

God's Presence

GOD'S PRESENCE BRINGS PEACE AND COMFORT EVEN IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY. PSALM 42:1-11

There are people today who think mature Christians never struggle with feelings of discouragement. But this is not the case. Nearly one third of the psalms are laments, cries to God from people who were discouraged and seeking God's help. These psalms communicate that God understands our feelings of despair. He is ready to comfort and help those who seek and trust Him in times of adversity.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Most scholars believe Psalms 42–43 originally were one composition, and that, perhaps for liturgical reasons, they were separated into two separate psalms later. Indications they originally were one psalm are as follows: (1) Psalm 43 has no heading to separate it from Psalm 42; (2) many Hebrew manuscripts combine Psalms 42–43 into one psalm; (3) both share similar phrasing; and (4) the two psalms share the same refrain at the end of each of the three poetic divisions (42:5,11; 43:5).

The heading of these psalms indicate they are a "maskil," a psalm of instruction meant to enlighten those who hear or read it. The "sons of Korah" were worship leaders in the temple. That said, the writer and specific occasion of Psalms 42–43 is unknown. Together they are the lament of one who was a great distance from the house of God and the people of God. He longed to be back with them as he contended with the taunts of his enemies. His prayer was for God to vindicate him and return him to the temple.

Psalm 42–43 contains three sections, each concluding with a statement emphasizing the main point of the psalm: "Why my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God." In the first section (42:1-5), the psalmist expressed his longing to be with the people of God, worshiping the Lord in His temple. In the second section (42:6-11), he acknowledged his depression that was compounded by the added oppression of his enemies. But he also recognized that God was with him, even if he did not understand why he was suffering. In the third section (43:1-5), the psalmist realized he would get his answer when he was able to return to the temple.

At the end of each section, the psalmist's self-rebuke is a reminder to himself that he must put his hope in God. He knew he could praise God in the midst of his difficulties because God is faithful to those who trust in Him.

Key Words

1 As a deer **longs** A for flowing streams, so I long for you, God. 2 I thirst B for God, the living God. When can I come and appear before God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while all day long people say to me, "Where is your God?" 4 I remember this as I pour out my heart: how I walked with many, leading the **festive procession** ^C to the house of God, with joyful and thankful shouts. **5** Why, my soul, are you so **dejected**? D Why are you in such turmoil? Put your **hope** E in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God. 6 I am deeply depressed; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and the **peaks** of Hermon, F from Mount Mizar. 7 Deep calls to deep G in the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your billows have swept over me. 8 The Lord will send his faithful love by day; his song will be with me in the night—a prayer to the God of my life. 9 I will say to God, my rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about in sorrow because of the enemy's oppression?" **10** My adversaries taunt me, as if crushing my bones, while all day long they say to me, "Where is your God?" H 11 Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God.

- **A.** "Pants" (ESV; NIV). An intense craving. Without water, the deer will die. So, the psalmist longs for God.
- **B.** The psalmist had a spiritual thirst. Connecting with God was a necessary part of his existence. He trusted in God to meet his deepest needs.
- **C.** Likely, the annual Jewish festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. During these, pilgrims journeyed to Jerusalem and assembled to remember God's great deeds.
- **D.** The Hebrew wording means to be bowed down or prostrate. In this case, it related to mourning.
- **E.** Not just wishful thinking, but a firm conviction that God can be trusted and will come through.
- **F.** The highest mountain in Israel. It was the source of the Jordan River and was seen as a source of life.
- **G.** While the psalmist longed for "water" (v. 1), the image here is a flood. He is overwhelmed, drowning in his current situation.
- **H.** Repeated from verse 3. While enemies questioned the reality of his God, the psalmist understood that the Lord was with him. As a result, his soul had every reason to hope.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. In Times of Longing

(Psalm 42:1-5)

Believers can seek God's comfort in times of need.

- What do you desire more than anything else?
- If your consuming desire is for something other than God, how would your life change if you desired Him more than you desired anything else?
- The psalmist talked to himself in verse 5.
 In light of this verse, what do you need to be saying to yourself?

2. In Overwhelming Times

(Psalm 42:6-8)

Believers can take comfort in God's love for them.

To what Bible truths can you cling when you feel overwhelmed?

3. In Seasons of Waiting

(Psalm 42:9-11)

Believers can know that God's timing is always perfect.

What is this psalm telling you to do when you are in the midst of a hard season?

Apply the Text

 Identify someone who is going through a time of adversity. How can your Bible study group minister to that person?

KEY DOCTRINE:

God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. The Holy Spirit's presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. (See John 7:37-39; Romans 8:9-11; Ephesians 1:13-14.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Compare two similar Bible passages.

Most Bible scholars believe Psalms 42–43 originally were one composition. Compare the two psalms. What are the similarities? What words and phrases are repeated in both? How does Psalm 43 enrich the insights offered in Psalm 42?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Psalm 42:1. Do you picture this scene as one of serenity and contentment or of drought and desperation?

The image of a deer longing for a flowing stream conveys what it's like to thirst for God. The deer was not in a state of peace and contentment but a state of desperation and longing. The word translated "longs for" is sometimes translated "pants." It suggests a consuming desire or a driving passion. The object of the psalmist's consuming desire was God.

When have you experienced a deep thirst? How does that compare to your desire for God?

The psalmist who wrote this psalm was in turmoil and deeply discouraged. This psalm was his cry for God to meet him where he was. Not only did he cry out to God, but he also talked to himself. He told himself to put his hope in God and said, "I will still praise him" (vv. 5,11). We can be honest with God and with ourselves about our feelings. At the same time, we can be confident that God meets us where we are and is worthy of our trust (v. 8).

