

SBC – Sept. 8, 2024

Psalm 42 (NKJV)

“Yearning for God”

Most commentators think that initially Psalm 42 and 43 were probably one Psalm and a key reason is because of the repeated refrain “Why are you cast down, O my soul?”. This refrain is found in both Psalms (42:5, 11; 43:5). Also Psalm 42 has a title whereas 43 does not.

We don’t know who wrote the Psalm or what the exact occasion was other than he was far from the centralized place of worship in Jerusalem and this greatly troubled him. This along with the fact that his enemies were mocking him in his trouble.

Psalm 42 begins the second of five sections in the book of Psalms – often called the 5 books of Psalms corresponding to the 5 books of Moses.

Slide # 1

The Five Books of Psalms:

Book 1: Psalms 1-41 (Genesis)

Book 2: Psalms 42-72 (Exodus)

Book 3: Psalms 73-89 (Leviticus)

Book 4: Psalms 90-106 (Numbers)

Book 5: Psalms 107-150 (Deuteronomy)

Psalm 42 (NKJV)

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

This is probably not a designation of the authors, but a reference to the fact that these psalms were delivered to them to be performed.

– ***The Bible Knowledge Commentary***

The sons of Korah trace their heritage back to their father Korah who is infamously known for what is called “Korah’s rebellion”. He was a Levite in a privileged place of service but he wanted more. He wanted to be in the position of Aaron and Moses and he sounded so spiritual saying to them, “all the congregation is holy, every one of them...Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” (Num. 16:3).

Well, by the time it was done God caused the earth to open up and swallow Korah and all those who rebelled against the God ordained leadership of Moses and Aaron. However, the children of Korah were not killed as it specifically states in Numbers 26:10-11.

These descendants of Korah went on to faithfully serve the Lord, and evidently, from the days of David onward, they were notable among the Levitical singers in leading in the worship of God (cf. 1 Chron. 6:22-28, 31; 2 Chron. 20:19). In 1 Chron. 9:17-24 and 26:1-19 they are called the gatekeepers in the temple. So it seems they were some combination of gatekeepers and singers. As Levites, they had a prominent serving role in relation to the temple.

The phrase “the Sons of Korah” appears in a total of 11 Psalms (Ps. 42; 44-49; 84; 85; 87; 88).

Slide # 2

Psalm 42 Outline

Yearning for God

- vv. 1-3 The Psalmists Deep Need of God
- v. 4 Remembering Former Times of Blessing
- v. 5 Some spiritual “Self-Counsel”
- v. 6 Responding to Spiritual Depression
- v. 7 The Depths of Despair
- v. 8 An Affirmation of Faith
- vv. 9-10 Honest to God in the Struggle
- v. 11 More spiritual “Self-Counsel”

1 As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God.

The imagery of a deer panting for water is a picture of great thirst or longing for water. This pictures the writer longing for God. They say one can live without water for about 3 days on average. Thus, the Psalmist is expressing his great desire and need for God.

As God’s people one of the things we often deal with is “the dry times” when we long for refreshment from God. These desert experiences are common to God’s people. We all go through times when we don’t feel close to God and we are spiritually thirsty.

When you are going through a time like that Psalm 42 is for you!

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

As least the Psalmist knew what he was thirsting for and wanting to quench his thirst with God. He expresses his need for God – for the living God.

Recently, a friend who has been going through a really hard time wrote about how God has so wonderfully moved and worked in a most trying situation. I wrote back...

Wow! Praise the Lord for His working and your testimony. We call Him the LIVING GOD for a reason! I keep you in my prayers almost daily! Keep on keeping on!

Living things move – they have life. Our God is the living God. He moves – He intervenes – He interacts with us in our life. One of my favorite titles for God is “the living God”. All the other gods of the world are false gods who do nothing for those who believe in them. They don’t move! In contrast, our God is alive and active!

The writer then says, “When shall I come and appear before God?” The Psalmist desired a fresh touch from God. He needed to be spiritually revived and encouraged. He needed to experience the presence of God.

He is thinking in terms of the designated place of worship in Jerusalem. It was here the people of God would intimately connect with God in corporate worship. The experience and presence of God was unique in that context. This is what the Psalmist longed for.

The Psalmist theologically knew that God was everywhere – after all he was praying to him right here. But still he felt far from God and wanted to experience His reviving presence.

