

# (1) Depression

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[ 0 : 01 ] Our reading is taken from Psalm 42 and Psalm 43 on page 563 of the Bibles on your chairs. Page 563.

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 continually, 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? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

[ 1 : 04 ] My soul is cast down within me. Therefore I remember you, from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mitzah. 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? Why do I go 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 continually, 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.

Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man. Deliver me.

[ 2 : 14 ] For you are the God in whom I take refuge. Why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Send out your light and your truth.

Let them lead me. Let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my 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.

Well do please keep your Bibles open to Psalm 42 and 43. We've prayed, so let me begin. Let me start with that famous quote by Forrest Gump.

I'm sure many of you know him as that fictional character who was played by the actor Tom Hanks. Forrest Gump said this in his infamous Southern Draw, which I won't imitate now.

[ 3 : 24 ] He said, Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get. I wonder what you think of that. I guess in one sense it's true, isn't it?

Life is a little bit like a box of chocolates. We never quite know what we're going to get. So you don't know what the future holds. You don't know what's going to happen in a year's time, in a month's time.

You don't even know what I'm going to say in two minutes' time. Hopefully I do. So life is full of unexpected twists and turns, ups and downs.

And we never quite know what we're going to get. But on the other hand, I'd like to suggest, and I think it's true that as Christians, if you're a Christian here today, then we can know what we're going to get.

And more than that, we need to know what we're going to get. That is to say, we need to know what the Christian life should look like and feel like.

[ 4 : 26 ] We need to have a realistic expectation of what our experience as Christians should be like. We need to know for two reasons. One, because if we had unrealistic expectations, we'd be

very quickly disillusioned with our Christian walk, wouldn't we?

Very quickly disillusioned. And two, we need to know what our Christian life is meant to look like, feel like. So that when the different circumstances of life come pressing in around us, whatever they may be, we are armed and ready to respond to them in a way that is honouring to the Lord Jesus. Because the Lord, as we've been saying, is King. And that's what it is all about, isn't it? Honouring the Lord Jesus in all that we do. So this week, as Simon was saying, we're starting a four-part series on the book of Psalms.

And one of the great things about the Psalms, one of the reasons why they're just so important for us to do, for us to look at, is because they kind of show us what we're going to get.

They show us what the believer's experience really looks like and really feels like. And so my prayer this morning, my aim this morning, my prayer is that as we identify with the psalmists, here in Psalm 42 and 43, and as we add our voices in with theirs, we learn to respond here in 21st century Dulwich.

[ 6 : 04 ] In the midst of our own circumstances, we learn to respond in a way that honours our King, in a way that honours the Lord. So let's look then at Psalm 42 and 43, at the believer's experience, and then the believer's response.

Follow along at the back of the service sheet, the points are laid out there. Incidentally, we're handling the psalms together, these two psalms together, really because they are one psalm. They're written by one of the sons of Korah, as the subscript says, who probably had some kind of role as temple musicians, ministering in some way before the people of God, in the temple. And we know it's one psalm, because of this repeated refrain that we get, this refrain that kind of glues the whole thing together. Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

[ 7 : 10 ] First then, the believer's experience. Look with me at the first four verses, because these first four verses really kind of set the scene for us.

And they paint a picture of a believer in complete despair, in deep depression. And why? Well, it's because he feels cut off from God. Let me read the first four verses again. 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 continually, 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.

[ 8 : 21 ] It's such a vivid picture he paints in verse 1 and 2, isn't it? You have to imagine a landscape like you get in Asia, sort of parched and barren, or Middle East, totally barren.

And here is this lone deer wandering around in this God-forsaken land, condemned to death, desperate for water. That's how desperate this psalmist is for God.

So pants my soul for you, O God. That word soul there is his entire being. It's almost a physical H. It's as if he's saying, just as life depends on water, so I depend on God.

Without God I'm a dead man. Because God is the living God. Verse 2. God is the very source of life. So this believer longs to come before God to renew that feeling of intimacy that he once felt to quench his thirst.

and yet all he gets is the taste of his own tears. It is a terrible picture. I hope you can feel it. A believer in deep depression because he feels cut off from God.

[ 9 : 44 ] But I guess then we have to ask the question, why does he feel so cut off from God? Well in verses 3 and 4 we kind of get a wide angle view or a wider angle view as we get a picture of the circumstances he's found himself in.

So verse 3 he's clearly in a situation of hostility. Isn't he? Where he's surrounded by hostility. They say to me continually where is your God?

