

PSALM 42:1-43:5

<p>1. Tell God how deeply you yearn for His presence</p> <p>a. Bc. you feel alienated from Him, cut off from His presence</p> <p>b. Bc. your heart is broken by unbelievers taunting & ridiculing you</p> <p>c. Bc. you can no longer go to the house of God... 1) Where you can fellowship with God's people 2) Where you can praise God among fellow believers, He.10:25</p> <p>d. Bc. your soul is downcast, disturbed, deeply troubled</p> <p>e. Bc. your hope is still in God: He is <i>your</i> God & <i>your</i> Savior</p> <p>2. Remember God no matter how desperate your situation</p> <p>a. Remember Him even if you are a foreigner exiled to a distant land</p> <p>b. Remember Him even when you feel overwhelmed by problems & sense the judgment of God</p> <p>c. Remember the LORD's unfailling love: Pray to & praise the God who gives you life</p>	<p>BOOK II PSALMS 42-72</p> <p>PSALM 42</p> <p>When You Are Deeply Discouraged or Depressed in Life, 42:1-43:5</p> <p><i>To the chief Musician, Maschil, for the sons of Korah.</i></p> <p>As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.</p> <p>2 My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?</p> <p>3 My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?</p> <p>4 When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.</p> <p>5 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.</p> <p>6 O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.</p> <p>7 Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.</p> <p>8 Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with</p>	<p>me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.</p> <p>9 I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?</p> <p>10 As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?</p> <p>11 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.</p> <p>PSALM 43</p> <p><i>For the director of music.</i></p> <p>Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.</p> <p>2 For thou art the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?</p> <p>3 O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.</p> <p>4 Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.</p> <p>5 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.</p>	<p>d. Remember Him even when you feel He is distant & has forgotten all about you</p> <p>e. Remember Him even when enemies oppress you... 1) Causing you great anguish 2) Scoffing at your faith & questioning where your God is</p> <p>f. Remember Him even when you are downcast & disturbed within 1) Put your hope in God 2) Praise Him: He is <i>your</i> Savior & <i>your</i> God</p> <p>3. Pray for God to defend & deliver you</p> <p>a. Bc. you live in an ungodly nation—among deceitful & wicked people</p> <p>b. Bc. God is your strength, your refuge, your haven</p> <p>c. Bc. you feel rejected by God—forsaken to suffer oppression</p> <p>4. Ask God to restore you</p> <p>a. To give you His light & truth to guide you</p> <p>b. To lead you into His presence—the place where He lives</p> <p>c. To make way for you to worship & praise Him—God, who is the source of your joy</p> <p>5. Encourage yourself in the LORD: Put your hope in God & praise Him, for He is your Savior & your God</p>
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BOOK II: PSALMS 42-72

PSALMS 42-43

When You Are Deeply Discouraged or Depressed in Life, 42:1-43:5

(42:1-43:5) **Introduction:** surely there is no greater tragedy than a person's committing suicide. Every year, thousands of people choose death over life. Many of these suffer from deep depression and can find no hope for the future.

Depression affects nearly all of us at some point in our lives, if only to a minor extent. Indeed, the illness has many causes, and science has proven that physical or chemical factors in our bodies and minds can contribute to depression. As a result, many drugs have been developed to help with these deficiencies. Doctors, therapists, and counselors are trained to help people cope with depression. In many cases, long-term treatment is required.

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Scripture is not silent about depression, discouragement, or despair. In fact, some of God's greatest heroes battled depression. The Bible records that Moses, Elijah, and Jonah suffered through times of discouragement so deep that they desired to end their lives (Nu.11:14-15; 1 K.19:4; Jon.4:8).

The author of Psalms 42 and 43 was battling depression when he penned these psalms. Exiled from home and oppressed by cruel enemies, he cried out to God for help. He confronted his downcast soul in a refrain that establishes the theme of these psalms. He was totally disheartened and recognized that his only hope was in the LORD.

Most scholars agree that Psalms 42 and 43 were originally one song. Three strong signs supporting this opinion are...

- the common theme and continuous flow of both psalms
- the lack of a title or heading to Psalm 43
- the repeated refrain in both psalms (42:5, 11; 43:5)

We do not know why or when the song was divided into two psalms. However, it appears this way in the Septuagint,¹ indicating that the separation occurred sometime in the late Old Testament period.

