

A Song for the Depressed

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[0 : 00] As the dear pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the loving God. When can I go and meet with God?

My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, where is your God? These things I remember as I pour out my soul, how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the mighty one, the shouts of joy and praise among the fneest of throng.

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.

My soul is downcast within me, therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon, from Mount Mazar. Deep calls to deep, in the roar of your waterfalls, all your waves and breakers have swept over me.

By day the Lord directs his love, 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?

[1 : 08] Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? My bones suffer mortal agony, as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, where is your God?

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. Vindicate me, my God, and plead my cause against an unfaithful nation.

Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wicked. You are God, my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? Send me your light and your faithful care.

Let them lead me. Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then I will go to the altar of God. To God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with a lyre.

O God, my God. Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.

[2 : 20] Thank you, Lana. Thank you, Lana.

Thank you, Lana.

Thank you, Lana. Thank you, Lana. Thank you, Lana. So, depression is a serious mental health issue. And, of course, we know as human beings, there is a huge emotional range in our lives. So, there will be some who just feel down from time to time, right through to those who suffer from clinical depression. And so what we see in Psalms 42 and 43 could be called a song for the depressed, because the psalmist is clearly downcast, he's depressed, things aren't really going well for him.

It's thought that these two psalms, 42 and 43, belong together because they're linked by the repeated refrain or the chorus that comes up. If you look down, 42 verse 5 and then 42 verse 11 and then again 43 verse 5.

[4 : 20] Why, my soul, are you downcast? He repeats again and again. And so this writer is speaking honestly about his own experience. And the good news is that any facing similar experiences can be helped through these experiences to know God as their joy and their delight.

As the psalmist says in 43 and verse 3. And so this is a psalm for every single one of us. Yes, it's for those who are feeling depressed. But it's for each of us when we're feeling downcast or disturbed or disheartened or discouraged.

And so we don't just need to know about the condition that's being described here. We also need to know the causes and also its cure. And so I'd like us to look at the outline printed on the inside of the service sheet.

We've got the condition. First of all, second, the causes. And then third, the cure. So first of all, the condition. And it's depression. That's clear from what the psalmist says.

So who is the writer of these psalms? So the title of Psalm 42 says, For the director of music and mascul of the sons of Korah.

[5 : 37] Now the sons of Korah had responsibility for praise in the temple, for leading the people in the worship of God. And so the writer of these psalms is a believer. He's somebody who knows God.

And so although he hasn't lost his belief in God, it sounds like he's lost the experience of God. So look what he says in verse 1 and verse 2.

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet with God?

He's using the illustration of a deer to describe how he's feeling. So just as a deer pants for water to quench its thirst, so he is thirsting for God in this dry season in his life.

He needs to sense the presence of the living God with him, because that's something he wasn't sensing. He's experiencing instead discouragement and darkness, but he wants God.

[6 : 42] And so how should we understand his condition? How do we explain his condition? Why does he feel this way? Well, his depression doesn't appear to be because of any sin in his life.

There's a right depression, which comes from our sin and is caused by guilt. It's right to feel depressed and discouraged and downhearted because we've done something wrong. But there's no indication that he's feeling this way.

There's no indication that this is like other Psalms, where the writer is honest about his sin and his confession and his need for forgiveness. And so despite being a believer in God, he is experiencing some kind of depression.

And again, it's in that refrain, in that chorus, chapter 42, verse 5, 42, verse 11, and then 43, verse 5, all saying the same thing.

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.

[7 : 50] That's his condition. This is where he is. This is how he's feeling now. And this is where he wants to be. He wants to be praising God again. So he's downcast and he can't understand why.

And I wonder if you've ever felt the same, feeling downcast and not quite sure why you're feeling the way that you do. Or maybe just longing for the presence of God in your life when God just seems absent, as if he isn't there.

Well, that's how this writer is feeling. And so none of us are immune to the way he's feeling, even if he profess to be a Christian. And that's why it's wrong to think that Christians are people who should never get depressed or who could never be depressed.

Because anybody who knows God can feel like he felt. And you just need to read any good Christian biography to see that depression and suffering and struggle is a very common experience in the life of any Christian.

