

Psalm 42

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[0 : 00] Just bow your heads in prayer. Heavenly Father, I admit at times it's hard to pray honestly to you.

At times, emotions are so hard to express that we don't know how to express them to you. And Father, as we approach this psalm now, I ask that the Holy Spirit would speak to our hearts and minds.

As I prayed earlier, that any distractions from this week, whether good or bad, would just fall away. And we would be able to hear your voice speaking to our hearts.

And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So this past... Oh, please be seated. This past week honestly has been one of the hardest weeks personally for me to do sermon prep.

I've never struggled so much with preparing a sermon. As many of you know, me and Amy, we've moved now to Port Perry, where I'll be continuing my...

[1 : 28] I'll be starting a new job as a curate, which is basically an associate pastor. And so we moved this past week. And at the beginning, as we were moving, three family members were admitted to the hospital.

And it definitely stirred a lot of emotions in us. And during this move, as we moved our entire lives four hours from here, closer to Toronto, the sense of a feeling of great loss I found personally as I moved.

It's super exciting for us to move, to start a new chapter in our lives. But there's this really big sense of a loss. And it's been something that's been really weighing on me lately.

And through all this stress and emotions, other emotions from the past couple of years with COVID and other things that have gone on in our lives have come up over the past week.

And this combined with depression that I've suffered with or dealt with for pretty much my entire life has been quite a combo.

[2 : 34] It's definitely been one for the books. And because of all this, I feel like I shouldn't be up here. I feel like someone, my mind tells me, someone who has it more put together should be up here speaking to you guys.

But as the great renowned Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon said once when he was speaking on depression, and he is someone who struggled immensely with depression, he said that I am up here only to remind you about Jesus.

And that motivates me to come up. And I can relate to that because I am up here, a beggar leading other beggars to bread, to tell you about Jesus.

And the writer of this psalm that we're looking at today is bearing his soul to God. He is in the abyss of depression. He is suffering so greatly.

And we have a front row seat to this. And the thing that's so encouraging that I get to tell you about Jesus is that he is the only hope in a world full of pain, suffering, and death.

[3 : 54] He is the only true hope, the only hope that lasts, that goes the whole nine yards, as they say. And I pray that I do it justice because I am very aware only those who have been to the cliff edge or to the great depths of suffering can truly understand what someone is experiencing through as they go through these things.

So I just ask for grace as I approach this topic. Because I know there's people here who have or who are at this moment going through it.

Going through it. They feel like they are in the pits of hell. And I just ask for grace as we approach this topic. So let's see what the writer of Psalm 42 is saying.

What he's saying to God. So please turn to Psalm 42 with me. That would be a big help. And as Ross pointed out, he kind of stole my thunder a bit. It says book two at the top.

And he gave a great explanation of it. Another, because the commentators are a bit divided on this. Another thing is that they divide the books into five books to symbolize the first five books of the Bible.

[5 : 05] Which is Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And they did this for a liturgical purpose, as Ross mentioned. And then you also may be wondering what a maschal is.

And Ross, again, alluded to this. It is most likely a musical or liturgical term. So let's take a look at the psalm. And I'll begin reading it. I'll read verses one to the beginning of six.

As a deer pants for flowing streams, So pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night. While they say to me all the day long, Where is your God?

These things I remember as I pour out my soul. How I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God. With glad shouts and songs of praise.

[6 : 05] A multitude keeping festival. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him.

My salvation and my God. Now when he says soul, he's not talking about this out-of-body experience that you maybe sometimes hear around our culture today.

What he's talking about when he says soul, When the Bible says soul, it's talking about our very inner being. The depths, when we feel emotions. It also talks often in the Bible about the heart, which means the same thing.

It's the depths of our very self. Our very identity. Everything is wrapped up in that. It's not an out-of-body experience. And then as anyone knows, anyone who has suffered deeply knows, sometimes you can't describe adequately what you're going through.

You're lost for words. There's no words that can describe it. And the same is true for this psalmist that we see here. He has to resort to using metaphors. Here again what he says.

[7 : 12] He says, As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

See, he's talking about a desolate place. He is in a desolate place right now. He is searching for revival. Or for survival. It could be a revival too.

He feels so lost. So out of place. So, in a sense, abandoned. That he is parched for a God.

For just having an experience with God. I don't mean like a big Pentecostal experience. But just a sense of knowing that he is with him. That God is with him. Anything.

Just the little drip of God's presence would quench his thirst. But he's not getting that in this. As many of you know, I'm an avid rock climber.

[8 : 09] And the closest I've ever been to feeling so quenched for thirst was when I was climbing with Amy. In this place called Skaha. Which is in BC.

Just on the outskirts of Kelowna. It's a place that's known for being almost desert-like in Canada. And as we were climbing, we were very underprepared with water.

We only brought a liter of water. And we went through that very quickly in the morning. But we were young, so we kept climbing. We didn't go get water. We just kept climbing for the rest of the day.

