

Heman's Sorrowful Psalm

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that persistent, sincere prayer, even in the darkest times of despair, is the believer's lifeline to God's mercy and salvation.

Scripture: Psalm 88:13, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Prayer", "Faith and Trust", "Salvation"

Description

In 'Heman's Sorrowful Psalm,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the depths of human despair and the power of persistent prayer. Drawing from Psalm 88, he encourages believers to pray honestly and earnestly, even in their darkest moments, trusting in God's mercy and salvation. Spurgeon's devotional message offers hope and practical guidance for those struggling with doubt and sorrow, urging them to come boldly to God and never give up praying.

Transcript

"But unto You have I cried, O Lord; and in the morning shall my prayer come before You." Psalm 88:13.

WHAT misery of soul some persons endure before they find peace with God! There is no need that it should be so with them—their anguish often arises from a mistake. The Gospel is very simple—it is just—"Believe and live." He that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is not condemned—he at once receives pardon, passes from death unto life—and he shall never come into condemnation. But a very large number of persons will not go the straight road to Heaven. They cannot believe that it is the right road, so they get troubled in their thoughts—tumbled up and down in their minds—as John Bunyan puts it. They go staggering over dark mountains, stumbling and falling, wounding and bruising themselves, and it is a long time before they come out into the light and joy of peace in believing. I would recommend you young people, especially, to take the straight way to salvation by trusting in Jesus just as you are. You shall, by doing so, avoid the poor pilgrim's Slough of Despond and many other things that might trouble and burden you. But, as I know that many do go round about and so get troubled and perplexed, I am going to talk to them from these words of the Psalmist.

This good man, Heman the Ezrahite, went by this rough roundabout road that some of you have taken, and thus he found himself in terrible places. He seems to have been brought about as low as a man can be brought, but all the while there was this fact in his favor—he continued praying. He did pray. He would pray. He could not be made to leave off praying! If, by some process or other, Satan could have dragged him from the Mercy Seat, he would have had the diabolical hope of his ultimate destruction. But as long as

the man kept on his knees, repeating his earnest cry to God for mercy, it was not possible that he could be destroyed! I may now be addressing some who, in the depth of their trouble, have been praying to God. Not always with a brave, believing heart, but still, with intense sincerity and earnestness—and now it has come to this pass with them—the evil spirit says, "Do not pray any more. Give it up! It is of no use. God will never hear you." If that is your temptation, dear Friend, may the Holy Spirit come to your rescue while I talk familiarly with you in His name!

First, from this Psalm, learn how to pray. Secondly, from the Psalmist's example, resolve to pray in your very worst case. After I have spoken upon these two points, I shall close by giving you some reasons why you will find it wise to thus pray.

I. First, then, from this Psalm, LEARN HOW TO PRAY.

A great many people make a mistake about what prayer really is. They seem to think that it consists in repeating a form of words, but it does not. The witch of old used to mutter certain phrases and she pretended that she worked great wonders by repeating such and such words backwards! But there was no real power about her words—it was sheer superstition to believe in her incantations. I pray you, beloved Friends, do not rely upon prayer as a kind of witchcraft, for it is nothing better than witchcraft to believe that the mere utterance of certain sacred words and phrases can have any appreciable effect either upon yourselves or upon God! Prayer is the longing of the soul to hold communion with the Most High, the desire of the heart to obtain blessings at His hands. James Montgomery happily described what real prayer is when he wrote—

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, Uttered or unexpressed,

The motion of a hidden fire, That trembles in the breast. Prayer is the burden of a sigh, The falling of a tear, The upward glancing of an eye, When none but God is near. Prayer is the simplest form of speech That infant lips can try! Prayer the most sublime strains that reach The Majesty on high! Prayer is the contrite sinners voice Returning from his ways While angels in their songs rejoice, And cry, 'Behold he prays!'"