Psalms 42–49 are attributed to the *sons of Korah* (see *Psalms*, INTRODUCTION). Whether these songs were actually written *by* the sons of Korah or *for* their use in temple worship is unclear. However, most scholars conclude that the psalms were written by the sons of Korah. Some think, though, that David wrote them and instructed the sons of Korah to sing them. Others believe that the sons of Korah wrote the psalms but that they based them on the events of David's life. These psalms are unquestionably written in David's style and reflect his zealous love for God's house.

Some who hold that David is the author believe the occasion for writing was his son Absalom's rebellion against him, which forced King David into exile. The great nineteenth century preacher Charles Spurgeon argues this position passionately:

Although David is not mentioned as the author, this Psalm must be the offspring of his pen; it is so Davidic, it smells of the son of Jesse, it bears the marks of his style and experience in every letter. We could sooner doubt the authorship of the second part of Pilgrim's Progress than question David's title to be the composer of this Psalm.²

Another belief is that the author was a Levite worship leader, perhaps a son of Korah who had been exiled to a Gentile nation, maybe as a hostage in time of war. Still others suppose he was one of Korah's sons who accompanied David into exile.

The fact is, we do not know for certain who wrote these songs. But we do know the purpose for Psalms 42 and 43: they are *maschil* psalms, songs of instruction and teaching. Whatever his circumstances, the author was suffering through a period of intense trials, trials so severe that they plunged him into deep depression. Psalms 42 and 43 are inspired by God's Spirit to teach us what to do when we find ourselves in the same pit of despair. This is, *When You Are Deeply Discouraged or Depressed in Life*, 42:1–43:5.

1. Tell God how deeply you yearn for His presence (42:1-5).
2. Remember God no matter how desperate your situation (42:6-11).
3. Pray for God to defend and deliver you (43:1-2).
4. Ask God to restore you (43:3-4).
5. Encourage yourself in the LORD: Put your hope in God and praise Him, for He is *your* Savior and *your* God (43:5).

1 (42:1-5) Tell God how deeply you yearn for His presence.

The dejected psalmist used a vivid image to express his intense need for God's touch: Like a parched *hart* or deer searching desperately for water in the wilderness, his soul craved the energizing strength, hope, and joy found only in the LORD. Emotionally and spiritually dehydrated, he cried out to God from the bottom of his heart.

a. Because you feel alienated from God, cut off from His presence (v.2).

The psalmist desperately longed for the LORD to rejuvenate his spirit. But he was far from Jerusalem and the temple where God's presence dwelt. Because of this, he felt unable to connect with God.

Under the old covenant, God's presence dwelled in one specific place: the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle (and, later, the temple). The psalmist felt alienated from God because he was away from this sacred place. Therefore, he asked God how much longer it would be before he would be able to return to Jerusalem to stand before Him.

¹ The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that was completed approximately 200 years before Christ came.

² Charles Spurgeon. *Treasury of David*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1990). WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

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Under the new covenant, God does not abide in a specific place but in His people. Through His Holy Spirit, the Lord lives within every true believer (Ro.8:9; 2 Co.6:16). Although God's presence is always within us, we may at times feel disconnected from God just as the psalmist did. Any number of factors can cause us to feel far from God, including...

- sin in our lives
- difficult circumstances
- neglecting Bible reading or prayer
- failing to worship
- closely associating with ungodly people
- uncontrolled emotions
- doubting God or worrying
- sickness or extreme pain
- unanswered prayer
- failing to follow God's will
- lack of understanding
- lack of faith
- things not turning out as expected
- being too busy
- being overwhelmed by demands
- fear
- loneliness
- self-pity

b. Because your heart is broken by unbelievers taunting and ridiculing you (v.3).

The psalmist was under enemy oppression (43:2). One way these hostile unbelievers tormented him was by ridiculing his faith in God. As he continually cried out to the LORD, his circumstances remained unchanged. It seemed as though God did not even exist. This provoked the psalmist's foes to taunt him mercilessly. Hence, their jeering multiplied his pain, causing his tears to flow even more.