And at the end of the day, when we were walking out, I have never experienced being so thirsty in my life.

My mind, everything was just focused on getting to the corner store as quick as possible and drinking water. Literally, when I got to the corner store, I started drinking the water before I paid for it.

I didn't even think of handing it to Amy. I just started. Unfortunately, I just started drinking it. You can ask her about that. It's pretty funny to reflect on. And if we continue looking at this psalm, it continues.

[9 : 17] He almost doubles down on what he's feeling. And we see this in verse 3, as I read. The psalmist is utterly depressed. He is beyond himself. He says, My tears have been my food day and night.

At the same time, he's being mocked. By those around him. Where is your God? Where is he? See, no one would say this to him unless he looked abandoned.

Unless he looked pitiful. Completely alone. And then we see that he continues. He is haunted from his memories of when he could freely worship.

Look at verse 4. These things I remember as I pour out my soul. How I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God.

With glad shouts and songs of praise. A multitude keeping festival. Personally, this is one of the worst things for me I've ever experienced with depression.

[10:28] Is experiencing memories. And you think in your mind about the good days. For me personally, I think about good days. Like the glory days when things seemed so good.

When almost I was younger. Those were the better days. Or it could have been for other people I know they experienced. Maybe it was a different church they used to go to back in the day. But that church doesn't exist anymore.

It was like the glory days. Or it was a time. It could be another thing. Where a time where you felt like you were more your whole self. And it haunts you.

And it could also be on the flip side. It could be something horrible that you've experienced that haunts you. And you can't get it out of your mind. You almost pray to God.

Why won't these leave my mind, God? Why won't they go? Or it could be the thought of your mind wrestling with you. Where is your God? God. That I find personally is the hardest thing going through suffering and depression.

[11:27] Is that your mind thinks about other times. When things were easier. When things were better. And it haunts you. And that's what's going on here. He in a sense is having a nostalgic moment.

But this nostalgic moment is haunting him. Because he's thinking about it as he's crying. It's not a good thing. He's weeping. It's haunting him. And this is something most of us, many people can relate to.

Is things that haunt them from their past. It could be good or it could be bad. And he then finishes the stanza with this. What does he say? He says, Why are you cast down, O my soul?

And why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God. For I shall again praise him. My salvation and my God. Two of the biggest critiques of Christianity are How could God allow people to go through such suffering?

How could he allow pain and suffering? If he is an all-powerful, all-good, all-loving God. Or another critique. I've heard this often. Christianity is just a crutch for people to live in a utopian delusion.

[12:37] As they go through life. They find life too hard. So they need to make up something to believe in. But I would argue that Christianity and the Bible give the only rational explanation for suffering and a hope that's based on an external factor.

It's not based on a factor within. Give me a second. In the opening verses of the song, That's Life, which is made famous by Frank Sinatra, who did a cover of it, it goes like this.

That's life. That's what all the people say. You're riding high in April, shot down in May. But I know I'm going to change that tune when I'm back on top.

Back on top in June. Isn't this something we hear all the time as we go through life? The advertisements, slogans, everything's always about just getting up, picking up our socks and continuing on, doing our own self.

A very common thing we hear now is something that if you need to deal with something, you need to practice mindfulness. It could be another thing, just overcome it. Chin up.

[13:53] You just need to try harder. Only you can change your circumstances. You just need more faith. What if you never overcome it?

What if your strength to carry on fades? What if you never get out of that slump and never get back on top? What if you can't muster more faith?

The psalmist in this situation is so utterly bleak, his situation. But instead of relying on himself, he hopes in God.

But you might be thinking, why would I hope in a distant God? In this God that seems so, if God even truly exists. He's so distant. Why would I hope in that God?

Why would I do that? I'd rather hope in things that I can see and that I can touch. But God is not distant. God came into history and walked on this earth.

[14:56] Jesus came into the world. God sent his son. He came for you. In the book of Isaiah, it is prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus came about Jesus.

And I'm just going to read it. In Isaiah 53, verses 3 and 4, he says, He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief.

And as one from whom men hid their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

You see, what Isaiah is saying here, Jesus is a man of sorrows. Only he knows what you truly are going through to your deepest being, to your deepest soul.

Your pains and your longings. And I know me being up here, just saying, hope in Jesus. Hope in the salvation of the future.

[15:58] That could come across pretty flat. Pretty, doesn't help at all. For those of us who have gone through suffering or depression, it comes out flat. But if that's the case for you, remember Jesus, the man of sorrows.

If you can remember one thing from this sermon, is that remember Jesus. He is a man of sorrows. He has gone through everything. He is the suffering servant who said in the garden, My soul, before he was betrayed, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

He knows what you're going through. He's been there before. And this psalm isn't over yet. So we go back to the psalm now, into the second stanza, in verses 6 to 11.