And I've known of colleagues who have been signed off for months, even years, because they feel the way that the psalmist feels here. And that's why this psalm is such a great tonic for us.

[9 : 13] John Calvin, who is the reformer, he called the Psalms an anatomy of all the parts of the soul. It's a great way to describe the Psalms because he's saying that in all the Psalms, we find what is going on in our hearts.

And so the Psalms, if you like, are a bit like a medicine chest where we find what we need for whatever we experience in life. An anatomy of all the parts of the soul. And that's what we see here in Psalms 42 and 43.

Because the writer is speaking as a spiritual doctor. Somebody who makes a diagnosis and who explores the remedies. But he's not a doctor who's doing this from a distance, as if he is the doctor and he's speaking to patients.

Instead, he's speaking as somebody who's been there himself. He's felt this way and he knows what's going on. He knows how it feels to be depressed, to be discouraged, to be downhearted.

And so whether we are feeling this way right now or not, or whether we've been in this kind of condition in the past, or whether we've never felt like he's feeling, I guess we need to recognise what he's saying before it happens to us.

[10 : 28] We need to be aware, not just of the condition, but also of the causes, so that we might find the cure. And so that's the first point, the condition. So why is he feeling this way?

Well, let's look at the causes secondly. And the first cause seems to be physical. So he's got all the symptoms of somebody who is depressed. His whole body is affected by how he's feeling.

So whether the physical is a cause or merely a symptom, the fact is that he's suffering. So chapter 42, verse 3, he says, My tears have been my food day and night, so he can't stop crying.

I wonder if you've ever just burst into tears about the slightest little thing. Well, this is slightly different. This is more than an uncontrolled outburst.

For him, this has become a characteristic of his life. He's crying. He's in tears all the time. He says his tears have been his food. So he's lost his appetite, which is a classic symptom of depression.

[11 : 33] And if he's up all night crying, then he probably didn't sleep much either, which is another classic symptom of depression. And he was completely overwhelmed by how he's feeling.

So look at verse 7. He says, Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfall falls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me.

So he's got this sinking feeling. He is totally overwhelmed as if he's drowning. So how he's feeling on the inside is affecting his physical condition.

Look at verse 10 in Psalm 42. Do my bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, Where is your God? So his whole body is affected by how he's feeling.

He's crying. He's not eating. He's not sleeping. He's overwhelmed. And he's in agony. And I guess these days, in terms of mental health, we've got a far better understanding of mental health than previous generations.

[12 : 40] Because we realise and we know that our health isn't just about our physical well-being, as if it's just our body. We realise we're whole people.

And so the physical and the mental and the emotional and the social and the spiritual are all interlinked. And they all combine to make us who we are as a person.

And so there's the physical side. And yet for him, the second cause of his depression seems to be social. Because he's socially isolated.

Look at verse 4. These things I remember as I pour out my soul, how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the mighty one, with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. So what he's doing is he's thinking back to the time when he used to go to the house of God, when he used to go to the temple, when he used to go to worship with other people.

[13 : 39] That was back then. But he's in a different place now. Not only was that back then, but back then he would have been the worship leader. He would have been the one who was leading other people.

And the praise of God. But now he's far away from God's place. And he's far away from God's people. So where is he? Well, look at verse 6, Psalm 42.

My soul is downcast within me. Therefore, I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, from the heights of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. So he can't gather with others in worship.

Because the place of worship was Jerusalem. Because he's stuck away up in the far north, and the Jordan Valley, somewhere in the Hermon Mountains, up on Mount Mizar.

So that's a long, long way away from Jerusalem. And we don't know why he's there, but that's where he is. And he seems to be there on his own, away from social interaction and away from other people.

[14 : 44] Which, if you're feeling at all depressed, is a bad place to be. It's bad to be on your own, away from other people. It's never a good thing. Being away from other people will just make us feel worse about ourselves instead of making us feel better.

Because God made us as relational people. And being in relationships with other people helps us as human beings. So his social isolation means he's also isolated from worship.

So he's not singing praise with the people of God. He is not hearing the scriptures being read and taught. He's not enjoying fellowship with other believers.

And all of this has an impact on how he's feeling. Which tells us, by way of application, how important it is to be part of a worshipping community.

