

Seeking Refuge in God

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[0 : 0 0] pray for us. So let's bow our heads together. Lord, be with us now. Open our ears to hear your word. Please make us humble enough to learn from your word and to be changed by it. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Last week I preached from Psalm 42 on spiritual dryness, spiritual depression, spiritual emptiness. And my main point was that spiritual dryness and depression is God's design that we might come to him to be relieved. I said it was his design for us so that we would come to him to be satisfied. That we wouldn't go to the things of this world to be relieved from our emptiness and our depression, to be fulfilled. Rather, we would go to him.

And the point was that he truly is the only one who is ultimately satisfying. I'll say that again more succinctly. Spiritual dryness is God's way of reminding us that in the end only he himself is truly satisfying. I also said that God may let you go on for months and months drinking and getting drunk so that eventually you would see that drunkenness doesn't satisfy.

Only God does. God might let you go on for months and months spending money on latest fashion items, hats for spring carnival, so that you would see that hats and fashion aren't ever going to be truly satisfying. Only God is. And tonight is a continuation of that sermon, really. In a lot of the early manuscripts, Hebrew manuscripts, Psalm 42 and 43 are one psalm. And you'll notice if you read it through, there's recurring themes there and a recurring refrain. And the refrain is the psalmist saying to himself, preaching to himself, why are you downcast on my soul? Why so disquieted within me? Put your hope in God.

You will yet praise him. And so I've taken them together. That's why we're doing them over two weeks. And tonight really is just a continuation of that sermon. And I'm really just going to talk about two things, two practical ways that you can respond when you're feeling spiritually dry, distant from God.

You could even stretch it to be any time that you're facing adversity or suffering. I've got two practical ways for you to respond. So just to remind you, as we go into these two things, two practical ways you can respond to suffering.

[3 : 0 0] Last week's main point was that spiritual depression or emptiness is designed by God so that we'll search for him. Thirsty is the way that the psalmist said in Psalm 42, you remember?

It says, as the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul thirsts for you. It's a really good word because hunger, hunger is a different word, isn't it?

Hunger is a whole different ballgame. You can do the 40-hour famine. I can't, but you might be able to. You might be able to go for a couple of weeks without eating. But thirst, you can't do anything. When you're that thirsty, you can't think of anything else but quenching your thirst. Spiritual thirst is designed by God so that we'll search for him just as we'd search for water in the desert.

I just want to make mention too and give credit to John Piper. If you don't know who John Piper is, you haven't been around here much recently because we like the guy.

[4 : 1 0] He's a pastor in America and he writes a lot of books. I just want to make mention of a couple that have helped me the last few weeks as I've looked into this topic. The first and the kind of synopsis of this book will come out tonight.

God is the Gospel. This is a really good book. Meditation on God's love as the gift of himself. The main point is that the greatest gift that God gives you isn't saving you from hell or giving you a fulfilling life or making you feel forgiven.

It's actually the gift of himself. You get God when you become a Christian and that's the Gospel. So that's a good book. Another one. When the darkness will not lift, doing what we can while we wait for God and joy.

It's really good if you know someone who's depressed. This book looks into depression, anxiety on a medical level but also on a deep spiritual level.

It's a good little book to have. And the hidden smile of God. This is a bunch of biographies that look at affliction and suffering.

[5 : 22] Really good book to get as well. So get your hands on them. They've helped me a lot. So the two things we're going to look at. Two practical ways that you can respond to suffering.

Number one. We can cry out to God and ask him to heal us, to rescue us, to relieve us. You get that from verse 1 to 2.

When we're in the place of the psalmist, the guy who wrote the psalm, feeling lonely, cut off from God, rejected. One way we can respond is by crying out to God.

Asking him to heal us, to rescue us, to relieve us. That's number one. But it's not the most important thing I want to talk about tonight. In fact, I'm going to talk about it for about 30 seconds because it's very subservient to the second point, I think.

It's good and godly and biblical to cry out to God and ask him to heal you. We should do it after the service, I think. We should probably clear that with Paul first.

[6 : 27] But I think we should be praying for one another. If someone's sick, we should be praying for them. Maybe in small groups. It's a great place to do it. Pray for one another. Ask for God's healing. It's an important thing.

It's a biblical thing. It's a good, godly thing. But it is not as important as the second point. And that is we can speak to God. We can pray to God and ask him to grow us spiritually and make us rejoice whether we're healed or not.

