

Why are you so downcast?

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[0:00] To Psalm 42, which is what we read. For the director of music, a mass skill, whatever that may mean, of the sons of Korah, as the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

The Psalms are the ancient songs of the people of God. And they encompass a vast range of emotions in the presence of God.

The Psalms speak to us as human beings in the world where God is, in all the complexities of our situation and all the emotions that we may have.

And the Psalm we're looking at today is a person in deep emotional pain and turmoil. That's what we're going to look at.

I kept some of the pictures from last time because there are some mountains there, which he speaks about. Some water, which threatens to overflow him, and darkness of dark clouds.

[1:20] And somewhere far off is the mountain of God where he would like to be, but where he isn't. And he hopes that he will be there. He hopes that he will be there.

First impressions of the psalm. It's very intense. It's a psalm of intense longing. It's not simply a description of depression.

It's spiritual. He's a spiritual person. He's a religious person. He talks about that it matters to him that he used to go, verse 4, with the multitude leading the procession to the house of God.

That matters to him that he used to do that. 43, 3, he's asking that he would come back to that. 43, verse 3, send forth your light and truth.

Let them guide me. Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell, and I'll go to the altar of God. So it's not just depression. It's a spiritual angle on this.

[2:32] But there are some very human parts to it, doesn't it? He says in verse 3, my tears have been my food day and night. So he just can't stop crying. And he talks about darkness.

Now the translation, let's just get this, verse 9. Why must I go about in mourning? Well, the mourning word is a darkness word. Why am I, well, I'm under darkness all the time.

And I think that's in 42, 42. Why must I go about mourning? Just everything seems dismal and dark and black. And he talks about disturbance, verse 5.

Why so disturbed within me, O my soul? So this is a word meaning a fight after, when people come out of the pub.

You know, a disturbance. It can talk about noise. It can talk about things being chaotic. And he says, that's where my soul is. Why are you sort of all in uproar?

[3:37] You know, why are you going off in all directions inside me? Why so disturbed within me? He says that in verse 5. Why so disturbed within me? He says it in verse 11.

Why so disturbed within me? And he says it in verse 5 of 43. Why so disturbed within me? He also uses the figure or the metaphor of drowning.

He says in verse 7, Deep calls to deep. The unfathomable threatening deeps. At the voice of your waterfalls, all your waves and breakers, heaps of water have passed over me.

So the picture in my mind is of somebody surfing on one of these huge waves. And they fall off their surfboard and the huge wave goes over them.

I'm glad I'm not a surfer. I know people who've had that experience. There's a way you cope with the waves going over you. You have to count to whatever it is, 60, and then hope you pop up.

[4:46] But he says, at the moment, I'm underneath. He feels as though he's drowning. Notice this is a poem. It has a poetic form. There's a repetition.

Why you downcast, O my soul? That bit is in verse 5. It's in verse 11. And then it's repeated again in 43, verse 5. So there's poetic form to this.

Notice there are a couple of significant repeated words. Soul is repeated. Soul being the real, deep, inner part of a person.

God can say he has a soul. Your appointed feasts my soul hates, he says in Isaiah. Meaning they're deep. You know, where you really feel things.

Where things really matter to you. And he talks about his soul. Count them off. Verse 1. As the deer pants for the streams of water, so pants my soul for you.

[5:54] Verse 4. Verse 2. Verse 2. My soul thirsts for the living God. Verse 4. I remember these things.

I pour out my soul. Verse 5. Why are you downcast? Oh, my soul. Verse 6.

My soul is downcast within me. Next one. Verse 11. Why are you downcast?

Oh, my soul. And verse 5. The same. Why are you downcast? Oh, my soul. This is really, really in the depths of what this human being is feeling.

Whatever it is, is rocking him. Not just on the surface, but right down to the deep. So he talks about my soul. And the second significant repetition is God.

[7:00] The soul and God. Notice this then. Count them off. Verse 1. I pant. My soul pants for you. Oh, God.

