

# Psalm 42 – Laments of the King

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## Longing to be Closer

What do you do when you're feeling sad? Do you avoid thinking about how you feel? Do you bury it deep down, where no one can see? Or do you wallow in it? Do you keep thinking about it all the time, until you drown and can't get out of it? How do you honestly deal with sadness, without letting it take over your life?

This Psalm is full of suffering, but the sadness actually brings the singer closer to God. The first picture we get in this psalm is of thirst. We can all relate to thirst, can't we? In our long hot summers, we long to have a cool drink to refresh us. \*That's why all those ads are so effective. But here, we see a different kind of thirst\*:

*Psalm 42:1-2 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.*

*<sup>2</sup>My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

Thirsting for God sounds strange to us, doesn't it?\* I think it's because we don't really thirst for anything in our rich country. We think we have everything. But when we suffer, we realise that there is a deep spiritual dryness in our lives. In fact, all suffering and brokenness came into this world, because we rejected the living God, and tried to find life without him. As the prophet Jeremiah says\*:

*Jeremiah 2:13 "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."*

The human body can last 40 days maximum without food. But just three days without water, and you'll die. As our bodies can't survive without water, so our souls can't survive without God. And in this Psalm it seems like everything is out of control.\*

*Psalm 42:7 Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls;  
all your waves and breakers have swept over me.*

The crashing waterfall of the Jordan river is somehow mixed up with the terrifying waves of the ocean. See the ocean for ancient people \*didn't mean surfing and sand-castles, but \*life-threatening storms and shipwrecks. Being battered again and again, and almost drowning in the waves.

Friends, have you ever felt like this? When all you can taste is tears. When the darkness closes in around you, and your world comes crashing down. Maybe you've been ground down by your work. You're exhausted and weary and there's no end in sight. Or a relationship has gone bad, and you feel hurt and lonely. And no one seems to care. Or you're just tired of the constant restrictions and fear of COVID.

In my experience, suffering can either make people bitter and lose their faith in God. Or it can make them cry out to God and bring them closer to Him. In Psalm 42, we see one man's struggle with suffering and sadness. And yet, through it all, he longs to be closer to God. What can we learn about suffering well? Well, he does three things: **1) Remember, 2) Pray, and 3) Hope.**

## 1. Remember

Firstly, he remembers the good times. He remembers the experience of joyful worship in the temple.

*Psalm 42:4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.*

Korah was one of the musicians that King David chose to lead worship in the temple. And they didn't just sing **in** the building. They'd sing and dance up to the temple, praising God. And the sons of Korah would help lead the joyful parade to the house of God. Friends, one of the greatest gifts God gives us is communal worship.\*

As God's people we can lift each other up. And our communal worship reminds us who God is, and what he's done in saving us. Even when you personally are down, and not able to praise God, being part of the worshipping community lifts us up. We encourage each other in our common forgiveness. We sing songs of praise that lifts our spirits, even if one of us is not in the mood for singing. We carry each other through all the joys and struggles of life. And this singer remembers how good it was to be part of that.

Now the Jews at that time didn't have the Holy Spirit. Special people like prophets and kings were filled with the Spirit. But if a normal person wanted to experience God's presence, they had to go to the temple. The temple was where God's stories of salvation were re-told. Where you could make sacrifices and find forgiveness of sins. Where you could offer prayers and give thanks to God. At the temple, you met with God.

But now the Psalm singer is **cut off** from the temple, for some reason. Maybe this was in the exile, when God's people were taken away from their land. Or there's been a crisis and he can't get to the temple. Either way, he feels cut off from God. And so he remembers the joy of meeting with God and all the saints. But he also remembers God himself\*.

*Psalm 42:6, 8 My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar...<sup>8</sup> By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me — a prayer to the God of my life.*

In the middle of the raging waters, he finds refuge in God. That v. 8 is not the best translation: 'By day the LORD directs his love.' There's lots of different words for love in the Bible. But this is a special word meaning 'steadfast, loyal love.' It's used for God's unbreakable covenant with Abraham. It was revealed when God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt and revealed his personal name, Yahweh.

That's why, this is the only verse in the psalm which uses 'Yahweh' or 'LORD'. And so, even in his suffering, he remembers Yahweh will never ever forsake his people. Even in the midst of the crashing waves, he finds that God is an island of steadfast love. A lighthouse in the storm. Even in the darkness of night, he can sing of the steadfast love of the LORD. Do we have this kind of unshakeable confidence?

Friends, we have a salvation even greater than the Exodus. We have been saved from the slavery of our sins. We rejoice that Jesus has saved us from death itself. So when you go through the storms of life, **REMEMBER! Remind yourself** of who your Saviour is and what he has done for you.