Whether we're rescued or not. Whether we're relieved or not. Say that again. We can speak to God. We can pray to God. Ask him to grow us spiritually.

To use the depression. To use the dry spell. To use the suffering. To grow us spiritually. So that we can rejoice in God whether we're relieved or not.

The Bible says as a command, rejoice in your suffering. And we should be praying that God would use our suffering to bring us to a place of joy.

[7 : 34] So that's what I'm going to talk about tonight. We'll dive right in. We'll see the first one really quickly. Let's turn to Psalm 43. If you've got it open, that would be great. You see in verse 1 he says to God as a prayer, vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people from those who are deceitful and unjust.

Deliver me. Save me. He cries out against his circumstances and asks God to change them.

Have you ever done that? I hope so. He asks God to relieve him, to vindicate him. He says, defeat these enemies, Lord.

Give me victory. And it's not wrong to pray that God would rescue you from your enemies. Whether they be literal enemies who are trying to kill you or the enemy of disease.

The enemy of particular sin. Natural disaster. It's right to pray for deliverance. God wants to hear our prayers for deliverance.

[8 : 45] And he's mighty to save. We sing that song. He's mighty to save. And so we should pray those prayers. That's number one. That's a legitimate response to suffering.

But it's not the most important response. Most important thing we can do is speak to God and ask him to lead us. Not mainly out of trouble.

Not mainly out of trouble. But into a deeper understanding of who he is. Even if that means staying in the midst of trouble indefinitely.

See that in verse 3 and 4. He says, That's an amazing prayer.

You notice that he's not concerned anymore about God giving him victory over his enemies. That's not the most important thing to him in that section of the prayer.

[9 : 57] Most of all, he wants to know God more fully. More intimately. More closely. Through his experience. So I want to take this part of the prayer.

Where he's asking God to please show me more of you. Bring me closer to you. Grow me spiritually through this. I want to be close to you. Even in the midst of this trouble.

And so I'm going to do that. I'm going to break it up into four stages. I'm going to look at this closely. What he says and what we can learn from it. You'll notice in the prayer that you've got on the blue piece of paper.

I've kind of summarized his prayer really. And I'll go through it with you as we go. That's a prayer that I think might be good for you to pray if you're in the midst of suffering.

Feeling cut off from God or rejected by God. There's a lot we can learn from this man and his prayer. So stage 1. First stage of his prayer. He prays for spiritual light and truth.

[11:02] Verse 3. Send out your light and your truth. Let them lead me. He confesses that he needs God to lead him.

Why? Because he's in darkness. He knows that God is his refuge. He knows that God hasn't rejected him.

But he feels like he has. He's in the dark. Have you ever felt like this? You know intellectually. You are saved. Jesus died on the cross.

Won your salvation. You know God. You've experienced God. But you just don't feel like it. You feel cut off. You feel rejected. Am I the only one who's felt like that?

Right. There's one other. Thanks. I've talked to a lot of people who have felt like this. A lot of people have come to me in my short experience in ministry and have said to me, I know it in my head.

[12:09] I know that Jesus has died for me. I know that he'll never reject me. He says in his word that he'll never forsake me. But I just don't feel it.

I feel like I'm in the dark. This guy knows better as well. He knows that God doesn't reject those who trust in him. But he can't help himself. It's the way he feels.

So he prays. God, send me light and truth. Light because he's in the darkness. He's surrounded by darkness and despair. He wants light.

He wants light. And truth because truth is what's real. Truth is reality. And he knows the reality is that God is with him. And so he wants to know that reality.

He knows he does have a relationship with God, but he's not feeling it. And it's the same for us. It's the same for us if you're a Christian. Jesus says, Those who are mine, those who I've chosen, They will never be snatched out of my hand.

[13:23] And so you know from God's word that if you're saved, he's got you. That's the reality. And so if you're not feeling it, if you don't feel it in here, you need to ask God, give me light.

Give me truth. Help me to know that I'm yours, even in the midst of this suffering. And so the first stage of our prayer on your sheet there is, Lord, help me to see and to feel the reality of my relationship with you.

Stage two of the psalmist's prayer. He longs to come to the altar of God. The second stage of his prayer is that by this light, by this truth that God gives him, that he would be led to God's holy dwelling, to the sanctuary and the altar of God.

Said in 3 and 4-ish, Let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God.

We need to do a little translation here. What's the altar? In the Old Testament, the altar was the place of forgiveness, place of atonement.