Where is your God? is a question that the idolatrous Gentile nations commonly asked the Jews (Ps.79:10; 115:2; Joel 2:17; Mi.7:10).³ When God's chosen people faced trouble, unbelievers mocked their faith in God, just as they do today. We must remember that *the presence of problems in our lives does not indicate the absence of God*. Believers will always face trials and tribulations, but this does not mean that God has forsaken us or that He does not exist. We serve a God who promises to be with us at all times, especially in the midst of trouble. He will strengthen us to endure whatever trials confront us, and He will carry us safely through them.

"Let your conversation [conduct] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (He.13:5-6).

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Is.41:10).

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Is.43:2).

c. Because you can no longer go to the house of God (v.4).

The psalmist's spiritual suffering was compounded because he could do nothing to change his distressing situation. He could not return to Jerusalem to worship with God's people. Memories of better days—past celebrations in God's house—only intensified his craving for the LORD's presence. There had been a time when he was the most excited of worshippers, leading the joyous procession to God's house. Now, lonely and depressed, he yearned to be among the congregation again as they marched to the temple on the holy days, the days of celebrating the feasts ordained by God under the law. How he ached to be with the people of God, dancing and singing in praise and worship to Him!

d. Because your soul is downcast, disturbed, deeply troubled (v.5^a).

For the first of three times in these psalms, the author addressed himself. He described the troubled state of his *soul* (42:11; 43:5), the seat of his emotions, as both cast down and disquieted. *Cast down* (shachach) literally means bowed down or sunk low. *Disquieted* (hamah) means in an uproar or in turmoil. Simply put, the psalmist was trapped in the mire of depression. Feelings of despair and hopelessness raged within him, keeping him in spiritual and emotional turmoil.

e. Because your hope is still in God: He is your God and your Savior (v.5^b).

Notice how the psalmist sought to take control of his emotions rather than allow his emotions to control him. In an attempt to lift himself out of the depths of depression, he encouraged himself in the LORD (see 1 S.30:6). He exhorted

³ Warren W. Wiersbe. *The Bible Exposition Commentary – Wisdom and Poetry*. Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 2004. WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

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his soul to hope in God. In his darkest hour, the psalmist spoke to himself in faith rather than doubt, reminding us of Paul's testimony in the midst of his fierce trials:

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you" (2 Co.4:8-14).

Just as Paul believed that God would deliver him through his trials and spoke accordingly, the psalmist spoke in faith. He believed that God would help him. He praised God from the pit of despair. When he could not go to the place where God's presence dwelled, he believed that God would come to him. He would be helped by God's *courtenance* (panim) or face, which refers to God's presence.

The word *hope* in Scripture means something much stronger than what it often means today. When we talk about hope, we are usually speaking of a positive attitude toward the future, or a wish or desire, as in, "I hope what I want will happen...." But hope in Scripture is a firm assurance that God will do what He has promised, according to His perfect timing. Hope is the reality of what is yet to come. It rejoices in promises God has not yet fulfilled. This unshakable confidence strengthens us to wait and endure until the Lord performs what He has promised.

Verse 5 is a refrain that declares the great lesson of this song: in times of severe trial, when we find ourselves getting disheartened or discouraged, we need to proclaim our faith in God. We need to encourage ourselves in His faithfulness and find strength in His promises. Lifting up our praises to Him can drown out our cries of despair from within.

Thought 1. When is the last time you yearned for God, when you fervently desired His presence? Too often our prayers are consumed with what we need from God rather than for God's presence. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with asking God for what we need. In fact, Jesus taught us to do so (Mt.6:11). But we must realize that *the greatest need of our lives is for God Himself, His holy presence*. We were created for a relationship with Him. Through Him, we have lasting satisfaction and fulfillment. We have joy, peace, security, and strength.

Imagine how you would feel if your children only talked to you when they wanted something from you! Imagine how you would feel if they never climbed into your lap, or begged you to play with them, or put their arms around your neck and kissed you! Surely the heart of God must break when we, His dear children, desire only what He can give us. Surely He grieves when we do not yearn for *Him* and for His assuring presence!

The great reward for seeking God is finding Him (Je.29:13). But we must seek Him with all of our hearts, as this psalmist did. When we genuinely and wholeheartedly yearn for God, we will find Him. He will hear and respond to us and, in Him, we will find everything that we need.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Mt.5:6).

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (Jn.7:37).

"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Ps.63:1).

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Je.29:13).

