the Ezrahite here in Psalm 88 that he is going through a similar experience in terms of answered prayer or at least getting answers to prayer at the right time.

There are a number of things that I think are helpful for us here in this Psalm and hopefully I can be of some encouragement to you as I highlight them.

Firstly we see Heman's approach to God in verses 1-2. Heman cries out to the Lord, to the God of his salvation for help. I think it is important for us to recognise that when we cry out to God, the God of our salvation, that we recognise He is our only source of help. It brings home a number of things that are important about prayer; the first being the need to pray. Often when we hit difficult times the last thing we want to do is pray; rather when in difficult times our reflex action should be to pray because we have been so used to praying and seeking God. This is underlined with Heman's declaration that he had cried out to God day and night. Have you ever prayed like that because you are in a tough spot? Maybe it is because there is a struggle going on in your marriage or maybe it's because one of your children have wandered off the track and you desperately want to see them come back into that right relationship with God. Sometimes in our desperation and despondency we can get a bit upset with God because He doesn't respond on cue. Then I think it is important for us to learn to pray persistently. Now when we pray in that manner part of what we are doing is learning to be submissive to God in our prayer. A classic example of this of course is when Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and He said to His heavenly Father "Not my will but your will be done". It is important that when we pray we come with a heart attitude that says not my will (as much as I want it) but your will God be done. Now why is it important to be submissive; well it helps us keep our focus on God and to be submissive to His divine schedule and agenda and when we are, then things don't seem quite as troublesome as we thought.

Secondly Heman spells out his troubles in verses 3-9. It is important that when we are praying to God we are truly honest in sharing with Him our concerns, and even how we are feeling. I love the way David again and again declares that his heart was failing him, which is really an expression to say that he was in deep trouble. Again as we pray about our troubles there are a number of things that are helpful as we look at these verses. First of all we need to accept trials as from God. If you look at verse 7 it says "your wrath lays heavy upon me and you have afflicted me with all of your waves". Now Heman isn't suggesting that God has deliberately set out to hurt or offend him but really to bring about a desired result in his life. We need to accept trials as coming from God. Part of doing this is acknowledging then that God is in full control of the situation. I know myself as I look around the world and see

certain things happening I could be thinking that God has lost the plot altogether but in fact the opposite is true. Everything is working towards a divine timetable that eventually will mean that Jesus will return and reign supreme. Another important principle here is that trials can reveal the glory of God in our lives. We can really see God doing some amazing things in our lives as a result of trials and affliction. In Psalm 119 and verse 67 David says "before I was afflicted I went astray but now I keep your word" and then in that same group of verses he says in verse 71 "it is good for me that I have been afflicted that I may learn your decrees". What I have discovered is that in times of trouble I learn most about God and His word.

Thirdly you will notice in verses 9-12 Heman's argument in favour of God's salvation that is the life of Christ. We can take hope in the eternal life He gives to us. It is important for us that although we call upon the Lord day and night as we stretch out our hands before Him in agony as it were, that we can know that the Lord gives us eternal life. Verse 10 says "will you work wonders for the dead, shall the dead arise and praise you?" Then in verse 11 "Shall your loving kindness be declared in the grave or your faithfulness in the place of destruction; shall your wonders be known in the dark and your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness". So when we recognise that we can take hope in God's eternal life, it is then that the sufferings of this world seem to lose their significance against the back-drop of the eternal life God has given us.

Lastly we see how Heman re-states his problems in verses 13-18. In trials and troubles we should never pretend happiness. Sometimes we hear people preach and suggest that we should be going around with a smile on our face when the wheels have come off in our lives so to speak. There are times when you feel down and discouraged but I think it is important that we don't try to pretend that nothing is happening. One of the things I have found to be of great help personally is to have a person or persons that you are accountable to; where you can share the burden with these people and have them praying for you through the troubles you are going through. Then we need to also talk through the issue honestly and frankly with God. Heman is not frightened to state how he is feeling when he says in verse 14 "Lord why do you cast off my soul, why do you hide your face from me". These are questions I am sure are asked in the depth of trial and difficulties. The reality is that God has not cast us off, He hasn't hidden His face from us – it is just our perception in what are difficult and perplexing times. That is why it is important that we don't allow ourselves to slip into a pity party as some people call it, or to wallow as John Bunyon called it 'in the slough of despond'. As Warren Wiersbe puts it; 'trials can either make us better or bent, and how we view these things can determine what the outcome is'.