[14:46] You go to the altar with a goat. Priest slits its throat and the blood is poured out upon the altar. And your forgiveness is won by the blood of that goat because sin must be paid for by blood.

And if it's not your own, it's got to be someone else's. So he recognises in this dark place his own sin and he wants to go, he wants to get right with God. So he yearns for the altar.

It's a little different for us, isn't it, on this side of the cross. Do we have an altar? Is this an altar? Pop quiz.

Is this an altar? No, it's not an altar. We're going to have communion later tonight. Nothing's happening on the altar. It's not an altar. It's a table. It's a bit of wood with fancy carvings on it.

We don't have an altar because we don't need one. The book of Hebrews says that Jesus was a once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. We still needed blood, but it wasn't the blood of a goat.

[15:51] It's not blood represented by wine. It is the blood of Jesus on the cross once for all. So we don't have an altar, but we have a cross.

The cross is the place of our forgiveness. And so our great strategy, one of our great weapons, we're in the midst of spiritual dryness, spiritual depression, suffering.

One of the great weapons we have, the great strategies in this war that we have is to go to the cross. This guy yearned for the altar. That's all he had. We have the cross of Christ.

We need to go there and we need to remember and remind ourselves and preach to ourselves. Jesus has died for us. John 3.16 Get it tattooed on you.

I give you permission. Do what you need to do to remember that verse. And every other verse about the cross of Christ. Hold on to that in the darkest hour.

[17:01] Yearned for that like this guy yearns for the altar. God so loved the world that he gave his only son. That whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Stage two of our prayer. Help me to know in my heart what Jesus did on the cross. Stage three. He wants to experience God as exceeding joy. He wants this light and this truth to lead him to God as his exceeding joy.

Verse four. Then I will go to the altar of God. To God my exceeding joy. See according to God. God. The main aim of our life is not to find joy in our money. Not to find joy in our possessions. Not to find joy in our car or in our relationships.

[18:10] It's not to find joy ultimately in our spouse or our children. It's not even to find joy in our children. It's not to find joy in our church or in our forgiveness. The main aim of our life is to find joy in God himself.

That's what this guy is saying. Then I will go to the altar of God. To God my exceeding joy. This is so important when we come up against adversity. That we remember this. And by the way. I should have said this earlier. You need to start getting yourself into this pattern right now. You need to start training yourself to remember these things now. Because when you're in the midst of suffering. When you're in that dark place of depression. You probably won't remember this stuff. You'll be so short-sighted.

That you won't remember it. So you've got to train yourself. Go over this day by day. Keep a hold of that piece of paper. Or write your own prayer. Or keep those memory verses in the bank of your memory.

[19:21] So that when you're in this place. You've trained yourself to go to these. Strategies. To use these weapons. Against the darkness. So it's important that when we come up against adversity.

We remember this. Here is a guy. That is threatened in every way. Like physically threatened by enemies. He's feeling cut off from God. He's feeling rejected by God.

And yet he knows that the ultimate goal of his life. Is not to escape his enemies. It's not to escape his adversity. He knows the ultimate goal in life.

Is not to be healed from cancer necessarily. Or to escape the financial crisis. The crashing of Wall Street. It's not necessarily to escape pain. And suffering.

And adversity. The ultimate goal of your life. And the ultimate battle in your life. Is will God be your exceeding joy? Will God be your exceeding joy?

[20:21] Or will he use everything else in the world as a crutch to hold you up? Until it's not there anymore. And you fall flat on your face. Will God be the gladness at the heart of his joy?

That's what he's concerned about. It's what we should be concerned about. See if church is at the heart of your joy. Firstly I think you're a little bit weird. But if church is at the heart of your joy.

Then it's become an idol. If forgiveness has come at the heart of your joy. Then it's an idol. If your children are at the heart of your joy.

The apple of your eye. Then they've become idols. For Christians God himself.

Has to be at the heart of your joy. So that when everything else falls apart. When your wife leaves you. When your boyfriend breaks up with you. When your dog gets hit by a car.

[21:25] When your kids run away from home. You won't fall to bits. Because at the heart of your joy. Will be God himself. Above everything else.

Above rescue. Above victory. Above vindication. It's God. Who is at this man's exceeding joy. We should pray. Pray all night if you have to.

That the same would be. True for us. If you find it impossible to be joyful. Unless things are going your way. Then you're in the wrong place spiritually.

I know how easy it is. I know how easy it is. To have everything. Hold on to everything else but God. And to have stuff.