Thought 2. Notice how the psalmist longed to worship God with the congregation (v.4). He was truly grieved because he could not be in God's house with God's people. Sadly, many professing believers today do not share his passion for assembling with God's people for worship. To many, church attendance is a dreaded duty rather than an anticipated delight. Tragically, the zeal for corporate worship that David and the early church experienced is missing in many hearts today (Ac.2:46-47, Ps.122:1). Yet God's command regarding assembling with His people remains unchanged:

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (He.10:25).

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Note the clear exhortation of this verse: as we draw nearer to Christ's return and the day of God's judgment, we should assemble with God's people *more*, not less. We need the encouragement of God's people and the preaching of His Word to help us remain faithful to Him during the perilous times in which we live (2 Ti.3:1). We have to resolve to be faithful to God's house and make gathering with God's people a foremost priority in our lives.

"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Ac.2:46-47).

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (He.10:24-25).

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD" (Ps.122:1).

2 (42:6-11) **Remember God no matter how desperate your situation.**

One of the greatest lessons of *Psalms* is that we, as believers, have the liberty to empty our souls to God. That is, we can express our deepest, innermost feelings and thoughts to Him. After the psalmist encouraged himself with words of hope, he took his burden to the LORD in prayer. When it seemed that God had forgotten him, he remembered God and looked up to Him from the depths of his despair. Remembering God's unfailing love sustained him in his darkest hours.

a. Remember Him even if you are a foreigner exiled to a distant land (v.6).

The psalmist's despair was likely due, in part, to the fact that he was far from home. The three geographic landmarks he mentioned identify his location as being close to...

- the Jordan River
- Mount Hermon
- Mount Mizar

Reaching over 9,000 feet high, Mount Hermon was the tallest peak in a range of mountains where the Jordan River has its source. Its location is at the northeast boundary of Israel. *Mizar* means *little hill* and was apparently a smaller peak in this same mountain range.

The psalmist was approximately 150 miles from Jerusalem, a short distance by today's travel standards. But in Biblical times, it was a journey of five to seven days. It is no wonder that the depressed psalmist felt he was a world away from his home, Jerusalem, and the temple where God's presence resided. Yet from his remote location he resolved to remember the LORD. When he could not go to God, he was determined to bring God near to him by focusing his thoughts on the LORD and His unfailing love.

Many people find themselves far from home due to necessity or circumstances beyond their control. College students, military personnel, and missionaries are examples of some who spend long periods of time away from home. Employment requires others to leave family and friends behind. And, sadly, in our fallen world, refugees and persecuted peoples are often forced from their homelands.

When we are separated from the people and places we love, we are prone to feel separated from God, as if He too were far from us. Loneliness and a longing for home are powerful emotions that can easily distract us from our purpose or mission. When compounded by other trials or troubling circumstances, we can quickly find ourselves drowning in despair. During these times, we need to focus on God's faithfulness and enter into His comforting presence through earnest prayer.

b. Remember Him even when you feel overwhelmed by problems and sense the judgment of God (v.7).

The psalmist felt overwhelmed by the problems crashing in all around him. As he watched water cascade over the boulders of Hermon and into the Jordan, he felt that the waterspouts or waterfalls were violently pouring down on him, as if he were struggling to survive in the turbulent flow.

The phrase "deep calls to deep" pictures one wave of the deep calling out to another wave of the deep to coordinate a conspiracy in their efforts to drown the psalmist, figuratively speaking....Like a stranded sailor clinging to a piece of driftwood in a raging storm, he was tossed back and forth, taking in water, sinking fast with no hope of rescue.⁴

⁴ Steven Lawson and Max Anders. *Holman Old Testament Commentary—Psalms*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2004), WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

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At times, God's judgment is portrayed as a storm or as crashing waters in Scripture. Some commentators think that the psalmist viewed his extreme trials as God's judgment being poured out upon him. Because we do not know the identity of the psalmist, we cannot know the specific circumstances that prompted this psalm. It is possible that some sinful action brought God's chastening upon him like a flood. But it is also possible that he was being unjustly persecuted, as when Saul jealously pursued David.

c. Remember the LORD's unfailing love: Pray to and praise the God who gives you life (v.8).