My soul is cast down within me. Therefore, I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep, at the roar of your waterfalls, all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.

By day the Lord commands his steadfast love. And at night his song is with me. A prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me?

[17:19] Why do I go on mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversary taunts me.

While they say to me all the day long, where is your God? Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him.

My salvation and my God. As you see here, the psalmist is separated from Jerusalem. He's completely isolated. He gives the location of where he is, which is north of the Jordan River.

If you have a Bible, most Bibles have maps in the back. I personally really like being able to look at maps to see historical parts. And this gives a historical reference. So if you have maps in the back, you can look at that later where he is.

He's completely separated. Completely alone. And people are taunting him, asking him, where is your God? You look pitiful. You look hopeless. And he's remembering.

[18:22] He's separated from the temple. And the temple then signified where the presence of God is in that time. And if you've gone through depression or suffering, you know what it feels like to feel separated.

Because when you go through it, you feel like you're completely separated from everything. You're completely alone. He's surrounded by people who don't believe in his God. They believe in other gods, other ways.

He would appear pitiful to them. But notice the language in verse 7. He resorts to metaphors again to express his feelings. What does he say? He says, Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls.

All your breakers and your waves have gone over me. See, he's using a chaotic water symbolism here. In the Bible, anytime there's water and it's chaotic, it symbolizes chaos.

Unrest. Just complete separation. You see it in Genesis. Anytime it talks about water, it normally talks about if God is separated from it, it's chaotic.

[19:27] But when God comes in, it turns into calm waters. Charles Spurgeon, as I mentioned him before, he was a famous preacher. And he was crippled by depression.

He struggled with it his whole life. And at times, he would just weep. And he couldn't come up on stage. And he talked often about depression. In his commentary, The Treasury of David, while commenting on Psalm 88, he says this, which I find so profound.

The mind can descend far lower than the body. For in it, there are bottomless pits. The flesh can bear only a certain number of wounds and no more.

But the soul can bleed in 10,000 ways and die over and over again each hour. Isn't this true? The psalmist feels forgotten by God.

But still, he hopes in God. This psalm teaches us three things. Three very important things. It teaches us how to pray as we look at it.

[20 : 36] And that's the beauty of the psalms. They teach us how to pray. It teaches you how to express our emotions. But it always comes back to praising God.

No matter what we go through, there is a God who is there, who is constantly with us, walking with us. Secondly, it teaches us to show empathy to those who are suffering from pain or depression. It shows us how to come up alongside them and walk with them, pray with them. And thirdly, it teaches us to hope in God and not in ourselves. Because if we hope in ourselves, it will just fail. But if we hope in God, he is steadfast. He is a steadfast rock, as it says here. He is, the symbolism of him being a rock is steadfast, solid.

So listen to the psalm again. Because it is so important, this psalm. It is balm to the soul. If you are going through depression or suffering, come to this psalm.

[21 : 37] Read it. Reflect on it. Listen to it again. I'll read it quicker. As a deer pants for the flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, Where is your God? These things I remember as I pour out my soul. How I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of praise. A multitude keeping festival. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me? Hoping God, for I shall again praise him. My salvation and my God. My soul is cast down within me. Therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermit, of Mount Mizar.

Deep calls the deep at the roars of your waterfalls. All your breakers and your ways have gone over me. By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me.

[22 : 42] A prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why do I go on mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me.

While they say to me all the day long, where is your God? Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him.

My salvation and my God. Notice how there is no resolve here in this psalm. It doesn't have a happy ending. The psalmist is still separated.

He's still isolated. He's still suffering, being taunted constantly. There's no resolve. And that's the thing with suffering and depression.

There's normally, most of the time, no resolve. It is a lifelong thing that you go through. But the Bible doesn't end here.

[23 : 39] There is resolve in the Bible. There's hope. See, God sent his son into the world to save the world. He sent his only son into the world to save it from itself.

That all those who put their faith and trust in him will be saved, will have eternal life. Jesus, on the cross, cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And the psalmist here says, why have you forgotten me? See, Jesus knows what it feels like to be completely separated from God. He knows what it's like.

But he also said, it is finished. It is finished for all those who trust in him. There is a hope in the future. It may seem like that it is hopeless right now.

But Jesus is the man of sorrows. He knows what you're going through. He'll walk alongside you.

He's there. See, the finished work of Jesus has given the ultimate hope.

[24 : 41] One that never forsakes you. Even if you feel forsaken. It allows you to say, hope in God. Say to your soul, hope in God.

For I shall again praise him. My salvation and my God. Amidst the suffering, you can say that boldly. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the psalms.

Thank you for inspiring the people who wrote them to write them. They are such a rich treasure. A treasure to have, as Spurgeon puts it.

Father, I pray for this psalm. It would resonate in our hearts. That we would remember it through all the good times and through all the bad times. That regardless of what we go through, we can hope in you.

And that is truly a balm to our souls. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.