3 My tears have been my food day and night, While they continually say to me, “Where is your God?”

The writer was an emotional wreck – with his tears being his food day and night. And one of the worst things about his experience (whatever it all involved) was that his enemies were challenging him with, “**Where is your God?**”

When one feels far from God in their experience and the enemy piles on with “Where is your God?” that is a double whammy. That is really HARD!

When God’s people go through hard times the enemy likes to mock and ridicule the person for their faith. The devil believes in “piling on” when the going gets rough. This is a TEST for the believer and it is not fun! We are all human and it is HARD!

Slide # 3

“As the bloody Papists murdered the Protestants, they cried out, Where is now your God? What is become of all your prayers and psalms now? Let your God that you called upon save you now if he can.” – *John Trapp*

When it doesn’t appear that God is going to intervene any time soon – that is really hard. The Psalmist responded by remembering and pouring out his soul to God. Give him credit he is taking it to God and looking to God for help every step of the way – which is the right thing to do.

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.

As he reflects on these hard, dry times, he pours out his soul to God. And in the process, he remembers the festal processions he previously had been involved in – in which the pilgrim worshipers would make their way to Jerusalem with the voice of joy and praise.

Oh, how he longed for those “good times” (those times of refreshing) once again! But then he brings himself back to what he knows and gives himself a good talking to.

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.

He asks himself rhetorically, “Why are your cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?”

The Psalmist has good theology. He knows his hope is to be in God and He knows the God in whom he hopes. Giving himself a little “soul talk,” he demands from himself a REASON why he should be cast down.

This is a case where, in a little bit of “self-counsel,” he refuses to allow his FEELINGS to run him. Instead, he drives himself back to where his focus should be, and that is on God – to HOPE in God!

He says to himself, “Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.” To hope in God here means trust God to bring him through. To continue to wait on God to act in His own good time. It is committing the situation to God knowing that He will bring you through in accordance with His sovereign purposes and timing.

The “help of His countenance” refers to the favor of God as seen in His intervention. This would be evidence of His approval and blessing.

Slide # 4

The psalmist paused from the painful memory to challenge his own soul. He did not surrender to his feelings of spiritual depression and discouragement. Instead, he *challenged* them and brought them before God. – **David Guzik**

The Psalmist realized the answer was not within himself but rather in the living God. He didn't look within, but rather he looked up.

Preachers have often said there are times when we need to preach to ourselves. We need to remind ourselves we can't go by our feelings – we must walk by faith. Sometimes we need to rebuke the despondence within ourselves. I know I do!

There were reasons for his discouragement....

Slide # 5

- Far from the designated place of worship
- Taunting unbelievers
- Memories of better times
- Overwhelming trials
- God has not yet intervened

But still, none of these were legitimate reasons to be cast down because, after all, he served the LIVING GOD, and that makes all the difference. He knew this intellectually, and yet emotionally he struggled. Still, he was determined to HOPE in God!

6 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.

The Psalmist talked to himself and he talked to God. We often need to do BOTH!

He is very honest with God about how he is feeling. He is struggling with depression. Again, he goes to the right place – namely to God.

Slide # 6

1 Peter 5:7 (NKJV)

7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Because he is cast down, he determines to remember God from the land of Jordan, and then he further clarifies it with “And from the heights of Hermon,” which would be way up north of the Sea of Galilee.

The Hill of Mizar is thought to have been a more precise location in the mount Hermon range but we are not certain today where it was located.

Slide # 7



This explains why the writer felt so far from God as the center of worship was way down at Jerusalem.

“We know the chief thing that was bothering him. He was far from Jerusalem and its temple worship on Mount Zion, and therefore felt himself to be cut off from God.” - **James Montgomery Boice**

7 Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All Your waves and billows have gone over me.

This is a double description of overwhelming discouragement! The first seems to picture two great waterfalls with their noise calling one another with a roar of despondency. The second pictures the raging sea with wave after wave of discouragement sweeping over him. This is the language Jonah used when he was thrown overboard and swallowed up in the raging waters.