If you would pray aright, you will do wisely to copy the writer of this Psalm and, first, tell the Lord your case. In this Psalm, Heman makes a map of his life's history. He puts down all the dark places through which he has traveled. He mentions his sins, his sorrows, his hopes (if he had any), his fears, his woes and so on. Now, that is real prayer—laying your case before the Lord! Go to your chamber, shut your door and tell the Lord all about yourself! Do you lack words? Well then, use no words. Tell Him all simply by the movements of your thoughts, for God can read the thoughts of men. Act as if you, like Hezekiah, were opening a letter—and spread it out before the Lord. Hide nothing from Him! It is true that you cannot hide it, for He knows all about you. But, still, do not try to conceal anything from Your God. Tell Him about your life of sin. Tell Him of your vain attempts to make yourself better. Tell Him of your many failures. Tell Him of your false hopes. Tell Him of all your blunders and mistakes and then say, "Lord, I do not, even now, fully understand my own case, but You do. Do with me according to Your own wisdom and prudence, and save Your servant, I beseech You." That is the way to pray! This is how the Psalmist prayed. Try the same plan as soon as you get home. No, do not delay, but pray thus at once! Open your heart to God and spread your case before Him right now!

Then, the next rule of prayer is, pray naturally. Note that the Psalmist says, "O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before You." Children are very eloquent when they cry—you have no need to

teach them the arts of oratory or of posturing when they really want a thing—they cry all over till they get it! That is truly the way to pray— when you so want the blessing that your heart and your flesh cry out to the living God! You will not need to trouble about words. Your eyes shall aid you with their liquid pleas. Your breath shall assist you as you sigh and sob. Every part of your being shall help you as you stretch out your hands to God. The best prayer is like a cry—the most natural expression of the sorrow and the need of the heart. Come like that to God! Get upstairs into that little room where no eyes but the Lord's shall see you—and there cry to Him, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." That is the way to pray, not to repeat some pompous form which may have been useful to saints in ages gone by, but to let your very soul pour out itself like water before the Lord in the most natural way that it can find!

But you must also notice, in the first verse, what is very essential to prayer. The Psalmist says that he cried day and night before God. This makes a wonderful difference in prayer! Praying is not whistling to the winds, it is crying before God—speaking to God! You cannot see Him, but He is there! Then tell Him your case. You cannot hear His footsteps to remind you of His Presence, but He is there, so ask for what you need—deal directly with God! Remember what Paul wrote to the Hebrews—"He that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Believe that God is and that He hears prayer, and you shall find it to be so in your own experience! I challenge any man to put this matter to the test and see if he does not find it as I say. There never was one, yet, who did come thus to God and God sent him away empty! Poor trembling Soul, get to your God! If up to now your prayers have been earnest, but you have left out this one important point that you have not really prayed to Him, then begin at once in a better style. You may write a hundred letters to a friend, but you will never receive an answer to them if you do not properly direct them and mail! So, many persons forget to direct and post their prayers by really presenting them before God.

Next, dear Friends, this Psalm will help you in prayer if you read aright its first words—"O Lord God of my salvation." Pray with this belief fixed in your mind—that your help must come from God—and pray expecting salvation from the Lord. It is true, whether you know it or not, that you are lost—and that only God, Himself, can save you. Pray in the full belief of that fact. Go to God with this thought in your mind and this utterance out of your mouth—"O Lord, I am lost unless You help me! I am undone unless You come to my rescue! Here I am at your Mercy Seat, crying to You, Lord, save me." Do not go to so-called priests. Do not go to ministers or to Christian friends with any idea that they can help you the turn of an ounce! Go straight away to God, applying to Him through our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is not possible that He will turn you away! Try it and see. Some of us who were certainly as guilty as ever you can be, have tried this plan and we have found mercy and we are, therefore, all the more earnest in entreating you and all other sinners to do the same!

