

Writer Liz Petrone shares this story and thoughts:

***Many years ago an old boyfriend, asked me to tell him what my wildest fantasy was. I looked at him. "You really want to know?"***

***He nodded, eager.***

***So I leaned in close, lowered my voice, and told him how I wanted—more than anything—for someone to tell me that everything was going to be okay convincingly enough that I believed it.***

***I knew from the way his face fell that he was disappointed with my answer, but there was nothing else to say. It was the truth.***

***Everything is going to be okay. It's such a magical phrase, one of my favorites still. I've said it countless times to everyone I love, and once I had kids I found myself saying it to them constantly: everything is okay it's okay it's okay all strung together to soothe them when they were sad or hurt or scared or over-tired or mad because they couldn't wear dirty underwear as a hat to school. I even say it in my sleep when they whimper next to me, just a reflex that pops out of my still-unconscious mouth, as instinctively a part of my parenting now as checking the toilet seat before I sit down or whipping my arm out across the passenger seat when I brake too fast.***

***I've said it to myself even more, probably a million times over the years, using it as a mantra to get through awkward phases and job losses and bad breakups and bad hair days. But when my mom died, it didn't work. It just wasn't true and I knew it.***

Sometimes ***Everything is NOT going to be OK.***

We are in a series of sermon studies looking at some of the Psalms. As we have noted, there is a large gamut of themes that are covered in the book of Psalms. If you read through the book of Psalms it won't be long until you come across words of pain and brokenness. Sometimes the Psalmist found himself in a place of darkness and despair. And the writer is very open and honest about what they are feeling and experiencing. Today, I want to look at one of those Psalms today – Psalm 88. Listen as I read this Psalm.

## Scripture

## Psalm 88 (NIV)

These are painful words. It is heart breaking to read these words. We almost want to cry out **"Stop!! I don't want to hear any more."** Here is a writer that we would love to take in our arms, and say those soothing words, ***Everything is going to be ok!*** But his pain is so deep and intense that we don't know if we can even say that. We just don't know if it is true. Perhaps some of you have been here. You have experienced **some trauma, some loss.** You have been thrust into a **season of grief and sorrow.** You have fought the **darkness of depression.** You could have written this Psalm.

In some of our English Bibles, the Psalm is printed with some breaks between some of the verses. Certain themes are being separated from the rest of the Psalm. Those gaps break the Psalm in pieces that help us in studying the book.

**Section 1 (Vs. 1-2).** The first two verses tell us about the composer and his relationship with God. He addresses God with that name that we looked at a few weeks ago – **YAHWEH (LORD).** So the writer is one of God's Covenant people. The LORD is his Lord. He is a believer who has aligned his life with YHWH and His purposes. So right away, we are confronted with a **troubling predicament.** Here is a person who loves God, trusts God, who is faithful in praying to God. And as we see as we continue reading, the writer finds himself in a place of darkness and despair. It is so painful. The question for which there is no answer comes to mind – Why is he in such a painful and dark place? Why are God's people not exempt from these places? There are others like him: Job, Paul, Daniel, David and many more whose stories show up in the Bible. And yet, in spite of not knowing why, his faith remains intact. **"You are the God who saves me....My prayer comes before you."** There is not assurance in this Psalm that God will do any such thing. But still He trusts.

**Section 2 (Vs. 3-5).** We now learn about his situation – no specific details. We just learn that his **life is filled with trouble**. We don't know what the source of the trouble was – Financial failure, emotional breakdown, physical illness, under attack by enemies. It may be that God does not include the details of his trouble, so that we can put ourselves into the story. He considers himself as good as dead. We aren't aware that he has contemplated suicide but as we put the Psalm in the context of our time, we are aware of a growing number of people make that choice. Soldiers suffering from PTSD, those who struggle with addiction, young people, mothers of small children, pastors. They feel as if they may as well be dead, and so they end their lives.