How significant it is to be part of a church family. To put it bluntly, if we're going to survive as a Christian, not just mentally, but spiritually, if we're going to survive, then we need to go to church.

[15 : 55] You can't do a free solo as a Christian and expect to survive. We need to be involved with the family of God's people. We need to be cared for and looked after by them.

And we also need to be the ones who are looking after other people. Which leads us to the next cause of his depression. So there's the physical, there's the social, but there's the spiritual. So the physical and the social impact the spiritual. And so for him, he's got all these voices around him and they're saying to him, God has left you.

So see verse 3, the end of verse 3. They're saying, where is your God? People say to me all day long, where is your God?

Then again in verse 10, Psalm 42, his foes are taunting him and saying all day long, where is your God? So he's being told by these voices, whether these are physical people around him or voices he's hearing in his head, I don't know, but he's being told, your God's not with you.

[17 : 06] See this God that you say you trust in? Well, where is he now? How's he looking after you? Surely you really need him because of the state that you're in.

Why can't he do something for you now? And these taunts from these voices, wherever they're coming from, seem to get through to him because he was then beginning to ask these things himself.

So see verse 9, where he says, why have you forgotten me? And then Psalm 43, verse 2, why must I go about mourning?

Why have you rejected me? So the spiritual depression he experienced resulted in the sense of being forsaken by God. He seemed to be socially isolated and he also seemed as if God had left him.

And it wasn't that God had forsaken him, but at least that's what it felt like for him. He'd lost a sense of God's presence. He'd lost a sense of God's love. And so this writer's experience isn't unique to him because it's possible for any Christian to feel downcast, to feel disturbed, to feel discouraged or to be depressed.

[18 : 26] And that's why we need to be aware of the causes of depression. They can be physical, they can be social, they can be spiritual. Like the writer outlines here.

Far better to be forearmed by being forewarned, by reading psalms like this that help us see that this is a reality. We can't always escape feeling this way.

And so we may see them in ourselves, we may understand them as we look on and see these causes in other people for how they're feeling. and we may just identify with them so closely. Because the psalm here doesn't deny the reality of depression. It's not denying it. So what's the cure then? Well, it's not just about saying wise up or get a grip or snap out of it or pull yourself together because that's just going to be more harmful than helpful.

But thankfully, God helps us through the words of this writer. Because there will be very real and painful reasons for our distress or for our depression but there are better reasons to be encouraged than there are to be discouraged.

[19 : 45] In other words, the causes are never greater than the cure. So the causes here are not greater than the cure that the psalmist outlines for us. Because when it comes to God, there is always help and there is always hope no matter how we're feeling or no matter what is going on in our lives.

So let's look then at the cure, thirdly. Because as he speaks of his condition, as he speaks of the causes, he also then outlines a cure for how he's feeling.

It's really a process. It's a process and there are four parts to it. And by him sharing it, then he helps us deal with the onslaught of depression as it comes to our own lives.

And so the four things, he analyzes his condition, first of all. Secondly, he remembers what God is like. Thirdly, he preaches to himself. And fourthly, he hopes in God.

So first, let's look at each. First, he analyzes his condition. salvation. So, Psalm 42, verse 4, says, these things I remember as I pour out my soul.

[20 : 54] So, he's not afraid to take an honest look at his life and the reasons for his discouragement. So, for him, he's sensing, he's realizing, and for us as well, that the way to move forward from how he's feeling is to bring how he's feeling out in the open, to let it all hang out, as it were.

Because as he does this, he's able to get a better perspective on things. He's able to raise the issues and he's able to find some help and a way forward.

And it's not just because he focused on himself, which is what, I guess, healthcare professionals and practitioners or counsellors will get people to do when they're depressed. They will get the person to focus on themselves and on how they're feeling. But there needs to be more to it than that. Because he doesn't just focus on himself and stay focused on himself. He analyzes condition and as he analyzes condition, his condition and what he discovers helps him focus on God. Because as he analyzes his life, what he finds is that it leads him to prayer. [22 : 05] In fact, it leads him to write this song for us. And so what he's doing is he's not wallowing in self-pity. He's cross-examining himself so that he can confront his condition, so that he can confront how he's feeling.