Further, dear Friends, that you may pray aright, notice that the Psalmist prayed often. In the first verse he says, "I have cried day and night before You." Further on he says, "I have called daily upon You." I like those morning prayers of which our text speaks—"In the morning shall my prayer come before You." I remember, as a lad, when I was seeking the Savior, getting up with the sun that I might get time to read gracious books and to seek the Lord. When I look back upon it, I can see why the Word was blessed to me when I heard the Gospel preached in that Methodist Chapel at Colchester, because I had, before that, been up many times crying to God for the blessing! There are some people here who do not know what it is like early in the morning. You never did, in your lives, see the sunrise, did you, unless you got up earlier than usual one winter's morning? I have often proved that the early morning is the best part of the day. The dew of the morning has medicine in it to drive away many a disease. A little while, all alone in the

morning, might prove to be the time in which God would meet with you—will you not try it?

But the Psalmist says that he also prayed at night. Perhaps, when others were asleep, he stole from his couch and bowed His knee, and cried to God. When all is hushed and still—and there is, even in London, an hour of that kind, somewhere between three and four o'clock in the morning when the streets cease, for a while, their almost perpetual grind and the air is still and quiet—it is wonderful how you may be helped to pray by the silence that is round about you! O Friend, if you are not saved, I would beseech you to get up at the dead of night and cry to God for salvation! I would advise you not to go to your beds, nor to think of falling asleep till you have believed in Jesus to the saving of your soul lest you should never wake up in this world, but should awake in that state in which there is no hope, forever, for those who have died impenitent! Dear Hearts, cry often, cry continually to God until He gives you this salvation! And after that I know you will always cry to Him, for you will not be able to help it! Prayer will become your daily breath and you will pray, then, as naturally as your lungs now heave with the breath of life! But pray often, even as Heman did.

The Psalmist tells us, also, that he prayed with weeping and mourning. Read verse nine—"My eyes mourns by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon You." That is a blessed style of praying, when the prayers are salted with penitential tears! If your heart is breaking with repentance and sorrow for sin, you will break down the bars which shut you out of hope and peace! If you will give up your sin. If you mourn over your sin. If you sigh and cry to become gracious and holy, you shall prevail before long, for God may permit a weeping penitent to stand awhile at mercy's door, but He can never send that penitent away empty, for it is written over that door (I can read the golden letters)—"He that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." While God lives, never shall a sinner truly come to Him and yet be cast out! I say again, go and try it, go and try it, and you shall find it to be so!

Once more, you will perhaps find prayer more successful if you follow the Psalmist's way of praying pleadingly. Notice how he puts it in the 10th verse—"Shall the dead arise and praise You?" Plead with God! If you are in earnest, you will soon find pleas that you can use with Him. "Lord, save me! It will glorify Your Grace to save such a sinner as I am. Lord, save me, else I am lost to all eternity! Do not let me perish, Lord! Save me, O Lord, for Jesus died. By His agony and bloody sweat, by His Cross and passion, save me." I am going over the kind of pleas I used when I took my arguments and came before the Throne of Grace and said, "I will not go away, I will not quit the Mercy Seat except You bless me." Surely you can find some reason why you should be saved! Look not for it in any merit of your own, else you will look where you will never find it! But look to His Free Grace and Sovereign Love—to the heart of God and to the bleeding wounds of Jesus—and say to God, "Lord, I cannot, I will not, let You go except You bless me." If you pray in that fashion, it will not be long before the morning light of salvation will break in upon your troubled spirit!

II. This leads me now, briefly, to speak upon my second division—from the Psalmist's example, **RESOLVE TO PRAY IN YOUR VERY WORST CASE.**

I want to go over the Psalm, again, very rapidly, to remind you of the writer's experience. This man of God was, first, full of troubles. Note what he says in the third verse—"My soul is full of troubles." Yet he prayed! When you are full of troubles, go to God with them, that is the very time when you most need to pray. "But," you say, "Mr. Spurgeon, you do not know all that I have to think of." No, but I do know that the more you have to think of, the more reason you have to go to God in prayer about it. That was a grand argument of Martin Luther when he said to his friend, "I have a very busy day, today. I have so much work to do that

I am afraid I shall not get through it all. I must have at least three hours' prayer, or else I shall not have time to get through all my toil." The more work he had to do, the more prayer he felt that he needed! Is not that right? The more loads you have to drag, the more horses you need—and the more work there is to be done, the more reason is there for crying to God to help you to do it! That is not a waste of time. On the contrary, it is the best employment of time that anyone can have!

