

## BIBLE STUDY

### Psalm 88 (OSB 87): The Sacred Permission to Lament

#### Bible Study Preparation and Materials Needed:

Reflecting on: Psalm 88 (OSB 87) Your Mercy Is Better Than Life: Finding God in the Wilderness

For the Lesson: Orthodox Study Bible or Holy Bible: Armenian Church Edition

*Recommended Orthodox Study Bible* [HERE](#).

*Recommended Holy Bible: Armenian Church Edition* [HERE](#).

#### Optional Practice

If time permits, begin or conclude this Bible study with an antiphonal Psalm reading. Have students read the psalm aloud in two groups, line by line. Encourage them to hear David's emotion, allowing it to become their own prayer.

#### Leader Notes

Things to Watch For:

Some students may have experienced real trauma. Don't push for details or force sharing.

If discussions stall, that's okay. Silence is better than forced responses.

Be ready to follow up individually with students who seem especially affected.

#### Adaptation Options:

For smaller groups (under 8), skip partner discussions and keep everything as full group.

For larger groups (over 15), use more small group time.

If your group is less familiar with Holy Scripture, add more context about psalms in general.

For groups that are more reserved, extend individual reflection time and reduce sharing time.

#### Memory Verse:

**“O Lord, God of my salvation, I cried out day and night  
before You. Let my prayer come before You;  
incline Your ear to my supplication.”**

**- Psalm 87:1-2, OSB**

## ***Psalm 88 (OSB 87)***

*1 An ode of a psalm for the sons of Korah; for the End, for the Mahalath to respond; understanding for Heman the Israelite.\**

*2 O Lord God of my salvation, I cry day and night before You.*

*3 Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my supplication, O Lord.*

*4 For my soul is filled with sorrows, And my soul draws near to Hades;*

*5 I am counted among those who go down into the pit; I am like a helpless man, free among the dead,*

*6 Like slain men thrown down and sleeping in a grave, Whom You remember no more, But they are removed from Your hand.*

*7 They laid me in the lowest pit, In dark places and in the shadow of death.*

*8 Your wrath rested upon me, And You brought all Your billows over me.*

*9 You removed my acquaintances far from me;*

*They made me an abomination among themselves;*

*I was betrayed, and did not go forth.*

*10 My eyes weakened from poverty; O Lord, I cry to You the whole day long; I spread out my hands to You.*

*11 Will You work wonders for the dead? Or will physicians raise them up, and acknowledge You?*

*12 Shall anyone in the grave describe Your mercy And Your truth in destruction?*

*13 Shall Your wonders be known in darkness, And Your righteousness in a forgotten land?*

*14 But I cry to You, O Lord, And in the morning my prayer shall come near to You.*

*15 Why, O Lord, do You reject my soul, And turn away Your face from me?*

*16 I am poor and in troubles from my youth; But having been exalted, I was humbled and brought into despair.*

*17 Your fierce anger passed over me, And Your terrors greatly troubled me;*

*18 They compassed me like water all the day long; They surrounded me at once.*

*19 You removed far from me neighbor and friend, And my acquaintances because of my misery.*

## Bible Study Lesson

### Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Յօր՝ Յիսուս, տո՛ւր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի Քո՝ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց, ի բանից եւ ի գործոց փրկեա՛ զիս. եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Eemasdootyoon Hor Heesoos, door eents eemasdootyoon uzparees khorel yev khosel yev kordz arachi ko hamenayn jham. Ee char khorhrtos, ee paneets yev kordzots prgya zees yev voghormya ko araradzots eents pazmameghees. Amen.

Wisdom of the Father, O Jesus, grant to me the wisdom to think, speak, and do that which is good in Your sight. Save me from all evil and distracting thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

## A Reflection on Psalm 88 (OSB Psalm 87): The Sacred Permission to Lament

### When Faith Speaks Through Tears

Have you ever prayed until your voice broke, only to be met with silence? Psalm 88 stands as Scripture's most unflinching portrait of suffering: a prayer that begins in darkness and ends in darkness, offering no tidy resolution, no triumphant finale. Yet this very quality makes it one of the most profoundly honest and necessary texts in all of Scripture.

This is the psalm for sleepless nights and unanswered questions. For those who have lost someone and cannot find their way back. For anyone whose faith has become a whisper in the void rather than a shout of victory. The Orthodox Church, in her ancient wisdom, does not sanitize such experiences. Instead, she gives them a home within the very heart of worship.

### The Paradox of Faith in Darkness

*"O Lord, God of my salvation, I cried out day and night before You. Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my supplication. For my soul is filled with sorrows, and my soul draws near to Hades."* (vv1-3)

Notice the stunning contradiction: "God of my salvation" spoken by one whose soul "draws near to Hades." This is not the language of someone who feels saved. It is the language of someone who chooses to remember who God is, even when experience suggests otherwise.

The psalmist is not lying about his pain to appear faithful. He is demonstrating that faith is not the absence of despair, but the direction of our despair. He turns his anguish toward God rather than away from Him.

St. Silouan the Athonite, who knew profound spiritual darkness, wrote: "Keep your mind in hell, and despair not." The psalmist keeps his mind in hell, but he keeps his voice toward heaven. Faith doesn't require you to feel rescued. It only asks that you keep speaking to the Rescuer.