And if you glance down to verse 10 he describes the they there, those people as his adversaries, his enemies, those who those who taunt him day and night.

So he's in a place of hostility and he's cut off from worshipping at the temple. Verse 4 worshipping at the temple has just become well it's just a distant memory.

Now it may well be that this psalm is written during the exile where the people of Israel lived under the oppressive pagan rule of the Babylonian Empire and were physically cut off from the temple in

Jerusalem.

[10:49] Which is why of course it would explain why he felt so cut off from God. Because if you wanted to meet with God under the old covenant you went to the temple.

Now wonderfully that's not the case for us today is it? Wonderfully through Christ's death on the cross if you are a Christian here today then you have the incredible privilege of God dwelling within you in the person of the Holy Spirit so that as Christians we can never be physically cut off from God.

It's an incredible real objective truth but it doesn't always feel like that does it? Because there are times when we feel just like this believer when we feel cut off from God when our prayers just ricochet off the ceiling when the Bible just seems dry when times of fellowship times of closeness just a distant memory when we long for God and yet there seems to be no answer when the pressures from outside overwhelm us and the black dog of depression as Churchill put it sets in. Now we're not talking here about serious mental illness we're talking really about those times that we all go through I know I have and perhaps this morning you're going through a time like this perhaps this morning you can identify with this believer in this psalm perhaps the stress of the office has been grinding you down perhaps those long hours are finally taking their toll perhaps the sheer stress demands of family life are piling up those sleepless nights perhaps it's loneliness where good friendship good fellowship feels like a distant memory perhaps the taunts of family or colleagues are ringing in your ears where is your God and you feel in despair because God is nowhere to be found well if that's you then please recognise from this psalm that it is part of normal

Christian experience it is the believer's experience to go through times like this you're not alone and of course Jesus himself could have sung this psalm he went through times of deep turmoil deep depression he was forsaken by God so don't be disillusioned by your circumstances we all go through times when hostile circumstances hostile people hostile environments press in around us and God feels cut off if I can borrow the word to Forrest Gump it's what we're going to get let's be real the Christian life isn't all song and dance so we can sometimes make it out to be we should and we can expect times like this so I guess then the million dollar question is how do we respond if that is our experience how do we respond in a way that honours our king so let's look now at the believer's response now the very first thing he does is he talks to himself

[14:41] I'm sure the needers would tell you if they were here that I talk to myself all the time which is really just a little bit worrying but here this is about the only time when talking to yourself is not the first sign of madness because here he talks to himself he says three times why are you cast down oh my soul why are you in turmoil within me hope in God for I shall again praise him my salvation and my God he says it in verse 5 again in verse 11 and lastly ends the psalm with it in chapter 43 verse 5 three times and it's the key refrain this is the glue that holds the whole thing together and I think we'll see that this is the motor really the driving force that moves him through the psalm it's what moves him from despair and depression in verses 1 to 4 to glimpses of hope in chapter 43 it's as if he's drawing his emotions into line isn't it now I'm not much of a fisherman but I'm told that if you're that way inclined and you manage to hook a really really big fish well that's the easy bit to hook it the hard bit is to get it on the bank so you've got to reel it in a bit and then let it go and then reel it in a bit more and then let him go you've got to do it bit by bit because otherwise you'll break your line and that's a little bit what he seems to be doing here with his emotions isn't it every time he says to himself hope in

God it's as if his emotions are way out here depression deep despair and he's reaching out grabbing hold of his emotions and bit by bit drawing them into line with what he knows to be true about God because he knows in his head doesn't he that God is his salvation he knows in his head that God will deliver him but he doesn't feel it so he speaks it out to himself and that's that's what we've got to do hope in God he says for what or for deliverance for rescue for rescue out of those hostile circumstances back into a place of praise a place of intimacy for I shall again praise you my salvation and my God now if you're anything like me you'll know that it's so easy in times of deep depression to let our emotions run away with themselves and to slip into a bottomless spiral of self-pity and yet to honour the Lord it is at these times we need to grab a hold of our emotions and say to ourselves hope in