In conclusion I want to say this Psalm brings home to us the fact that we should never lose hope in God as it is important we recognise that whilst things may look hopeless we should always realise that we have hope in God. It is also important to realise there are times when we go through struggles, that God

(Please turn over)

is using them to strip us of things which are not helpful in our Christian walk. As it says in John 15 verse 2 "The branches that bear fruit He prunes that they may bear more fruit". One of the pruning techniques God uses is trials, and whilst it is not a pleasant pruning method, it can be a most effective one to bring us back to Him. Then last but not least we need to keep our eyes on God and in doing so we can keep on hoping and keep on waiting and praising and trusting despite the pain

and the struggle. I like the way Isaiah sums it up beautifully for us in chapter 40 verse 31: "But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint". That word 'wait' means to literally wait in faith, and as we do He renews our strength day by day. I trust and pray you will know the reality of this Psalm in your own walk with the Lord.

— Carl Carmody, Editor of Challenge



Praise

1 We would value prayer for the ongoing need of funds for our Southern Africa and South America work. Whilst we have had some wonderful gifts coming in we are really in need of an ongoing supply of funds to not only help us sustain what we are doing but to enable us to increase the print run to meet the need.

2 Please pray for the ongoing development of each edition of the Challenge Newspaper. We are certainly stretched with the different editions that we are doing and so we would value your prayer for the necessary people and skills and insights to be able to keep up the quality of work that is being done.

3 We would value prayer for our New Zealand edition of Challenge which has stopped being produced due to our partner organisation having some financial troubles. We would value prayer for this edition and for the Lord's provision financially for them so that they might continue to get out the good news of the gospel through this paper.

4 We would value prayer for the work of Challenge in Kenya. We have ongoing needs for finances for Bibles, bicycles and for a second hand Hi-Ace van for pastor Paul Dondoh to use in the pick up and distribution of the Challenge paper, amongst other things. We would appreciate your prayer for this part of the work as well as for Partners International who very kindly fund this edition of the paper for us. Like any other organisation they too have their struggles in getting the necessary funds to honour their commitments so we would very much value your prayer as they do a fantastic job.

5 Pray for our Christmas Dec./Jan issue and for lots of extra orders. We would love to see 100,000 of this issue going around Australia to proclaim the reason for the season.

Special Request: We are still collecting books to send to African Pastors. If you have any good quality books on Christian Living, Commentaries, Biographies, etc., that you are no longer using, please contact us here at Challenge.

Prayer

1 Praise God for the encouraging gifts we have had come in lately for the Challenge work. Every gift is precious and we are enormously grateful for each one that God brings in.

2 Praise God for the way He is expanding the Challenge newspaper ministry around the world. We continue to see the demand for the paper coming into the office from countries like Cameroon, Ghana, Malawi and Egypt. We praise God as He guides and directs us in the various opportunities He would have us take.

3 Praise God for the faithful folk we have working with us in various places around the world: Argentina (Word of Life), South Africa (Multi Ministries), Kenya (Peace Makers Fellowship) and also in the United States (Urbancrest Baptist Church).

4 Praise God for the way in which God is opening up opportunities in the United States to get access into Southern Baptist churches with the Challenge newspaper. We are looking to promote to the State Convention of Ohio where they have some 700 Southern Baptist churches. We are enormously grateful to God for these opportunities and are hoping and praying for others to come along as well.

5 Praise God for all that He is doing in developing the team of staff that we have here. We are praising God for a new staff member commencing next year who will take on the development and promotion of the Challenge newspaper here in Australia.

*Send your testimony to
Challenge – Your conversion
to Jesus Christ is a miracle,
and is a wonderful means of
witnessing to a lost world
– Ring or write to Challenge
for a testimony outline sheet.*



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