When you are full of trouble, pray the more. "Ah," says one, "I gave up praying, Sir, because I was in such trouble." Foolish brother! Foolish sister! Another says, "I went down in the world till I felt that I had not any clothes fit to come in." Clothes fit to come in? Any clothes are fit to come in if you have paid for them! "Oh!" says another, "but I was so troubled that I did not like to come." What? Not go to the House of the Lord when you most need comfort? That is the time when you ought certainly to come! Do not, I pray you, stay away from the outward means of Grace when you are in trouble! But especially do not stay away from God, Himself, when you are tried and perplexed. When you are as full of trouble as you can be, then is the time to pray the most!

Next, it seems that the Psalmist was ready to die—"My life draws near unto the grave." Well, do not leave off praying because you are ready to die! Then, surely, is the time to pray more earnestly than ever—

"Prayer is the Christian's vital breath, The Christian's native air! His watchword at the gates of death— He enters Heaven with prayer." If you are going to die, die praying! Do not let the fear of death stop your praying, that would be folly, indeed!

Moreover, the Psalmist had given himself up—"I am counted with them that go down into the pit." Well now, if you have given yourself up, yet still pray. I know that you say, "Sir, I am in despair." Well, offer one more prayer, Brother! One more prayer and if you should not get comfort, then, I will come to you and say, yet again, "One more prayer." If you despair of everything else, yet do not despair of the mercy of God! Your extremity will be the Lord's opportunity. Keep on praying! As long as you are out of Hell, still keep on praying, and so you shall never go there, for no praying soul can ever be cast away from the Presence of God. Keep on praying, I beseech you, even if worse comes to worse.

I fancy that I hear you say, "Oh, but I have no strength left!" Well, then, you are just like Heman, with no strength, for he said, "I am as a man that has no strength." Pray all the more if that is your case. If you have not strength to kneel, fall flat on your face and pray to God, but keep at it, hold on to it! If you can scarcely hold on, yet somehow or other get a grip of the Divine promise and plead for God's mercy for the sake of Jesus—and you shall never perish!

I do not know whether I am spreading my net widely enough, but there may be one who says, "I am forgotten!" Then listen to what Heman says—"I am like the slain that are in the grave, whom You remember no more: and they are cut off from Your hands." Man, if you have written yourself down as lost. If you have given up all prayer. If you never open your Bible. If you have resolved never again to come to the House of God because you despair of mercy, yet, I beseech you, know that it is a lie that deceives you! There is still hope for you! Believe that Jesus still receives sinners—yes, such sinners as you are—and go to Him by believing prayer and you shall yet find mercy! There are many records of men and women who have been in despair through guilt for 20 years or even a longer period and then have been Divinely delivered!

I remember one case, that of Mr. Timothy Rogers, who was 28 years in despair and yet came out to light and liberty—and wrote a wonderful book on trouble of mind which has been a comfort to many other

afflicted souls. Do not despair even if Satan seems to have gripped you and to be dragging you down to the bottomless pit! As long as you yet live, the Gospel woos you and entreats you to believe in Jesus Christ, for there is yet room in the heart of God and in the love of God for such a sinner as you are! I pray you, do not cease to cry unto God! Still continue calling upon Him till He gives you a comforting answer!