Struggling to survive in a raging sea of doubt and despair, the psalmist grabbed hold of this wonderful truth: he was surrounded by God's love. Note that this is the only time in these psalms the author refers to God as *the LORD* (Yahweh, Jehovah), God's covenant name. *Lovingkindness* (chesed) is God's covenant love for His people, demonstrating His mercy, His steadfast love. During the psalmist's difficult days, the LORD sent His unfailing love sweeping over his dear follower, keeping him afloat in the rushing current of trials. In the dark nights, the LORD comforted him with His song, like a mother singing a calming lullaby to her frightened child. It was God who sustained his life and strengthened him to endure the severe trials.

d. Remember Him even when you feel He is distant and has forgotten all about you (v.9^a).

The psalmist remembered God's unfailing love when his trouble plunged his soul into doubt. God was his Rock, his refuge, the one to whom he tightly clung in his sea of despair. He cried out to God just as we do, asking why God was allowing him to be harassed by his enemies. He felt as if God had deserted him again, just as we often feel when we are in despair. But this was not true. God loved him, just as He loves us. In fact, Scripture says that God cannot forget us, for we are etched upon the palm of His hand (Is.49:14-16).

e. Remember Him when enemies (unbelievers) oppress you (vv.9^b-10).

Again, the author referred to the stabbing taunts of his enemies who mocked his faith in God. Their ridicule was as sharp as a double-edged sword, piercing all the way through him to his *bones* like a mortal wound. Their relentless scoffing may have tempted him to ask the same question they asked: "Where is your God?"

f. Remember Him even when you are downcast and disturbed within (v.11).

As the author again dwelled on his trouble, despair took control of his spirit. Once more, he confronted his raging emotions and admonished himself to put his hope in God. The antidote for his depression would be to *praise* (yadah) God, to lift his hands in worship to Him, to confess what is right about God in praise and thanksgiving.⁵ As he offered the sacrifice of praise, God would fill him with inner peace and joy and replace his troubled expression with a smile.

Thought 1. The psalmist refused to give in to his depression, choosing instead to battle it by remembering God. Note three life-changing applications here that can help us when we are bound by despair:

First, the psalmist focused on the truth of God's Word rather than on the lies that tormented his soul. Overwhelmed by his troubles, the psalmist felt that God had forgotten him. *But this was not true!* The truth was, he was surrounded by God's unfailing love even in the midst of his problems.

One of the most effective ways Satan attacks us is through our minds—through our flawed and often foolish thinking. So many of the doubts that plague us are simply not true. They are the imaginations of our minds, thoughts that are contrary to what we know about God. Scripture teaches that we must take these thoughts captive and subject them to the obedience of Christ (2 Co.10:5). We are commanded to focus our minds on the things that are true, pure, and of good report (Ph.4:8).

Second, the psalmist focused on God's unfailing love even in the midst of his trouble. He recognized God's goodness in his life and clung to God's mercy in his sea of discouragement. No matter how bad things may get in our lives, God loves us and He is good to us. Nothing can separate us from His love (Ro.8:35-39).

Third, the psalmist chose to praise the LORD from his pit of depression. Praising God lifted him out of the depths of despair, putting a smile on his face and giving him a song in his heart. Praise is truly powerful. As our praise blesses the LORD, it also changes us.

"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Co.10:5).

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Ph.4:8).

"The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Je.31:3).

⁵ Spiros Zodhiates. *AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992. WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

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3 (43:1-2) Pray for God to defend and deliver you.

After crying out to God about his troubled soul, the psalmist prayed about the critical situation in which he found himself. With boldness and staunch conviction, he asked God to judge or vindicate him, to determine that he was innocent of his enemies' accusations. The psalmist then wanted God to plead his cause and to defend him before the people. God and God alone could deliver him from such oppression!

a. Because you live in an ungodly nation—among deceitful and wicked people (v.1).

By describing his oppressors as ungodly, the psalmist was likely saying that they did not know the LORD. Perhaps they were ungodly neighbors, fellow workers, or the people of a heathen nation. Whatever the case, because they were not living by God's holy law, they were deceitful in their attacks upon him and unjust in their judgments.

b. Because God is your strength, your refuge, your haven (v.2^a).

The troubled author trusted in God as his *strength* (ma'owz)—his stronghold, fortress, or place of refuge. Because he had lived faithfully under the shelter of God's protection, he could not understand how these horrible events had happened to him. Therefore, he continued to ask God why he was in this situation (42:9).

c. Because you feel rejected by God—forsaken to suffer oppression (v.2^b).