## 2. Pray

The second thing this psalm teaches us is to pray. When we are sad, it really helps to talk to someone about it. Especially someone who knows us and loves us. That's why I find it so helpful talking to Sarah about things. But who better to talk to than the God who made and knows every part of us, and loves us still?\*

*Psalm 42:4a These things I remember as I pour out my soul...*

He pours out his soul to God, because he knows God will love him no matter what.\* And it's not all happy prayer either. See ,it's not as if he remembers God's goodness, and lives happily ever after. We live in a fallen world, where people are opposed to God. Where everyday life and suffering wears us down. Where one day you trust God, and the next day your faith drowns in pain.\*

*Psalm 42:9-10 I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"*

<sup>10</sup>*My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"*

Would you ever pray like this? Or do you think you have to 'have it all together' when you talk to God? Or to pretend everything is ok? Friends, God doesn't want us to pretend. He wants us to be real with him.\*

In fact, challenging God's faithfulness shows that we know God. 'Why do I have to go about mourning.' 'Why have you forgotten me?' It's knowing God's steadfast love and salvation that makes the singer cry out to God. Why are you doing this? You are faithful. What happened to your promises of presence and protection? Come and help me. These are cries of desperation, but also cries of faith. That we believe in a God who has saved his people. And will save us again and bring us into his presence.

Friends whatever you throw at God, he can take it. He wants you to pour out your soul to him. The worst thing you could do in suffering would be to turn away from God. Do you long for healing, physical, emotional? Cry out to God. Do you long for guidance or protection. Cry out to God. To do you long for love and acceptance. Cry out to God.

"What a friend we have in Jesus... Oh what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer." He has promised to be our Protector and Provider. Go to God, honestly and often. And find the healing and peace that only He can provide.

### 3. Hope

*Psalm 42:5 Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

This is like the chorus of the song. It's repeated here and at the end, in v. 11. He is honest about his struggle, but he doesn't wallow in it. He says to himself, 'this too shall pass. And I will one day praise him again.'

A while ago I was watching \*Insight on SBS. It's a show that takes a controversial issue and gets a range of people's opinions on it? And this episode was on anxiety. There were lots of ways people address it, like medication, hormones. And one of the things they were talking about was Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). Looking at your thought processes, and learning to retrain your brain. 'What am I feeling? Why am I feeling like this? What do I know to be true?' And that's similar to what the singer does here. He questions his soul's despair, and tells himself to hope in God.

But I noticed that almost all the solutions on this show were individualistic. And all of them had nothing to do with God. These things have their place. But they're not enough.\* See, our godless world will always find solutions apart from God. We think we can conquer everything ourselves. So we internalise everything. Or medicalise everything. We don't need anyone else. 'Look within and find the strength you need.'

But as the U2 sings: 'Sometimes you can't make it on your own.' The Bible says we can never make it on our own. We need God, and we need the love and support of other people. Jesus has given us both. He has saved us and given us a community of believers.

See this Psalm isn't just self-talk. It's looking to the powerful God outside of ourselves. He's saved us once, and so he will lift us up again. I actually think CBT is a useful and powerful thing. But the question is how do you re-train your thinking? What do you tell yourself? Is it about your own strength? 'I can get through this. I'm a good/smart person.' Or is it the constant grace, kindness, presence and power of Christ? Jesus loves me. Jesus died for me. Jesus will never leave me or forsake me. Jesus will take me home.'

We need to practice gospel CBT. It's training us not just to think but to live the certain hope of the gospel. 'Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in **God**, for I will **yet** praise him, my **Savior** and my **God**.'

## Laments of the King

The Psalm starts the second book of Psalms (42-72). And they are generally the laments (or sad songs) of the King. That the king must suffer. But what does this singer lament? What does he long for? What hurts him most, is that he is away from God's presence.

Friends, what should distress us the most is that we don't have an intimate relationship with God our Maker. And when Jesus became a man and entered the world, he showed us that He wants an intimate relationship with us. At the last meal with his disciples, what did Jesus long for?\*

***Luke 22:15-16** And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.  
<sup>16</sup> For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."*

Jesus longs to share the joyful feast of worshipping God with all the saints. He wanted relationship with us so much, that he went through the agonizing pain of the cross.\* But what did he fear most? Was it the physical pain of the nails? Was it the mocking of his enemies? No. Just like in Psalm 42, he feared separation from God. On the cross, Jesus cried out, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' He was punished for our sin that brought separation from God. Jesus was abandoned by God, so that you and I could come into His presence, as forgiven children.

Friends, we don't often thirst for God. We often thirst for everything else but God. But Jesus, knowing our soul's need for the living God, died so that we could have his living water. Friends, if you don't know Jesus, your greatest need is a relationship with the living God. Come to Jesus today, and have your thirst quenched.

And if you're a believer, he's changing your desires so that you thirst for God, more and more. And long for eternal life with him. So when you're down and downcast. Remember how much Jesus loved you and did for you. Let us as a church family help each other to remember his salvation. Pray to him. Pour out your soul to him. The good, the bad and the ugly. And put your hope in him. Let us speak, even sing to ourselves and say: "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.