So he's not going to be overwhelmed or beaten into submission by his feelings because he's prepared to ask why. That refrain, why, my soul, are you downcast? Why, my soul, are you downcast? And isn't that a good place to begin? By asking that question, by analyzing our lives and seeing what the real issues are. So that's the first thing. Secondly, he remembers what God is like. So he doesn't just look inward at how he's feeling because that's never going to be the answer for any one of us, just looking at ourselves.

And nor is the cure just to be found by looking back to the past, which is what he does. And nor is the cure to be found in looking around at our problems, which is also what he does. [23 : 17] But we need to look up to God, which is where he finds his help when he looks to God. So look at verse 8. By day, the Lord directs his love.

At night, his song is with me. A prayer to the God of my life. So he knows he's feeling this way, okay, but he knows what God is like. So he knows that God is a God of love. It's a good place to start, isn't it? God loves me. No matter how I'm feeling, God loves me. And he knows that God is the God of his life. Okay, so he knows that God is his God. God. So God is his father. He loves him and he then belongs, he therefore belongs to God. So he starts by thinking about his relationship with God. And just look at what he says about his relationship with God. So Psalm 42 verse 9, he says, I say to God my rock.

[24 : 21] So he knows there's a security in God, a security that doesn't come from his feelings. and then Psalm 43 verse 2, he says, you are God my stronghold.

So he knows that God is stronger than he is. So no matter what he's going through or how he's feeling and he may not have the resources or the ability to cope with it, he knows that God is strong when he is weak.

And so he's reminding himself of what God is like and that's what helps. Not only that, but he wants to listen to God so in Psalm 43 verse 3, he says, send me your light and your faithful care or send me your light and your truth.

Let them lead me, let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. So he's praying that God would speak to him and that God would shed light into the darkness of his life. He wants God to reveal truth, truth about himself, to his confused mind and to his downcast soul. And so he's not just looking here for an emotional pick-me-up or a quick fix, maybe a Bible verse to give him a bit of a boost, to make him feel differently, to help him get through the day or through the night.

[25 : 42] No, what he wants here is to have the great truth about who God is, the great truth about what God is like to flood his soul. So his soul is flooded not by his feelings but by the truth about God.

And remember, it's a process. So it doesn't happen for this man, I don't think, in an instant. It happens over time as the truth about who God is sinks deeper into his own soul. Because he needed God's light in his darkness and he needed God's truth to counter his feelings, to dispel his depression.

And so, whatever we're feeling and however we're feeling, we need to remember what God is like, don't we? How are we going to be reminded what God is like? Well, it's through this exposure to God's word.

It's through reminding ourselves of his character, of his attributes. It's like the light of his truth flood our minds and our hearts. Because, whether it comes through personal Bible study as we read God's word each day or whether it comes through sitting under a biblical ministry as we hear it in

church on Sundays, this is what's going to feed us, this is what's going to nourish us, this is what's going to strengthen us.

[27 : 05] Because we need to be led by God's word more than we need to be led by our feelings. And so often it's our feelings that do the leading. Instead of God's truth.

And so the writer realises this. That's why he's looking forward to a time when he will worship God again. So, Psalm 43, verse 4.

Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my joy and my delight. I will praise you with a lyre, O God my God. So he knows that God is his joy, that God is his delight.

And so what's he going to do? Well, he's going to get his harp off the top of the wardrobe that he'd shelved there, he's going to brush the dust off it, and he's going to play it again. He can see a day when he will be through how he's feeling, and he will worship God as he should.

And so, this isn't just about popping a pill and feeling better. This is a process. A process for him and for us that involves continually looking upward to God as opposed to looking inward at how we're feeling.

[28 : 18] And wouldn't that make such a difference if we looked more to God and to the truth about him more than we looked inward to ourselves and how we're feeling.

So that's the second thing. He remembers what God is like. The third thing is he preaches to himself. He speaks to himself. That's what's going on in this chorus or this refrain.

So he's saying, why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? He's not talking to God here, and he's not talking to other people.

He's talking to himself. Did you ever talk to yourself? People think it's odd that you would talk to yourself, but what he's doing here is he's not listening to his soul.

