

Leader's Guide - Psalm 89: "When God says No"

1. What sort of places might we feel a tension between what we read in scripture, and what we see in our lives?

From the Sermon: Children and young people (ie me) are facing record high levels of anxiety and depression. People are starving all over the world. War, violence, racial tension, and devastation surround us on every side. We even commemorate the birth of a poor God by desecrating his holy day buying products built at the expense of His children. Jesus promises a future without sadness. He promises a new heaven and a new earth. The Bible tells us there is no Jew or Gentile in Christ. So why doesn't our world look the way God says it should? How might we be able to rise up and speak meaningfully to these situations? Have we experienced this being done well? Have we seen these areas answered poorly?

I think it would be really fruitful to explore this area as a group. This doesn't need to just be about social justice, but we can look at the Church, our lives, even our workplaces. Are there safe places for us to express these tensions? Have we ever felt afraid expressing these seeming paradoxes? These things defy a simple answer. Are we tempted to give one? Why might that be?

2. As you read through the psalm, were there any verses or phrases that really stuck out to you?

There's no right or wrong answers for this one. If you have time as a group it might be fruitful to explore more than one translation of the psalm, or read it more than once. Really press into the text. I have found allowing time for silence for portions like this in study to be very helpful. What is the text saying to you? Is it offering something for you to say to God?

3. Do you have a moment in your life where you prayed earnestly and continually for something? What happened? If God answered it, how did you respond? If it remained to be unfulfilled, how did you respond? This might be a good opportunity to share a vulnerable moment with the group.

It might be fruitful as leaders, to consider something you can share here to get things rolling. It doesn't have to be something major! God is concerned with all of our lives. Sometimes we need something small and seemingly insignificant, and God answers our prayer. Sometimes this

happens in huge areas too. Nothing is off limits here when discussing the work of God in our lives. The unfulfilled area can be fruitful to dig into as well. How does this seeming lack of an answer prepare us for the future? How does it impact our day to day lives?

4. Vs. 15-19 give a layout of the sort of people that are among God's chosen. What does it look like to delight in the Name of the Lord, or to rejoice in God? How do seasons of sorrow and grief shape these responses?

Perhaps nothing is more pertinent than the challenge of rejoicing in the midst of sorrow. What does this look like? Does it mean we are happy or more fulfilled? What does joyful suffering look like, or even just suffering well? If we don't know how to rejoice in God, how can we find out? Certainly the scriptures are full of encouragement, but we also have been given each other! It's important to encourage time of communal reflection on how this impacts our life together.

5. When we look at the scene of Jesus at Gethsemane, what does it call to mind for us? What do we think of the drowsing disciples, who couldn't stay awake with Christ in prayer?

Sometimes we might look at the disciples and over-spiritualize them. Yet here they are, right in front of Jesus and falling asleep. Have we experienced moments of spiritual drowsiness? I mean to say, sluggishness or apathy in the spiritual life? Looking at this passage and asking the questions I did I am hoping to encourage a deeper reading and engagement with the text. Doctrinal definition isn't what I'm after here, I want to hear about what it means for you as a Christian person to read this passage. Do you identify with a specific piece of it? Have you imagined yourself to be there with Jesus at the Garden? How does this picture of Jesus make you feel in light of your life as a believer?