Perhaps you say, "I feel the wrath of God so heavily." What if you do? Go and plead the mercy of God in Christ and, as Christ, in the place of sinners, bore His Father's wrath, go and rest in that great vicarious Sacrifice! "But I have nobody to speak to," says another. Never mind if you have not—that is all the more reason why you should pray to God and plead with God who will not leave you. "But I am distracted," says another. Yes, and you will be distracted, and I should not wonder if you went out of your mind unless you go to God as you are, and implore Him to look at your distractions and to lay His gentle hand upon you and restore you to yourself—and then to restore you to Himself. I wish I knew how to plead with each one of you personally. I feel that I want to go down these stairs, and round these galleries, and to pick out men and women who are being tempted not to pray, again, and to give each of them a brotherly grip of the hand and to say, "Do not cease to plead for your life! Do not cease to look to Jesus on the Cross! Hope in Him! It is Satan's desire to ruin you by leading you to despair! Take heart of hope and believe that Mercy's gate is still open to you! Come, and welcome, and you shall in no wise be cast out."

III. Now I finish with A FEW REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD KEEP ON PRAYING and why you should add to your prayer a simple confidence in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is the first reason. Suppose, dear Friend—and I do not like even to suppose such a thing—but, for the sake of argument, suppose that what your despair says is true—that you will perish? Then you cannot lose anything by prayer, can you? Remember what we sang a few minutes ago—

"I can but perish if I go. I am resolved to try, For if I stay away, I know I must forever die."

I repeat that you cannot lose anything by prayer. "Oh," I have said to myself, when broken down under a sense of sin, "God cannot be angry with me for crying to Him for mercy! Surely that cannot be an increase of my guilt—that I dare to say, 'Lord, forgive me.' The worst criminal before a judge may at least beg for mercy, so I will put in my plea—in broken words and with many tears. I cannot lose anything by praying and, therefore, I will certainly continue to pray unto the Lord."

Moreover, dear Friends, it is not so great a thing, after all, to have to continue to ask. It is not so hard a thing for me to be made to wait a little while. As a sinner I kept God waiting for me long enough, yes, far too long! He called, but I would not come—what wonder if now He keeps me waiting? Shall I be in a pet and say, "I will wait no longer"? Oh, the many sermons I have heard and thrown on one side! Oh, the many times the Spirit of God has touched my conscience and I have resisted His strivings! Ought I, therefore, to be at all surprised if now He should say to me, "You must wait a bit at Mercy's gate, for I will have you knock, and knock, and knock again before I let you in"? Oh, no, it is not so hard a thing, and it will pay me for waiting! When He does but open the gate, I shall think very little of the many prayers and tears that I have offered to Him—I shall be so overjoyed to get inside that I shall bless Him for keeping me waiting! Therefore, my Soul, press on!

Keep on praying, for what if He should, after all, hear you? O poor Heart, what if, after all, your sin should be forgiven you and you should become a child of God? O you forlorn one, what if the light of Heaven should yet shine in upon your heart and all the bells of holy joy should ring within your spirit? What if it should be so? And it will be so if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ! It may be that you are within an inch

of salvation even now. Let me tell you, if you are but looking to Jesus, you already have salvation! One trustful glance at Him upon the Cross and you are saved, saved now, and saved forever! God grant that it may be so with you!

At any rate, cease not to pray, for He to whom you pray is a gracious God. The widow who went to the unjust judge was importunate and prevailed with him, unjust as he was. But you are pleading with a loving God who gave His Son to die for sinners! Take good heart—you will not plead in vain, for He loves to hear your prayers. He must, He will answer you, for He is a God of Grace!

Besides, if He does not save you, will He be a gainer by it? And if He does save you, will He be a loser by it? Oh, no, dear Heart! If He will save you, it will increase His honor and His Glory. Why, you yourself will tell everybody what a good God He is, will you not? And your friends and your neighbors, when they see you saved, such a sinner as you are, will begin to say to one another, "Here is a wonder of Grace! Look what God has done for this man. Let us come and seek Him, too." It is not to God's disadvantage to save you, now that Christ has died. Therefore, take heart and be of good courage.