Slide # 8

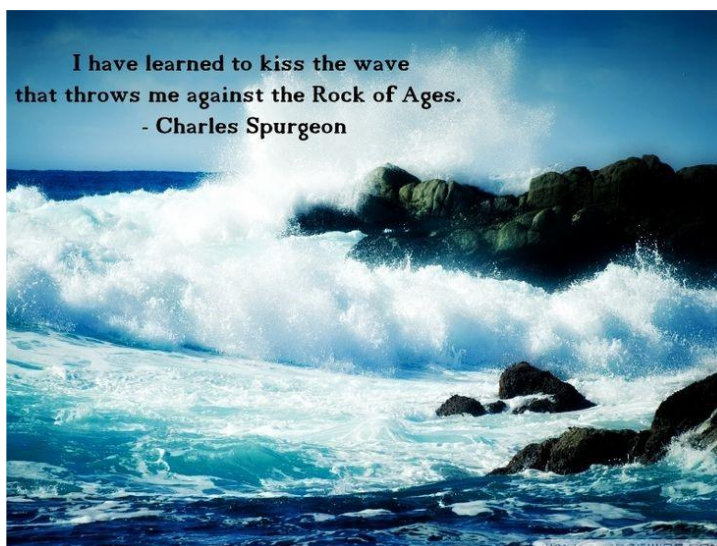
Jonah 2:3 (NKJV)

3 For You cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the floods surrounded me; All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.

Trouble after trouble overwhelmed him like the roar of waterfalls and like the raging billows of the sea! Truly he was overwhelmed.

But note he calls them “Your waterfalls” and “Your waves and billows” meaning that he saw God as sovereignly behind it. He realized God was sovereignly in charge – even over this horrific situation.

Slide # 9



Many have thought this description here in Psalm 42:7 may well ultimately depict Christ's experience on the cross.

Calvary, hearing the cries of the Lord Jesus as the waves and billows of God's judgment rolled over Him. The cataracts of divine wrath cascaded down upon Him with resounding thunder as He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. – **William MacDonald**

Truly no one has ever known the roar of trouble and the overwhelming billows of sorrow like Jesus did in His experience of the cross.

View that closing scene of anguish;
All God's waves and billows roll
Over Him, there left to languish
On the cross, to save my soul.
Matchless love! How vast, how free,
Jesus gave Himself for me. – **J. J. Hopkins**

Jesus underwent all God's waves and billows so that we might be right with God for all eternity!

When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul!"
Horatio Gates Spafford (1828-1888)

Certainly, in one sense, what Christ went through is the ultimate application. However, the psalmist knew deep overwhelming trouble both on the outside and on the inside. Overwhelming deep despair defined his experience. He felt buried by it all. He felt like it was drowning him.

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.

Yes, he felt like he was drowning in oceans of trouble, but in that context, he affirmed his faith, as seen here in verse 8. Here the writer used the word YHWH (LORD) which is the special title for God denoting His faithfulness to His people – often referred to as His covenant name.

He affirmed that no matter his feelings YHWH would command His lovingkindness in the daytime. Lovingkindness is the rich Hebrew word "hesed" which is often translated as "loyal covenant love" or "steadfast love".

YHWH emphasizes God as the unchanging eternally faithful God. Heseb emphasizes God's faithful love. Often YHWH and heseb are used together. The covenant faithful God is ever faithful in His love for His own!

It is this wonderful truth that we come back to in times of depression. God hasn't changed. We can still count on Him whatever life may throw at us.

In addition to God's lovingkindness being with him in the day, he says, "In the night, His song shall be with me". God's got him covered day and night. Day by day, He is faithful, and night by night, He ministers His encouragement by way of song.

Martin Luther used to say something like, "Let us sing psalms and startle the devil."

9 I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

Note He calls God his "Rock" and yet he feels like God has forgotten him. As his Rock God is his security, stability, and place of strength and safety.

Circumstances might be in constant flux but yet God the Rock is ever steady, stable, and unchanging.

Yet, at the same time he felt like God had forgotten him. Where was God's intervention? Where was the undeniable hand of God moving on his behalf? He didn't see it yet at this point – even though he affirmed God as his Rock.

This Psalm emphasizes we can't trust our emotions or look merely at circumstances. They don't change the reality of WHO God is.

The writer knew Who God was to him and yet he couldn't understand WHY God continued to keep him in the place of mourning because of the oppression of the enemy.

We don't know what the enemy was doing. But we do know they seemingly had the upper hand over the writer and were mocking him for his faith. But he continued to affirm his faith and yet he was emotionally distraught.

David Guzik calls this Psalm an "Honest Prayer from a Discouraged Saint".

As is so often the case in the midst of a spiritual struggle, the writer felt a mixture of things. He was confident that God was sustaining him as he called Him his ROCK. Yet at the same time he wondered WHY God allowed the situation to go on without intervening. Lots of times we have questions that don't have answers.