### Christ in Our Abandonment

*"They laid me in the lowest pit, in dark places and in the shadow of death... You put away my acquaintances far from me; they made me an abomination to them... O Lord, I cried to You the whole day long; I spread out my hands to You."* (vv.8-9)

The psalmist describes a double abandonment: God seems distant, and people have withdrawn. This is the loneliness beneath loneliness, the isolation that comes when both heaven and earth feel closed to us.

Yet in describing his abandonment to God, he is not abandoned. The very act of complaint is communion. His protest is prayer.

This truth reaches its fullest expression on the Cross. When Christ cried, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46), He was entering into the experience of Psalm 88. The Eternal Son experienced what it feels like when the Father’s face is hidden. He descended into the absolute depths of human alienation so that no depth would ever be beyond His reach.

When Christ felt forsaken on the Cross, the Father had not actually abandoned Him. The relationship was held by love stronger than death. Similarly, when you feel God is absent, you might be in the very place where Christ knows you most intimately.

**Q:** *How does knowing that Jesus has been exactly where you are change your understanding of your own dark nights?*

### **The Ending That Doesn’t End**

*“I am poor and in troubles from my youth... Your terrors greatly troubled me. They compassed me like water all the day long; they surrounded me at once. You put far from me neighbor and friend, and my acquaintances because of my misery.” (vv. 15-18)*

Psalm 88 ends where it began: in darkness. Every other lament psalm in Scripture, including Psalm 22, eventually pivots toward hope or praise. But not Psalm 88. Its final word in Hebrew is *choshekh*: “darkness.”

**Q:** *Why would the Holy Spirit include such a psalm?*

Because life in a fallen world sometimes looks like this. Because pretending otherwise is not faith but denial. Because the Church is not a place where we put on masks of spiritual success. It is a hospital where we bring our wounds.

The absence of resolution in Psalm 88 does not mean there is no hope. It means hope is located somewhere other than the psalm itself. The hope is that this prayer was preserved. That means someone survived this darkness to tell about it. That means we are not alone, even when we feel alone.

In the Orthodox tradition, we understand that Jesus prayed these words. The One who is the Light of the World has stood in this darkness and called it prayer.

Sometimes the victory is not in feeling better. Sometimes the victory is simply that you got out of bed. That you prayed one more day. That you did not give up.

**Q:** *What would it mean to consider your persistence, not your perfection, as faithfulness?*

### **The Church as Companion in Sorrow**

#### The Communion of the Suffering

When you pray Psalm 88, you join a great cloud of witnesses:

- The parent who buried a child
- The person betrayed by their closest friend
- The one whose mind is a prison of anxiety
- The soul who cannot remember the last time they felt joy
- You are not praying alone. The Church is praying with you, across time and space.

We live in a culture that treats sadness as a problem to be solved and doubt as a weakness to be overcome. But the presence of Psalm 88 in Scripture suggests something different:

- What if lament is not a failure of faith but a form of it?
- What if the willingness to stay in the questions is itself an answer?
- What if God is not offended by our honesty but honored by it?

The psalmist’s final word may be “darkness,” but it is not silence. He is still speaking. Still praying. Still in relationship. And perhaps that is the deepest lesson: that faith is not the absence of darkness, but the refusal to face darkness alone.

### Personal Reflection (share if prefer)

1. When have you experienced a season where prayer felt like shouting into a void? Did you keep praying? Why or why not?
2. The psalmist calls God “God of my salvation” while feeling utterly lost. What truths about God do you cling to when your feelings contradict them?
3. Psalm 88 has no resolution within itself. Where do you look for hope when your circumstances offer none?

### Group Discussion

1. Why do you think God included a psalm without a happy ending in Scripture? What does this teach us about the nature of faith?
2. How does the reality that Christ prayed Psalm 88, that He experienced feeling forsaken, change your relationship with your own suffering?
3. In what ways does modern Christian culture sometimes pressure people to hide their pain or fast-forward through grief? How can we create spaces that honor lament?
4. What is the difference between despair and honest sorrow? How can we tell them apart in our own lives?

If you are walking through a season of darkness right now, hear this: Your faith does not depend on your feelings. Your worth is not measured by your productivity or your positivity. You are a beloved child of God, and He is not waiting for you to “get it together” before He receives your prayer. Psalm 88 is proof that you can come to God with nothing but your brokenness, and it will be enough. It has always been enough. The darkness has not won. You are still here. You are still breathing. You are still praying. And that, dear soul, is resurrection beginning.

### Close with prayer:

Պահապան ամենայնի Քրիստոս, աջ Քո հովանի լիցի ի վերայ իմ, ի տուէ եւ ի գիշերի, ի նստիլ ի տան, ի գնալ ի ճանապարհ, ի ննջել եւ ի յառնել, զի մի երբեք սասանեցայց եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Bahaban amenayn Kreesdos, ach Ko hovanee leetsee ee vera eem; ee dveh yev ee keesheree, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sasanetsayts yev voghormya Ko araradzots yev eents pazmamyghees. Amen.

O Christ, guardian of all, let Your right hand guard and shelter me, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and in waking, that I may never stumble. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.