Verse 2. For God. The living God. When can I go and meet with God? Verse 3.

They get at me by saying, Where is your God? Verse 4. I used to go on the procession to the house of God. Verse 5.

Put your hope in God. I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. Verse 8. A prayer to the God of my life.

The God of my life. Verse 9. I say to God, my rock. Verse 10. They mock me. They say, Where is your God?

[8:04] Verse 11. Put your hope in God. My Saviour and my God. Verse 1. Vindicate me, O God. Verse 2.

You are God, my stronghold. Verse 4. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp.

O God, my God. Put your hope in God. My Saviour and my God. Now, this is very significant because this is a psalm full of longing for engagement with God.

See how important his God is to this person. Yeah? Do you see that? It's his soul and his God. And when can I meet with God?

That's what this psalm is about. And it's a very intense psalm. Now, it's a psalm of somebody in considerable emotional pain.

[9:07] And I know we all have different moods and seasons of life. And I trust that nobody has come along this morning in deep emotional pain. But maybe somebody has. I don't know. So maybe somebody can just read it off the page and say, I feel exactly like that today.

For sure, somebody will sometime. But if we're not feeling like that, let's have our eyes open to learn something from this person that we just get to learn a little bit about as we read this.

And I ask the question, should we sympathize and say, poor chap. I hope I never feel like that. Or should we rather envy him and say, even in the pain that he's going through, he's got hold of something that I would like to have.

So I ask you that question. Is he to be sympathized with or envied? And let's see as we go through. So I'd like, it's quite a psalm to tackle. I thought I'd try it in three points.

Number one, to say he feels deeply. Number two, to ask why does he feel deeply. And number three, to say what does he do about it. Okay, that's my way of trying to get a handle on it that way.

[10:23] He feels deeply. Why does he feel deeply? And what's to be done about it? Okay, so let's try that. Number one, he feels deeply. So let's just think about, first of all, about feeling.

Has it gone? It'll come back. He feels deeply. Now, our emotions are part of being in the image of God.

Our emotions are part of being in the image of God. So artificial intelligence doesn't feel.

Characteristically, Mr. Spock on Star Trek has no feelings.

But being human, we have emotions. And that is because God is a God of emotions. The God of the Bible is not just a pure thought or pure action.

He is a God who we could say, in human language, has a soul. He feels things. So the God of the Bible is a God who says he loves.

[11:35] There's not only emotion, but there's an emotional component to love. The God of the Bible is a God who gets angry. The Bible is a God who feels compassion.

The God of the Bible delights in some things. I will delight over you with singing, he says. There's a God of the Bible who is pleased with things and has pleasure and displeasure.

And, now, dare we say this? Dare we say that the God of the Bible is a God who experiences pain? So we hesitate there.

But we can most certainly say that when he sent his incarnate son, he experienced pain. And what he did on the cross was he bore pain.

Emotionally, physically, in the depths of his soul, to whatever depths they are, to the very depth of that. We can say that Jesus had a proper, genuine, emotional life.

[12:45] And he is the only human being, well, I suppose we could say Adam, but purposes of this, the only human being ever to do so.

He is the only human being who has had a proper, genuine, emotional life. And Jesus did things like this. He snorted with anger. He rejoiced greatly.

He looked around in anger. Seeing the crowds like sheep without a shepherd, he was moved with compassion. At the prospect of the cross, he says, now is my soul troubled greatly.

Jesus experienced the whole realm of human emotions. And as such, we are to worship him and aim that we should be like him.

So being emotionless is not being spiritual because it's not being like Jesus. And the man in our psalm, I'm going to call him a man, I assume it's a man, but please understand it's applicable to women too.

[13:58] Verse 4, he experienced joy. He says, I used to go. It was great going in the procession to the house of God with shouts of joy and thanksgiving.

But now he experiences pain. My tears are my food day and night. So as you don't do without food, you always have a little snacky-do and looking forward to your brekkie and your lunch.