10 As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

This is an emotional plea to God to act! The enemies were ruthless! It was if they were shattering his bones without mercy. Their reviling him was relentless as all the day long they were saying, "Where is your God?"

The writer is, in effect, begging God to intervene because the enemies are really brought reproach upon God – claiming He isn't there for him even though his faith in God has been shown to be strong throughout the Psalm.

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.

Once again the writer comes back to the "Self-Counsel" repeating exactly what he said in verse 5. This shows the struggle and recurring battle for one struggling with difficult circumstances and depression.

Again, and again we have to have a little self-talk to the soul. Note the 5 times the writer addresses his "soul" in this Psalm (v. 1, 4, 5, 6, 11) showing that in his mind this a spiritual battle.

The struggle is real – it continues on. And repeatedly we must come back to our HOPE in God! We need constant reminding. We are weak. We are human. In the midst of discouragement we need to continually challenge those thoughts that rise up against faith.

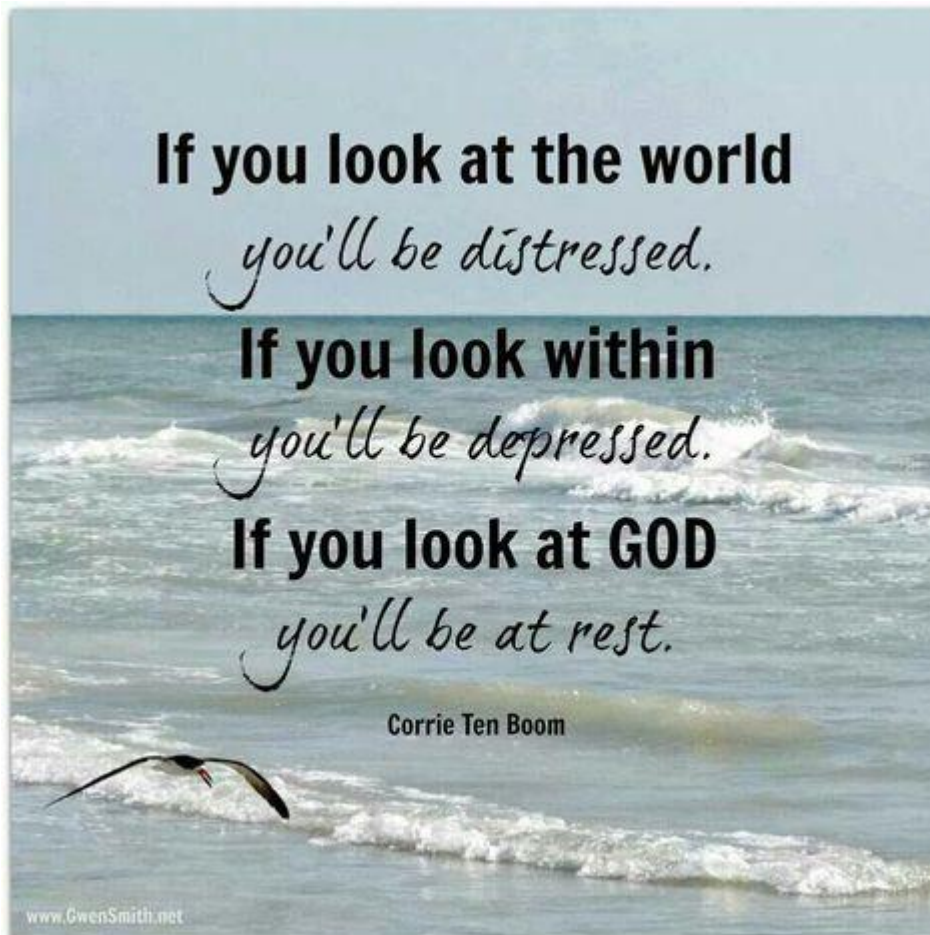
Someone has pointed out that this shows the doubled sided reality of the struggle of the believer who is at once a person of struggle and yet at the same time a person of conviction. We all know this battle.

The refrain amounts to what is called half-rebuke and half-encouragement. We often need both!

But faith always has the last word. Don't be discouraged. Don't be unsettled. Hope in God; you will be delivered from your enemies and from your depression as well. – **William MacDonald**

In the challenge of depression, we must look up and hope in God. In the end it is our HOPE in God that brings victory!

Slide # 10



No matter our feelings, no matter our circumstances:

Hope in God for we shall yet praise Him!

He alone is our ultimate help!

Hope in God!