**Section 3 (Vs. 6-12).** The next section is particularly painful for those who are faithful to the Lord to read. He writes about the source of His pain – God Himself. (Vs. 6-8). And of course **he does not know why**. This is an example of **Lament**. Lament is a form of prayer where the pray-er honestly pours out his anger, frustration, pain to God who He is convinced is the source of His pain. It is a form of prayer that is used by many writers of Scripture. It may be a form of prayer that you have used. When we are carrying a load of pain and trouble, the pain can build up so much that we need to get it out. Unfortunately many people will choose to take their frustration out **horizontally** – toward other people. That can do serious damage to friendships. It may result in the loss of relationships. A second option is to get rid of our frustration by releasing it **Vertically** – toward God. God is loving enough to hear our pain, cries, anger, and not respond. He will not be driven off. We will often find that when we release our anger toward Him, those feelings are out of our heart and mind, and we are able to experience peace again.

**Section 4 (Vs. 13-14).** In the next section, once again we find the Psalmist expressing his faith. He is still praying. He feels rejected. He feels that God has hidden his face from him. But He is still praying.

**Section 5 (Vs. 15-18).** As the Psalm comes to an end, we once again hear the pain of this man.

- **Close to death**
- **In despair**
- **Recipient of God's wrath**
- **Terrorized by fear**
- **Friends are gone**
- **DARKNESS IS MY CLOSEST FRIEND.**

**LESSONS.** Well, **So What?** As we have been drawn into this writer's world of pain and darkness, what do we take with us.

As I have reflected on this Psalm this week, there are some Lessons for us.

- **Perspective on Death.** In this Psalm the writer has grappled with the subject of death. The conclusion that he seems to come to is that Death is the end. He does not seem to have any hope of, any life beyond death. (Vs. 10-11). But we have the light of the New Testament and the news of Jesus' resurrection. **Jesus has conquered death and gives us the hope of eternal life.** For this Psalmist Death had the last word. But **for us** as believers in Jesus, we are convinced that **Death DOES NOT have the last word.**
- **Lament as a Form of Prayer.** In order to maintain some emotional and spiritual equilibrium in times of trauma and pain, we need to practice this ancient form of prayer. We learn to release our pain Upward toward God. Get it out of our heart. God is not going to be hurt or turn his back on us because we said some angry things. His LOVE is constant.
- **We see Jesus in this Psalm.** The more I reflected on this Psalm this week, the more I came to an awareness that Jesus could have written this Psalm. As we observe Jesus' experience of dying on the cross, we hear that painful cry, **"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me."** We believe that in that moment of pain and darkness the weight of sin was put on Jesus and He experienced the wrath of God against my sin.

There is something comforting to us in our times of pain and grief to remember that Jesus has been where we are.

To conclude our time together today, I want to return to the writing of Liz Petrone. As Liz discovered, sometimes the phrase that she loves to hear, **"Everything is Going to be Alright"** is not what we want to hear from others.

*My youngest—the one who will never know his grandmother but has her eyes—came running to me last night, a fresh red welt on his forehead where he'd bumped it playing. I scooped him up, held him tight, and put my face down into his hair. Instinct kicked in and I started to say it, the usual, but then I paused and forced myself to inhale. I could smell his hair, the faintest traces of that baby smell that he had less of every day mixed with shampoo and the yogurt he had smeared on himself after dinner. His face was ruddy from crying and he grabbed fistfuls of my shirt and used it to wipe his eyes.*

*"I'm here," I said quietly, trying it on. It felt right. It wasn't a lie. "I'm here," I said again, louder this time, and he softened into my chest, accepting that there was indeed space in me for him.*

*There is space in me for him. There is space in me for his brother and sisters too, and his father, and our families together and our friends and all of the people who I love and see struggle and want so badly to reach out and say the thing that might help, the only thing we both know is true when we both know that maybe it's not ever gonna be the kind of okay again that it used to be before: "I'm here."*

Sometimes the word we need to hear is not **"Everything is going to be alright"**, but **"I'm Here"**. **There is room in You for Me.** I believe that as the Psalmist passes through this valley of darkness, he has that realization. He has no guarantee that **"Everything is going to be alright."** But he does live with a certainty that **"God Is Here."** **There is room in Him for Me.** And that seems to be enough.

In this sermon today, I referred to writings by Liz Petrone. If you would like to read more from the writing of Liz, here is here web address: [www.lizpetrone.com](http://www.lizpetrone.com)