And he says, well, my day is just filled with crying. He experienced joy and pain and as he goes through this, he's asking himself, now how can I get this, my emotional state to be glorifying God?

Hope in God, for I will yet praise him. And that's where he's trying to get to so that I'm no longer just crying and complaining but praising and thanking.

So I pause to say that our spiritual growth means increasingly feeling rightly as a right response to a situation.

[15:15] what sin does to us is it twists our response so we're given a situation and we respond wrongly to it.

So somebody that we don't particularly like falls over and we think this is great fun but we shouldn't. something terrible happens and we're indifferent to it.

And for Christian people, the cause of God, when that goes forward, we should rejoice and when it suffers a setback, we should be deeply, we should feel deep pain and deep concern.

It's getting our emotions to respond rightly to the situation that we're in. And as I shall say in a minute, we're all wired up differently but that's the path for all of us.

Whether we are deeply emotional people or quite sort of steady emotional people, to get that right is part of our Christian aim.

[16:22] So let's look at this in a little bit more detail. So we've already said he's constantly weeping. We've said that his soul is downcast. So there's a sort of downward feeling to it.

We've said that he's disturbed. There's uproar inside him. Noise. Chaos. There's this sense of being overwhelmed. Everything's on top of me. He also says in verse 10, my bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me.

And it seems like the psychological pain of being taunted works out in a sort of physical pain that my bones suffer mortal agony.

Well, that's him. Hopefully most of us this morning are not in this acute, desperate situation.

Somebody might be. And as a church, as we've said before, we need the capacity to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

So, he feels deeply. That was my first point. Second point, why does he feel deeply? So let's look at this. Why does he feel deeply? And of course, this is exactly the question he is asking.

[17:42] It's repeated. Verse 5. Verse 5, verse 11, and the next verse 5, why? Why? Why are you downcast, O my soul?

Now, as we read it, I think it's quite difficult for us, at least it is difficult for me, to know his exact situation. In some ways, is it, should we take the geography of it as being important?

He talks about a mountain, where he is. He talks about foes. Are they, are we to understand that as being how he feels or how things really are? But he does raise the matter of the right connection between how we feel and what is causing that feeling.

So different people are wired up differently. You might have noticed that. Different temperaments, actually different cultures, cultivate different temperamental reactions to things.

So that at my wife's sister's husband's funeral, it was expected that she weep and throw herself on the coffin because that's what people do.

[18:54] They're encouraged to feel like that in an English funeral. That would be seen as not the right way to behave. So there are different cultural I'm disappointed.

Right. Different people are wired up differently. Age and experience makes a difference. I think when you're a teenager, you're thrown into tears by all sorts of things that you might survive better when you're a bit older.

And causes of feelings can be rational or irrational. They can be worthy or unworthy.

Causes for how you feel might be hormonal or chemical. Causes for how you feel might be historical. But all of these causes can be probed and the psalmist says the right thing when he says, why are you downcast?

Why are you downcast? He doesn't just say, oh I feel awful. He says, yeah, he do. But why? One of the reasons can be sin.

[20:15] And there are psalms where sin unconfessed, unrepented of has a devastating effect on the psychological health of the writer.

I feel terrible, says David, and the reason is I've sinned. But that's not, there's no hint of that here. That's not, he's not feeling terrible because he's done something wrong.

But he asks the question, why? So let's see if we can give some answers. So one thing that seems to go on here is there's a change in circumstances.

He says, I used to, this is verse 4, I used to go with the multitude leading the procession to the house of God. He's talking about being in Jerusalem with the temple procession.

And it looks as though he was an important figure in that, he used to lead that. So that's where he used to be. But it's not like that now. So there's been a change.

[21:20] And this has upset him, just to put it mildly. Is location something to do with it? So verse 6, he says, my soul is downcast within me from the land of Jordan, the heights of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.

Well that's way up in the north. So has something happened to make him move house? Is he no longer amongst the people he used to be with and the places that he used to know and the things he used to be doing?