At the heart. Just remember. The front of the Melbourne Anglican. This is the only time I mention Melbourne Anglican in my sermons.

[22:20] But it's a newspaper at the front. The front page is a guy I know. Andrew Smith. His parents go to this church. And he goes to another church I used to work at. And he's a good example of how to do this.

Because he's an Olympian hockey player. But he has a great testimony about how he was in the Olympic hockey team last Olympics. And got dropped at the last minute. If playing in the Olympics was at the heart of his joy.

He would have been a broken man. But his testimony was that he continued to trust in God. Despite that enormous setback. Let's not minimize it. It's an enormous thing for that to happen to him.

But he wasn't trusting in hockey. He wasn't trusting in gold medal. He was trusting in the crown of life. And so he didn't fall apart. You can read about it. In the front of that paper.

So the third stage of our prayer. Help me to find ultimate joy and fulfillment in you God. Ultimate joy and fulfillment in you. Last stage.

[23 : 31] Stage four of his prayer. He expresses this joy in God. He expresses his joy in God. Something happens. And he expresses his joy in God.

His prayer is that the light and the truth would lead him to express. The joy that he feels in God. Verse four. The end. I will praise you with the harp.

Oh God. My God. I believe that authentic joy in God. Will always overflow into genuine praise. The expression of your joy in song or in prayer or whatever. That expression completes your joy. Your joy is incomplete until you express it.

That's what the Psalms are all about in many ways. Expressions of joy. We're such a closed up culture. Middle to upper class Australia.

[24 : 37] We're so closed up. And I don't mean you have to be dancing up and down the aisles here. But you need to express in some way your joy.

The joy that you've found in God. It's the overflow of the joy that you experience inside.

If you come here on Sunday night and you're really closed up and you really hate singing. It might just be that you don't like our music and that's okay. I hope you still come along. But it might be that you just don't experience joy in God.

You're not reading your Bible and thinking. I can't believe this. This is incredible. Joy wells up and you want to express it.

I want us to be expressors of our joy.

[25 : 38] Read the Psalms. There's 150 Psalms of expression. Of inward reality. Joy. It should be overflowing. Let's pray that it is.

So this man is feeling empty. He's feeling despised. Oppressed. Abandoned. Rejected. In the darkness. And so he prays.

Send out your light and 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 harp.

Oh God. My God. So the fourth stage of our prayer. Help my joy in you. To overflow.

In genuine praise. Whether I'm restored or not. So that even if you get wheeled in here each week.

[26 : 37] With cancer riddled throughout your body. You can still raise your hands like. I took a funeral on Friday. And there was a guy here. 93 years old. And he was very ill.

Very ill. I was almost in tears. As I was up the front. Pretending to lead. The hymn singing. And. He couldn't even speak.

But he had his hands up like this. He's not going to be healed. But it doesn't stop him from praising God.

So we say. Help my joy in you to overflow. In genuine praise. Whether I'm restored. Or not. Whether my boyfriend. Comes back.

And goes out with me again. And mends the relationship. Or not. Whether my car gets fixed. Or not. Or whether. Whether. I recover from the financial crisis. Or not. So there's a couple of practical things.

[27 : 41] We can do in response to suffering. By all means. I just want to say this again. By all means. Pray that God would rescue you.

And heal you. And save you. And relieve you. But more importantly. Pray. Pray. That God would lead you. Into a deeper relationship with you.

In the midst of your suffering. Don't waste your suffering. Use it. That God might bring you closer to him. I'd like to pray for us now.

Then Jordan will pray for us. And we'll come together. And share communion together. So. Let's bow our heads. Ask God for help. Dear Lord. Let's pray for help. Dear Lord.

This is. A challenging psalm for us. I know that I am someone who gives up so easily in the midst of suffering. Lose. I lose my joy so quickly in the midst of suffering.

[28 : 42] That when anything goes against me. I lose my joy. So I pray for help.

That your Holy Spirit would come. And move in the lives. Of those that love you in this room. You'd convict us where we're going wrong.

Convict us where we're holding on to the. On to worldly possessions too tightly. To where we've replaced joy in you with joy. In stuff or relationships.

Please come and change us as a community of believers. That we would be a community that. Overflows. With praise.

Whatever form that takes. Amen. And pray so. So much that you would be glorified in this place.

[29 : 43] That we would learn. From the psalmists. How to praise you. And worship you in spirit and in truth. Pray it for Jesus sake. Amen. Amen.