Moreover, He has heard others. He who speaks to you, now boldly tells you that God heard him. "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears! This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles." Come along with you, whoever you are. I am sure you can pray as well as I did when first I sought His face. I am sure you know about as much of the Gospel as I did when I first looked to Him, for I did not really know the Truth of God till I heard that word, "Look! Look! Look!" That is about all I know even now! I look at Jesus and He looks at me! I am looking to Jesus, and I am lightened of all my burden! That is the whole story. Look to Him and you shall be lightened, too! If others have been saved, why should you not be saved? Therefore, pluck up heart and still cry mightily and believingly to Him!

More than that, the Lord has promised to hear you. Listen, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." Here is another precious promise, "Whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." That is a big, "whoever"! Let me repeat that text. "Whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The Lord does hear prayer! Do not let any unbelief upon that point linger any longer in your heart! He will hear you, now, sitting in your pew. Try it! Try it! If you have been praying for months and yet no peaceable answer has come to you, resolve this moment that you will never cease your entreaties until He grants you the desire of your heart!

I am looking upon many young men and women here—how I wish that they would all look to Jesus even now! Oh, that at least some of you, dear young Friends, might begin to be Christians from this very hour! The harvest is past, the summer is well-near ended and you are not saved! Before the leaves fall from the trees, yield yourselves to Jesus! There are some boys and girls here—the Lord grant that they may, while they are yet children, trust in Jesus and be saved! But the most of you are men and women in middle life and many, very many of you, are aged people. Have you found Christ, dear Friend? Are there any of you old folks who are without Christ? I cannot make you out—gray-headed and yet unconverted? What is to become of you? In the order of nature, you must soon die. The young may die, but the old MUST. Oh, that you would not rest in your declining years till all is right for eternity! You know what accidents are constantly occurring and how suddenly men pass into eternity! A man has heart disease and without a moment's warning he is hurried before his Maker's bar! Prepare to meet your God and do so by believing in Him whom God has set forth to be the Savior of men, even the Lord Jesus Christ, who died, "the Just

for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

God bless you, dear Hearers! We shall never, all of us, meet again on earth—that is not possible among these thousands from all quarters of the globe—but may the sincere penitent prayer of all the unsaved among us be so heard that we may all meet in Heaven! Amen and Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALM 88.

A Song or Psalm for the sons of Korah, to the chief Musician upon Mahaloth Leannoth, Maschil of Heman the Ez-rahite. I think that this is the darkest of all the Psalms—it has hardly a spot of light in it. The only bright words that I know of are in the first verse. The rest of the Psalm is very dark and very dreary. Why, then, am I going to read it? Because, it may be there is some poor heart, here, that is very heavy. You cannot proclaim of this great crowd how many sorrowing and burdened spirits there may be among us, but there may be a dozen or two of persons who are driven almost to despair. My dear Friend, if this is your case, I want you to know that somebody else has been just where you are. Remember how the shipwrecked man upon the lonely island all of a sudden came upon the footprints of another human being? So here, on the lone island of despondency, you shall be able to trace the footprints of another who has been there before you. Hear how he prays.

Verse 1. O LORD God of my salvation, / have cried day and night before You. It was only a cry, a cry as of an animal in pain, or, at best, the cry as of a child that has lost its mother. "I have cried day and night before You."

2. Let my prayer come before You. "Give me an audience, O Lord. Do not shut the door in my face. My prayer has been knocking, knocking, knocking, at Your gate! Open it. 'Let my prayer come before You.'"

2. /incline Your ear unto my cry. "Stoop down to me out of Heaven, O Lord. Bow that ear of Yours to hear even my feeble and unworthy cry. I know that I do not deserve it. I know that it will be a great act of condescension on Your part, but do 'incline Your ear unto my cry.'"

3. For my soul is full of troubles. "Full of troubles, brimming over with grief, and every drop of it is as bitter as gall."