God hope in God Dan there will be a time when we will praise him again because he is our salvation he will rescue that's the truth of the gospel isn't it that's what Jesus has done for us and it's so important we know that in our head so that so that when hoping in God is the very last thing we

feel like doing we know it in our head and we can draw our emotions in and say to ourselves tell ourselves hope in God now you may well be sitting there thinking to yourself it's all well and good saying hope in God but at some point we've got to move from just saying that to ourselves to actually doing it so what does it mean what does it really look like to hope in God well here again I think in the rest of the psalm this believer helps us because as he draws his emotions in and as he tells himself hope in God he begins to kind of put his money where his mouth is he begins to actually hope in God and we see glimpses sort of sparks in the darkness as it were of what it actually means to hope in God and there are two things he does he looks back and he looks forward so what does it mean what does it really mean in practice to hope in God well he looks back to the past and remembers God's character look at verses 6 to 11 notice that his situation hasn't changed look at verse 7 let me read that for you deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls all your breakers and your waves have gone over me picture the floods that we've been having these summer floods and then kind of times that by a million this is total chaos in fact that word deep there is the same word used way back in

Genesis chapter 1 to describe the earth at the very dawn of creation without form and void it's as if for the psalmist for this believer the whole of the created order has kind of just imploded on itself and chaos reigns he's still in the same situation look at verse 9 and 10 he's still feeling forgotten by God he's still feeling the oppression of his enemies he's still hearing those mocking voices where is your God and yet in the midst of all this what a contrast because he remembers the past looks to the past and remembers God's character look at verse 6 my soul is cast down within me therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon from Mount Mitzah see for the psalmist the promised land this land of Jordan is in a sense

[ 21 : 20 ] God's CV it's God's track record it's that tangible reminder of all that God has done in the past of the rescues he's done it's the evidence of his character and it's that character that he dwells on in verse 8 look at verse 8 by day the Lord commands his steadfast love and at night his song is with me that steadfast love is God's covenant love the love that binds God to his people and drives him to act in rescue it's the love that drove God to rescue Israel from Egypt it's that same love that drove him to the cross to rescue us and today though it may feel like everything around you is chaos though it may feel like God has abandoned you his character has not changed which means he's still in the business of rescue and he will not he cannot abandon you he's bound to you so in those sleepless nights when everything just feels like such a chore

God cannot abandon you that's his character or when you come home from work and work is just all consuming and you think to yourself is this it well God cannot abandon you or when you feel you've lost a good friend or when you just feel you're running on empty when laughter rings hollow and joy for some reason just just isn't there God will not he cannot abandon you so in times of depression times of despair we need to look to the past we need to see how God has proved himself in the past we need to look to his word we need to look to the cross we need to remember his character that's what it means to hope in God but it means something more than that because having dwelt on the past having looked back this believer now turns his gaze to the future and he looks forward in passionate expectation for that final deliverance he knows will come let me read chapter 43 1 to 5 vindicate me

O God and defend my cause against an ungodly people from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me for you are the God in whom I take refuge why have you rejected me why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy send out your light and your truth let them lead me let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling then I will go to the altar of God to God my exceeding joy and I will praise him I will praise you with the lyre O God my God why are you cast down O my soul why are you in turmoil within me hope in God for I shall again praise him my salvation and my God so his circumstances haven't changed the battle with his emotions still rages on why have you rejected me why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of my enemies and yet verses 3 and 4 give us a wonderful picture of the certain future rescue that this believer is longing for is looking to impassioned expectation when God's light and his truth will break into the darkness and the deceit that surround him and he will once again be in God's presence he will once again praise God on his holy hill in the temple in Jerusalem but this is no prayer of victory if this was a film it would be a bit of a cliff hanger because we end in verse 5 why are you downcast oh my soul so we leave him still waiting still battling but looking to the future looking to that horizon and longing in passionate expectation for that rescue he knows will come

and that's where we are that's why it's so real that's where we are we're still waiting we're still battling so let's hope in God let's keep our eyes fixed on the horizon let's look to the future in passionate expectation and long for that great final deliverance that deliverance just foreshadowed for us by Jerusalem the deliverance accomplished for us through the cross the new Jerusalem the new creation when depression will be no more when we will never again feel cut off from God because God will dwell with his people and wipe away every tear from their eyes when we will praise him in his presence for all eternity that's what it means to hope in God let's pray why are you downcast oh my soul why are you in turmoil within me hope in God I shall again praise him my salvation and my God thank you father that in times of depression in times of hostility we can put our hope in you so help us lord to do that help us when our emotions rage within us to look back and remember your character to look forward in passionate expectation to that great day when you will come again when you will reign forever as king in Jesus name amen and an and