

Psalm 42 – “Help for a Downcast Soul”

Today we deal with a subject that has only become a growing issue in today's society – it's the subject of depression. The writer of Psalm 42 was having a bout of it as he faced the struggles of his current circumstances. Some people can have moments where they feel down in the dumps and some may experience a gripping depression that can linger for an extended period of time and make it hard for them to even face life on a daily basis.

What is a person to do when faced with such crisis that can make it hard for them to even function? Psalm 42 provides some help for the person dealing with depression, doubt or discouragement.

Summary Statement:

Psalm 42 teaches us that even amidst despair and feelings of depression, we are called to seek God, for He alone is our true source of hope and refreshment.

To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation of the Sons of Korah.

You know sometimes depression can sink in because of sin or a feeling of guilt. But this is interesting, this Psalm was either written by, or given to, the Sons of Korah. Who were the sons of Korah? Well, we know who Korah was. He led a rebellion against Moses and the Lord came down and dealt with them by having the earth open up and swallow them up (Numbers 16). Korah and his household it says. Yet here we see the sons of Korah not only alive, but instrumental in the worship at the tabernacle. They weren't punished but rather given a blessed honour of serving in the worship of the Lord. That's the grace and forgiveness of a loving God.

- Don't let sin hold you back – confess it to the Lord. You don't have to remain in a place of guilt or unforgiveness because we serve a God of grace.

1. Thirsting for God's Presence – 42:1-4

42:1-2 - As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

The writer of this Psalm recognizes his need for God. He recognizes that his soul is thirsty and the only One that can quench that thirst is God.

- Some believe David is the writer of this Psalm and if that is so, he may have written this when he was exiled from Jerusalem during the insurrection of his own son Absalom.
- We know that David had many times where he was fleeing from Saul and having to hide out in the wilderness. Probably many times where he witnessed a parched deer searching for water to satisfy a great thirst.
- Whoever the writer of this Psalm is uses this imagery to convey the kind of desire he had for God. It's as though his soul was just panting like this deer and the only thing that could satisfy was the Lord.

That's a good place to pause and ask, *what is it that I thirst for?*

You see we were made to be in communion with God. And we can find lots of things to fill our lives with and think it will satisfy, but do you know that as a follower of Jesus there's only one thing that will ever truly satisfy, and that's Him! Are you thirsting after Him? Or have you found substitutes; counterfeit quenchers that may give you a sense of filling, but don't really satisfy at all.

- God told Israel that He was a fountain of living water for them, but they forsook him and turned to their own sources: **Jeremiah 2:13**, *"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water."*
- There are many sources you can turn to but they will lead to emptiness and dissatisfaction. For many it will only increase a depressed state. Only one source will bring fulfillment and satisfaction.
- **John 4:14**, *"but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."*
- **John 7:37–38**, *"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"*
- **Revelation 22:17**, *"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."*

The Psalmist here thirsts **for the living God**. He knew that this was no mere ritual, or religious practise. This was a vibrant, personal relationship with a living God who was able to meet his needs.

It's only in the Lord that we can have that thirst satisfied.

- You know how it is when you don't have enough water. You can get a headache, you feel weak, you just don't operate at 100%. So too, if we're not having that thirst satisfied in Jesus, all other areas of our life are going to be out of balance.

His conundrum was that he was separated from God. ***When shall I come and appear before God?*** He was far from Jerusalem and the tabernacle – the ordained place of worship. This is where God would meet with His people. And it's tearing him up inside not being able to be there. This was his delight, to just join in the worship of God and meet with Him.

It's going to feel like we're on a rollercoaster of emotions as we read through this Psalm. Throughout this Psalm the writer goes from reflecting on his misery to rejoicing in His Savior. He wavers between songs and sobs. It's just back and forth. One minute you think he's arrived, the next he's right back in the dumps. But it ends on the right note.

42:3 - *My tears have been my food day and night, While they continually say to me, "Where is your God?"*

This has been a difficult thing for this writer to endure, and it's left him weeping day and night. Think about this, the psalmist's sorrow has become as regular as his eating.

- It's often in our sorrow that we lose our appetite. We allow our emotions to take over. This is never a good thing, and it again brings this unbalance in our lives.

This Psalmist has felt this crushing weight of taunts by others when they see him in this condition and question why His God is not helping. And it's only adding to the sorrow he's feeling.

Now, as we look at this a little closer, we begin to see what had the writer here so worked up.

42:4 - *When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, With the voice of joy and praise, With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.*

The Psalmist now reflects on all these things he's feeling and going through. He's being real and vulnerable with how he's feeling as he pours his soul out within him. And as he thinks about these things he remembers the days that were. And they were good days. But he's not experiencing them anymore and he's getting a bad case of FOMO. He has this fear of missing out. He remembers how he would go with the multitudes to the house of God.

- It would be during one of the major feasts that all Jewish men were required to come to. Along with their families there would be a great celebration as they made their way to the temple to worship God.
- Psalms 120-134 are known as the Psalms of Ascent (or Songs of Ascent). These would be sung with joy and expectation as Jews would make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the temple during one of their three annual feasts.

But this writer is longing for this again. Notice he says, **he used to go...** These are things he has taken part in, and it has been a real joy, but now he's not experiencing these things. And it's leading to a heavy heart.

We're not sure why he's not present where he wants to be, but circumstances of life have him somewhere where he doesn't want to be. He's longing for that opportunity to be with God.

- Notice this, he wasn't looking for relief in some activity, or unhealthy binge. Rather, he simply wanted to be in the house of God.
- It's sad when people are kept from the house of God based on how they feel. Some will say, *I didn't make it to church last week, I was just really not feeling up to it.* If you're not feeling up to it then church is exactly what you need! This Psalmist is longing to be surrounded by other worshippers focusing on the Lord.
- Don't let the enemy rob you of the blessing of worshipping God corporately with other believers. He'll do everything he can to prevent it. When you least feel like it is when you most need it. Remember, He's the only One that can satisfy.