And I don't know, perhaps he's retired, but he's up north now. Is that a factor in this? Well I think we can certainly say that as people's lives change that it does affect people in their emotions.

When you're with the buzz of a lot of people in church, that's a very encouraging thing. and if you're kept at home because you're ill or looking after little ones, you miss that.

Do you not? And like the psalmist, this is awful. I used to be there, but I'm not there these days. And he, he, this affects him by feeling spiritually abandoned.

[22:40] He feels that God has left him. I haven't put the verse. Where does it say that God has left him? Nine.

Nine. Thank you. I say to God my rock, why have you forgotten me? It feels forgotten. Well, so there's some factor, change in circumstances.

Opposition and conflict. So he says in verse nine, I'm oppressed by the enemy. Now, does he mean the satanic enemy or does he mean people?

I'm oppressed by the enemy. 43.1, he says, vindicate me, O God, plead my cause against an ungodly nation. Sort of thing, a leader, king, prime minister, I don't know, might say, they're all against me.

The nation is against me. And he says, it's not just that they disagree with me, it's an ungodly nation. Verse one, he says, vindicate me, plead my cause.

[24:02] Giving the idea that he's been falsely accused. Some of, well, in the news, we know of people who have been falsely accused of child abuse.

And they must go through agony, must they not, until that false charge is shown to be false. He describes himself as a victim of deceit and ill treatment and wickedness in number one, verse one, rescue me from deceitful and wicked men.

So oppression and conflict. And who would read a psalm like this? I reckon the Babylonian exiles would read this and they'd say, yeah, that's us. We're, so sorry, we're far from God.

We have an enemy getting at us. We used to be in Jerusalem, now we're in Babylon, and we've got enemies getting at us all the time.

Where is your God? The Babylonian exiles would sing this psalm and they'd say, yeah, that's us. I think Jesus would have read this psalm and he'd say, in a sense, that's me.

[25:17] Vindicate my cause against an ungodly nation. Rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. You are God, my stronghold. Why have you rejected me?

Jesus could totally sing this psalm God. As someone totally innocent, suffering this to make atonement for our sins.

But Christians can sing this too, varying degrees. Maybe Christians who are innocent victims of injustice, false accusation, abuse of various sorts. When, O God, will you come and vindicate me? When will you clear me? When will you get me out of this terrible mess? But the third thing I think is the one that is most influential on his feelings.

That is, he feels the loss of contact with God in his soul. That's where he comes in, isn't it? My soul pants for you, O God.

[26:27] My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I go and meet with God? This is what most deeply troubles him.

I'm not in contact with God. My soul and my God, we just seem distant, I have no sense of him being near, I have no sense of him caring for me, I have no sense of engaging with him, I have no sense of my gratitude and love towards him, when can I come and meet with God?

I can't praise him, he says, I will do once, I feel forgotten by God, verse 942 too. Jesus would have identified with this totally, wouldn't he?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? God, he says, but the thing that strikes me most is that this was the very thing that the psalmist cared about most deeply and he was most anguished about.

He says, this really gets to me, I'm not in contact with God, I can't get with the people of God. I used to, but I'm not there now.

[27:46] and I ask whether we would feel the same. It's a very good question, it's a very searching question actually.

Would it bother us that much if we couldn't get to church? If we had moved to some distant place, I so looked forward to being with those people, I so looked forward to singing God's praises with them and being thankful to God in that congregation and now I don't have it and it really gets to me. I wonder if we would feel that. Because that's what he feels absolutely devastated about. And in that is his meeting with God.

to bother us that much.

I haven't really met with God at all this week. That's just the way it is. I'm busy. the psalmist would say, do you not have a longing to meet with God?

[29:07] Do you not feel that you need to meet with God more than you need water? Like a dried up animal looks for water. Do you not want to meet God that much?

Isn't that not so deep in your soul that you want that? It's a very good question, isn't it? And I think we should envy this man because of the degree of his engagement with God.