3. 4. And my life draws near unto the grave. / am counted with them that go down into the pit. "They put me down as a dead man. They that see the lines of fierce despair upon my face reckon that I cannot live long. 'I am counted with them that go down into the pit.'" These were his pleas in crying unto God—

"Distresses round me thicken, My life draws near the grave! Descend, O Lord, to quicken, Descend, my soul to save!"

4. / am as a man that has no strength. Here is one, in the time of manhood, when he should be strongest, who yet says, "I am as a man that has no strength." This subject may not interest some of you, just now, but it is here, so we must mention it. And it may be needed even by you, one of these days. Bright eyes are not always bright and the earthly joy that leaps and dances does not abide forever! The day may come when you will turn to this Psalm with the two eights in it and find comfort in it because it describes your case, also.

5. Free among the dead—A freeman of the sepulcher, at home at death's dark door. "Free among the dead,"

5. Like the slain that lie in the grave whom You remember no more: and they are cut off from Your hand. This is, perhaps, the most awful depth of the whole Psalm. The writer bemoaned that he was not remembered, even, by God, any more, and that he was cut off from God's hand. At least, so he thought.

6, 7. You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Your wrath lies hard upon me, and You have afflicted me with all Your waves. Selah. Very properly here comes a, "Selah." Such a strain upon the harp strings had put them all out of tune! So the players had notice to retune their harps and the singers were bid to lift up the strain of their song. It seems to me as if the writer, here, lifted his head above the waves of the tempestuous sea and still kept on swimming.

8. You have put away my acquaintance far from me. You have made me an abomination unto them: / am shut up, and / cannot come forth. This is the utterance of a soul imprisoned in solitary confinement with nobody able to come to it to breathe out consolation. "You have put away my acquaintance far from me. They cannot come to me and I am shut up, and I cannot come forth to them."

9. My eyes mourn by reason of affliction: LORD, / have called daily upon You, / have stretched out my hands unto You. Now hear how the Psalmist pleads with the Lord! Prayer is always best when it rises to pleading. The man who understands the sacred art of prayer becomes a special pleader with God!

10. Will You show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise You? Selah. "Shall the dead arise and praise You?" Not in this life, though the godly will praise the Lord in the world to come. But now, when a Christian dies, God loses a chorister from the choirs of earth—there is one less to sing His praises here—and the Psalmist, therefore, pleads, "Lord, if I live, You can show Your wonders to me; but will You show Your wonders to the dead? If I am alive, I can praise You; but shall the dead arise and praise You?"

11. 12. Shall Your loving kindness be declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in destruction? Shall Your wonders be known in the dark? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? He pleads that if he dies, he shall not be able to proclaim the mercy of the Lord! God will lose a singer from His earthly choir, a witness from His earthly courts, a testi-fier of His loving kindness, faithfulness and righteousness.

13. But unto You have / cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer come before You. "I will be up before You come to me. I will be first to approach You. I will salute the rising sun with my rising prayer."

14. LORD, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me? Note again the earnestness of the Psalmist's pleadings. We have had many of them already—each verse has, I think, had at least two pleadings in it. If You would be heard by God, take care that you reason with Him and press your arguments with the Most High. He delights in this exercise of persevering supplication which will take no denial.

15-18. / am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while / suffer Your terrors, / am distracted. Your fierce wrath goes over me. Your terrors have cut me off. They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together.

Lover and friend have You put far from me and my acquaintance into darkness. There the Psalm ends. It is a sorrowful wail and it comes to a close when you do not expect it to finish. It really has no finish to it, as when men wind up their songs with proper finales—it is broken off like a lily snapped at the stalk. I have read you this 88th Psalm as an example of persevering prayer. The man who wrote it—"Heman the Ezrahite"—kept on praying even when he did not seem to be heard and thus he is a pattern to us. Yet

notice how the next Psalm begins—"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord." It is not always the sorrowful sackbut that is to be in our hands—we can play the joyous harp as well! "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever." "I will never leave off praising Him." "With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/heman-s-sorrowful-psalm/>

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