Look at how the Psalmist deals with this:

2. Trusting Despite Trials – 42:5-8

42:5 - *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance.*

Look at what the Psalmist does. He begins to have a little pep talk with himself. Some would say talking to yourself is a sign of craziness, but here the psalmist does it to prevent it!

We don't have to let our emotions, moods, or feelings dominate our attitude or dictate our outcome. We have the Lord!! And sometimes we need to remind ourselves of that.

- **1 Samuel 30:6**, *"Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God."*

We have the promises of the Lord and we can hope in Him!

- **Isaiah 26:3–4**, *"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You. ⁴ Trust in the Lord forever, For in Yah, the Lord, is everlasting strength."*
- **Psalms 56:3–4**, *"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. ⁴ In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?"*

The psalmist recognized that his soul was not where it should be. It was cast down. Depression will do that. It will cause us to look down rather than look up. And in that state you just get overwhelmed with that sinking feeling. But we have an alternative. We're not to be cast down, we're to cast our cares to Him:

1 Peter 5:7, *"casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."*

- A cast down soul is the one who is not casting their care upon Him. And I know that can be easier said than done. But it's why we must question ourselves when we are in that state. *Why are you feeling this way? What do you have to be down in the dumps about? You have a loving God who is with you and for you! Put your hope in Him!*
- Give yourself that needed pep talk and begin to praise Him again. When we set our sights on the greatness of God it will decrease the greatness of our problems.

Often times the cure for depression is turning to Jesus in hope and clinging to Him as our rock. Take the focus off self and delight in Him!

42:6-8 - *O my God, my soul is cast down within me; Therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, And from the heights of Hermon, From the Hill Mizar. ⁷ Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All Your waves and billows have gone over me. ⁸ The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, And in the night His song shall be with me— A prayer to the God of my life.*

The Psalmist is in a distant place but he dwells on the Lord. He remembers the Lord. Not only does He remember the Lord but he remembers the past faithfulness of the Lord. He's had God's waves and billows flow over him, yet he's still here. He's seen God's lovingkindness and faithfulness day in and day out.

"When we walk through dark times, we must follow the psalmist's example. Keep track of those times when God has come through for you. Store such experiences in your memory bank. It's important to have a history with God so that during the bad times, you can remember the good times to help you persevere. In addition, when God seems absent and uninterested, remember what you know to be true about God. He is faithful and worth hoping in. To hope is to expectantly wait for God to act. Just because you can't see God working doesn't mean he's inactive. Sometimes, like Abraham, you must hope [when it is contrary to] hope, trusting that God will do what he has promised (see Rom 4:17–21)." ¹

- We can't always *trace* God, but we can always *trust* Him.

3. Triumph Over Despair – 42:9-11

42:9-10 - *I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" ¹⁰ As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"*

We're going to have our ups and downs. There may even be times we question God. But may it always bring us to God. That is the key!

So much of our depression is self-induced. I know there are physical things that can bring about depression, but most of the time it is wrong thinking or the focus

¹ Evans, T. (2019). *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (p. 529). Holman Bible Publishers.

of our thinking is self. We have an option. Give it to God and turn to God. Put your hope in Him. The psalmist reminds us to do just that to end.

42:11 - *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.*

The Psalmist has been in turmoil because he is separated from the place of worship. He longs to be there. He longs to stand in the presence of God where he remembers the sweet joy and praise that took place there. But here's what he does do, he puts his hope and trust in the fact that he will indeed be there again. He will have opportunity to worship God in the house of the Lord.

This psalmist had to put his hope and trust that he would be reunited in the place of worship. And it was that hope that broke that depressed state.

Now I want you to catch something from this. It's the difference that we are in as new covenant followers of Jesus. We are no longer bound to worship in a specific location or structure. For the Jew in King David's day it was the tabernacle of the Lord that sat in Jerusalem. We however are not relegated to a place or proximity of meeting with God. Could you imagine if the only place you felt connected to God was at Riverside? Or if God said, *unless you attend Riverside you will always feel distant from Me?*

This was the reality for this Psalmist. He felt incomplete and distant from God unless he was there at the tabernacle. It was there he could bring his offerings and appear before God (or see God as it really means – vs. 2).

- Do you realize the extreme privilege we have that we can appear before God anywhere and at any time? That we can be cultivating this fellowship and closeness with God at all times?? That is an incredible blessing.
- But the saying: "familiarity breeds contempt" can be all too true with this privilege. May we never get familiar to the point where we get comfortable, complacent, or take for granted the amazing privilege of being able to come to God in any circumstance, and with any circumstance.
- Don't just hope in the time you can meet with God as this Psalmist does, rejoice that you can meet with God and begin to delight in Him now! It will go a long way in changing your spirit from one that's depressed to one that is at rest.

Points to Ponder:

1. Perhaps you've struggled with discouragement or depression. This Psalm has been written for you to understand that you don't need to stay in that state. When your soul is cast down, follow the psalmist's example by questioning your emotions and reminding yourself of God's promises. Speak truth to your soul, encouraging hope in God's faithfulness (*vs 5, 11).
2. Thirst for God above all else. Like the psalmist, recognize that only God can satisfy the deepest longings of your soul. When feeling depressed or discouraged, turn to Him as the source of living water, rather than seeking temporary substitutes that leave you empty.
3. Hope in God, and determine to praise Him. Depression doesn't have the final word. Circumstances may shift, but God remains the same – faithful, present, and worthy of praise. The valley is temporary; joy in His presence is eternal.