I long for God, he says. And wouldn't that be a prayer? Lord, put that in my soul, so that I wouldn't just be content with all, you know, I've ticked off this, I've been to that, helped with that, but I want to meet with God.

So I think we should pray, Lord, let my soul have that intense desire for God that this man had. Let me not be content until I've got that.

Loss of contact with God in his soul. Why does he feel this deeply? Well, I think that's the deepest reason. So he feels deeply. We've looked at some of the factors in what causes him to feel deeply.

[30:23] And let's thirdly look at what can be done about it. What he says what's going on.

The whole psalm is him putting down on paper and probably singing about how he feels. He articulates the situation.

He says, I remember things, verse four, and I bring them to memory. I remember things. I pour out my soul, he says in verse four.

And I'm thinking it's not necessarily pouring out his soul in prayer, but just sort of maybe even to himself. What's going on in you? I just feel terrible about this. I'm really worried about that.

He pours out his soul. He articulates his situation. He explains it, puts it into words. He says, this is how I'm feeling. This is where I'm at, at this moment.

[31:22] And the very act of doing that is in itself a helpful thing, a sort of organizing of thoughts. It's an exercise in self awareness and keeping in touch with oneself.

What's going on inside me at the moment? What is really important to me? What's preoccupying me? What is concerning me at the moment? time? He articulates that.

If I may give a little bit of advice, I think there's a lot to be said for keeping a diary. You don't have to keep a hugely introspective diary, but what good things has God done for me?

What things am I praying about? You're not just immersed in how I feel at the moment, but can say, there's that factor and that factor and actually that was not too bad.

And oh, that was an answer to prayer. And oh yeah, I remember da da da da. He articulates it. He spells it out. My recommendation of keeping a diary of some sort.

[32:29] Second thing to be done, he talks to himself. So he says in verse 5, why are you downcast, O my soul? He talks to himself. What are you doing?

What on earth are you doing? Why are you feeling like that? What's going on with you? He talks to himself. I know people say it's the first sign of madness but I honestly recommend this.

This is what he does. Not out loud. But he does this. He talks to himself. Why are you downcast?

And he asks a question of himself. What's going on? And he tells himself stuff. He says to himself, put your hope in God for I will yet praise him, my saviour and my God.

So he, it's an exhortation. He urges himself. Come on. Don't be silly. He says, put your hope in God. Wait for God. You will yet praise him. He talks to himself. He takes himself in hand.

[33:30] I will yet praise him. He defies despair with hope. He says, no, don't be so negative. You will yet praise God. Keep waiting for God.

And Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones has a wonderful section on this in his book, *Spiritual Depression, Its Causes and Cures*. And I recommend that book. I'm not sure I've read all of it.

But there's some very, very helpful chapters. They won't make you depressed. It's a very positive book. *Spiritual Depression, Its Causes and Cures*.

And he says this rather funny thing. He says, the main trouble in this matter of depression is that we allow ourselves to talk to us instead of talking to ourselves. And he goes on to say, so the first thing that happens when you wake up in the morning is thoughts come into your head and you're being talked to.

And he said, you shouldn't just let those thoughts take over. You should talk to yourself. You should say, now, what's going on here? What are you believing? What are you trusting in? What's really

important to you?

[34:37] Why are you thinking like this? And I'm sorry, I had a quote, but I left the book at home. We should talk to ourselves. He talks to himself. Here's some advice from another preacher on this.

Talking to yourself. How to talk to yourself. Number one, be logical. What is the reason behind this? Is this rational? Irrational? Is this a proportional response to the fact that you trapped your finger in the door this morning?

Is it disproportional? He says, be logical. Secondly, he says, be realistic. I will yet praise the Lord. Be realistic. If you're suffering grief, it takes time to get over it.

If you've suffered something painful, pain does not abate immediately. If you've suffered loss, loss is real. It takes time to get through it.