What do you long for? How would your life change if you longed for God more than anything else?

This week, repeat Psalm 42:1 several times throughout the day as your prayer.

Prayer Requests

DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Psalm 42:1-2

Highlight the phrases "I long for" and "I thirst for."

The picture the psalmist painted as he began this psalm is not one of serenity but one of scarcity, upheaval, and desperation. It depicts a prolonged drought. The prophets Jeremiah and Joel described the suffering of both people and animals alike who experienced the barren fields and dried up riverbeds during these droughts in ancient Israel (Jer. 14:1-6; Joel 1:20).

The expression "longs for" means "to have consuming desire for." The psalmist was expressing his desperate yearning for God. As a deer cannot survive physically without water, so his soul could not survive spiritually apart from God. The psalmist thirsted for "the living God" to renew and strengthen him. He had no doubt his living God was able to meet his greatest needs and answer his prayer. The expression "appear before God" is an Old Testament way of referring to going to the Lord's sanctuary or temple to worship (Ex. 33:17; 34:24). This was the psalmist's desire. He knew he would be fully satisfied and spiritually reinvigorated when he could return and worship Him at His temple, the place of God's manifest presence among His covenant people.

Pray that you would desire God more than you desire anything else in life.

Day 2: Psalm 42:3

Compare this verse to Psalm 22:1-2.

During this time of isolation from the temple of God and the people of God, the psalmist's enemies continually taunted him. They asked, "Where is your God?" This question may be understood in at least one of three ways. First, his enemies may have been communicating that the psalmist's God did not exist. But this is unlikely. People in the ancient Near East tended to believe there were a multitude of gods and that everyone worshiped a god, even if they didn't all worship the same gods. Second, they could have been communicating that the psalmist's God was too weak to help him. However, the third meaning makes the most sense given the context (vv. 9-10). Most likely, these enemies were saying the psalmist had been abandoned by his God. There was a time when David felt like God had done this to him (Ps. 22:1-2).

When tempted to feel like we have been abandoned by God, we must remember His words to us through Isaiah: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and the rivers will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, and the flame will not burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior" (Isa. 43:1b-3a).

What would you say to a person who feels he or she has been abandoned by God?

Day 3: Psalm 42:4-5

Notice what the psalmist said to himself.

We often fail to fully appreciate blessings in life until we no longer are able to experience them. There are multitudes of believers today who terribly miss being able to attend church because they are physically incapable of doing so. For our own spiritual health and for the encouragement of our brothers and sisters in Christ, it is essential for us to be active members of a local church. Building relationships with other believers is one way of receiving encouragement in our walk with God (Heb. 10:25). It was wise for the psalmist to long to be with the people of God during this dark time in his life. Each of us needs help from others at one time or another.

The psalmist revealed his self-talk. He rebuked himself for his sense of despair. Then he followed his rebuke with an exhortation, "put your hope in God," together with a declaration, "I will still praise him, my Savior and my God." To hope in God is to wait expectantly for Him, anticipating Him to act. When the psalmist looked to God, he saw the One who would save him. This gave him cause to continue praising God. Here the psalmist provided another example of how we should confront feelings of despair. We need to speak the truth to ourselves, and, like the psalmist, we repeatedly need to do so until it takes root within us (v. 11; 43:5).

In light of verse 5, what do you need to be telling yourself?

Day 4: Psalm 42:6-8

Underline the phrases "by day" and "in the night."

The psalmist was determined to continue to "remember" God-who God is and what He had done in the past. Instead of being in Jerusalem at the temple, the psalmist was in another region. "Hermon" was about 100 miles away from Jerusalem and the temple. Although the psalmist was not where he would like to have been, he set his focus on the Lord from where he was.

The headwaters of the Jordan River contain rushing water and waterfalls crashing down from the slopes of Mount Hermon. The psalmist used this picture to describe his precarious state. He was feeling the sense of helplessness and panic people experience when it appears that rushing water is about to sweep them to a watery grave. Metaphorically speaking, he was barely able to keep his head above water as the waves of despair incessantly crashed against him. It was as if he was literally drowning in his despair. Nevertheless, he recognized God's faithful love for him at all times.

Believers will do well to remember an oftstated saying: "Don't forget in the darkness what God has shown you to be true in the light." Whenever believers have feelings of alienation and despair, they need to be reminded of truth-God sends His "faithful love by day" to protect and to provide. What's more, "his song will be with" them "in the night" as He expresses His delight in them (Zeph. 3:17).

To what Bible truths do you cling when you feel overwhelmed?

Day 5: Psalm 42:9-11

Compare these verses to Deuteronomy 31:8.

The psalmist exhibited strong faith in God while at the same time experiencing intense sorrow. By calling God "my rock," he believed God was trustworthy, that God would protect him and strengthen him in this ordeal. Still, he wrestled with his feelings as he expressed them to God through rhetorical questions. He felt as if God had forgotten and abandoned him by not responding to his prayers, especially as the painful oppression of his enemies intensified. His enemies asked him, "Where is your God?" Their question said out loud what the psalmist was wondering himself.

The psalmist knew the answer to their question, and he answered it by speaking truth to himself. God was with him; God had not abandoned him. Although in that moment he could not see it, the psalmist knew deliverance would come. Therefore, there was no good reason to feel "so dejected" and be "in such turmoil." Instead, he could put his "hope in God" and "still praise him" because his God was his Savior.

What is this psalm teaching you to do when you are in the midst of a hard season?

APPLY THE TEXT

How does Psalm 42 prompt you to pray? Write your prayer below.