He's talking to his soul. He's saying, remember this, my soul. Soul, listen to me. Soul, listen to what I've got to say to you.

[29 : 15] In essence, what he's doing is he's preaching the gospel, the good news, to his own heart. And that is great counsel for every discouraged and every depressed Christian.

Listen to what Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, who was a medical doctor before he became a minister and preacher. He's Welsh. And he wrote a book called Spiritual Depression, and this is what he says, and I quote, the main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this, that we allow ourself to talk to us instead of talking to ourself.

You have to take yourself in hand. You have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul, why art thou cast down?

What business have you to be so disquieted? You must turn on yourself and say to yourself, hope thou in God, instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way.

And then you must go to remind yourself of God, who God is and what God is and what God has done and what God has pledged himself to do. Then having done that, end on this great note, defy yourself and defy other people and defy the devil and the whole world and say with this man, I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance, who is also the help of my countenance and my God.

[30 : 50] So you can see what Lloyd-Jones is saying there. He's saying that he preaches to himself. And isn't that a good thing to do? Rather than listen to how we're feeling, we need to preach to ourselves the truth about God.

So he's saying shut up and listen. That's what he's saying to himself, shut up and let me tell you something. And so what is it that he's telling himself?

Well, fourthly, he hopes in God. He tells himself to hope in God. hope in God. That's what he needed to say to his soul because that's what his soul needed to hear, hope in God.

Now in the Bible, hope is never this kind of vague, wishful thinking like, hope is going to be a nice week, this week and not rain tomorrow. Hope in the Bible is trusting in what God has promised that he will certainly do.

So hope in the Bible is far stronger. And so this writer is not going to let depression have the last word because he's going to hope in God despite how he's feeling and that hope in God despite how he's feeling he believes will help him through how he's feeling to a greater hope and trust in God.

[32 : 08] And so isn't that the challenge for us, however we're feeling? It is to hope in God. To hope in God despite what the circumstances are. Because when we hope in God we won't be led by our feelings, we won't be led by our circumstances, we won't be led by our problems and we

won't be looking inward or backward or around.

Instead we'll be looking upwards and we'll be looking forwards by putting our hope in God. And that's why Christianity is such good news.

It's good news for everybody no matter how we're feeling. And Christianity is never about denying your feelings. And so that's not what I'm saying today, that we should deny our feelings, put a big smile on our face and say everything is fine.

Because that's not what the psalmist does, is it? He acknowledges and he admits that he's not feeling fine. But neither is Christianity about letting your feelings rule your life.

because sometimes we can't let our feelings rule our lives. But Christianity is about knowing who God is and placing our hope in him despite how we're feeling.

[33 : 24] Because that's the best thing that we can do. Why? Well, because we know that in the gospel of Jesus Christ, God is for us and not against us.

And so however we're feeling, it's not because God doesn't love us. Because God has already declared the full extent of his love for us at the cross. And so there's nothing that the writer of these psalms experienced that Jesus Christ didn't experience to a far greater degree.

So Jesus knows what it means for our souls to be downcast and disturbed. Because Jesus has been there. So he fully understands what we go through because he was fully human.

So as Jesus approached death, he said, now my soul is troubled and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. And then in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was deeply distressed and troubled and said, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

And on the cross, Jesus was mocked. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, they said. And then as Jesus died, Jesus experienced God forsakenness when he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[34 : 54] And so Jesus didn't just lose the feeling of God's presence with him. He lost God. He was forsaken by God the Father.

God said, Jesus hasn't just been there. Jesus has experienced far worse than we ever could. He was forsaken by God so that we need never be forsaken by God.

And so because Jesus has been there, then he can lift us out of wherever we are. And that's the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And that's what we need to preach to our hearts again and again and again, just like the writer does here. Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my saviour and my God.

And so however you're feeling, keep singing that refrain. Keep singing it to yourself. Keep preaching that message again and again and again to fight any feelings of despair.

[36 : 01] And never forget the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. And because he's been there, he understands what it's like for us to be there. And because he's been there as the son of God, our saviour, he can lift us out of where we are to where we need to be.