If you're suffering change, change has to be dealt with. It's a process. Be realistic. Thirdly, be patient. He keeps on saying, put your hope in God.

[35:43] You could translate that wait on the Lord or wait for the Lord. Some things you have to wait for the Lord. Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

And faith is acting on the basis, I don't like this expression, but I've put it down. Faith is acting on the basis that God will show up even if it takes time. Be patient.

Fourthly, be firm. Take yourself in hand. If you are being silly or stupid, tell yourself so and don't let yourself off the hook. Be firm.

So those are four pieces of advice. Be logical. Be realistic. Be patient. Be firm. Third thing that he does, he talks to the Lord.

And you notice that quite, not all of this is directed to the Lord. Some of it's directed to himself, but some of it's directed to the Lord. So he starts off, my soul pants for you, oh God.

[36:44] Where are you? He addresses the Lord. It's you I want. He addresses the Lord sort of really saying, you've caused this problem.

This is, you know, your hand is in this. Verse 7. The roar of your waterfalls, all your waves and breakers have swept over me. And you see, in saying that, he is recognizing that the hand of God is in this.

And he's actually beginning to relate to God even in this really complaint. It's your waves that are over me. But it is yours. It's your hand that's upon me.

And verse 8. Now, I don't know whether this is a prayer or a statement, but it's certainly to do with the Lord. If we took it as a statement, by day the Lord commands his hesed, we might take it as a prayer.

May the Lord command his hesed. Hesed, being steadfast love. Lord, if you send that, it's a word for command, send your hesed to me, your steadfast love into my life.

[37:54] At night, may his song be with me. A prayer to the God of my life. That's a beautiful expression, isn't it? The God of my life.

What is my life without God? It's nothing. This is the God of my life. I say to God my rock. So this is a prayer, isn't it?

I say to God, why have you forgotten me? He addresses God with this complaint. Why are you so far away? Why don't you do what you said you'll do? Why have you left me? But he's talking to God.

But he does say, you are my rock. Even though I can't feel any ground under my feet, you are my rock. He says, he calls on God to vindicate him and to plead my cause.

It's like what we specifically know that Jesus does for us. He stands up for us in the court of heaven and pleads our case. Stand up for me. Plead my case.

[38:57] You see the situation? It's your job to vindicate me and do that, please. It's calling on the Lord to do that.

Act for me when I am powerless. Send out your light in my darkness and your truth in my abandonment. Verse 3. Send forth your light and your truth.

Truth here not meaning things that are mathematically true or logically true but his dependability. bring your dependability into the equation of my life, Lord. Send out your truth and let them cease wanting to be brought back to the holy mountain.

Let them guide me to your holy mountain to the place where you dwell. his preoccupation with meeting and knowing and engaging with his God.

[40:04] Let them bring me to your holy mountain where you dwell. If you bring me then I will arrive at joy and praise and gladness. I think these are things we can all pray, aren't they?

We can pray to God. I want you. I won't be satisfied without you in my life. Moment by moment day by day.

Isn't that right? Pray to pray. It's a good prayer to pray. When things are on top of us Lord, it's you. You are my rock. Stand up for me in my powerlessness.

Send out your light and your faithfulness into my life. Bring me into your presence. So we've gone through the psalm and we've looked at what he does about it.

spells out his situation, talks to himself and he talks to God. And we come to the end of it and the last verses say Why are you downcast O my soul?

[41:09] Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God for I will yet praise him my saviour and my God. And he still hasn't come out of the problem yet has he? Still in there.

But as he's worked this through I don't know about you but I feel very confident that it won't be long before he finds his prayers answered.

Because even in the act of grappling with God in these prayers he has actually met God hasn't he? He has actually come near to God even though he might not feel it but we see as we read you're actually in touch with God even as you go through this dark valley.

The painful process itself has brought him nearer to God. Do we sympathise with him or do we envy him? And I must say I must say I rather envy him.

I wish I had the longing for God that he has and maybe you feel the same way. ending