The psalmist felt that God had cast him off, that He had forsaken or rejected him. No doubt, the grief his oppressors caused him was agonizing, but even more unbearable was the feeling that he was separated from God. He needed God, and he yearned for fellowship with Him (42:1-2).

Thought 1. At various times in our lives, we find ourselves trapped in situations over which we have no control. Like the psalmist, we may be victims of slander or false judgment by people who want to hurt us. Or, we may be facing grave illness, marital or family problems, financial crises, or the death of a loved one. At some point in time, we will all know the feeling of being powerless to change an extremely grievous situation.

When we reach the end of ourselves and our abilities, we need to remember that God can do what we cannot do. His strength is revealed through our weakness and inability. Thankfully, He invites us to come boldly to His holy throne, seeking grace and mercy to help us in our time of need (He.4:16).

When under the pressure of crushing circumstances, we are prone to question God's love and care for us. It is easy to feel that He has rejected or forsaken us. In such times, we must rest in His promises to never leave or forsake us. He promises to stand by us in the fiery trials of life. We may not always understand *why* God permits us to face grievous situations, but we can be sure that He does not allow us to go through them alone. Consider Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace (see outline and notes—Da.3:1-30). Just as He was with these faithful servants in their time of dire need, He will surely be with us.

“Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us” (2 Co.1:10).

“Let your conversation [conduct] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (He.13:5-6).

“And he said, The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence” (2 S.22:2-3).

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Is.43:2).

“And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Is.46:4).

4 (43:3-4) Ask God to restore you.

The psalmist again asked God to deliver him from his pit of despair. He needed God to restore him to a place of joy and peace. For him, this meant a return to the place where God's presence dwelled. He entreated God to bring him back home to Jerusalem, back to the temple where he would once again worship in the LORD's presence. The psalmist reasoned that this restoration could only come after God had vindicated or defended him before his enemies.

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a. To give you His light and truth to guide you (v.3^a).

The psalmist realized that his own conduct—his words and actions—played a part in his restoration. Therefore, he asked God to lead or guide him by His light and His truth. Just as God had led the Israelites through the wilderness and into the promised land, the psalmist prayed that God would guide him each step of the way back to Jerusalem. He was not asking for geographical direction but for *personal* direction, what he should do and how he should conduct himself.

At times in the psalms, *light* refers to God's presence (4:6; 44:3; 89:15). It also speaks of God's comfort and guidance during the dark times in our lives (78:14; 112:4). On another occasion, it refers to God's Word (119:105).

Truth (emeth) is one of God's attributes, one of His unique, holy characteristics as God. It speaks of God's faithfulness to His holy character, His laws, and His Word. As it is here, it is frequently connected to God's mercy and *lovingkindness* (chesed, His steadfast, covenant love) in the *Psalms* (25:10; 40:10-11; 86:15; 138:2). It is also mentioned along with God's righteousness (45:4; 85:11; 96:13), His justice (89:14; 111:7), and His peace (85:10; 2 K.20:19; Is.39:8).⁶ God's truth is revealed and preserved in His Holy Word (Ps.119:43, 142, 160; Da.10:21).

To summarize, the psalmist called upon God to demonstrate His faithfulness and love by guiding him back to Jerusalem. Through the light and truth of His Word, God would direct what he should say and do.

b. To lead you into His presence—the place where He lives (v.3^b).

The psalmist prayed that God's light and truth would bring him back to the LORD's *holy hill*, which is Mount Zion or Jerusalem. Mount Zion is called a holy hill because it was the location of the LORD's tabernacle, the place on earth where God dwelled among His people.

c. To make way for you to worship and praise Him—God, who is the source of your joy (v.4).

From the very beginning of this song, the exiled psalmist emphasized his heart's burning desire to experience God's presence again. Note his "progression of increasing closeness [to God]..."

- the *holy hill*
- the tabernacle or dwelling place
- the *altar of God*
- *God Himself*⁷

More than deliverance from his enemies and returning to his home, the psalmist yearned to be in God's holy presence once again. He exuberantly confessed that God was his exceeding joy, his greatest joy, more than anyone or anything else. He vowed that the first thing he would do upon entering Jerusalem would be to go to the altar of God and offer sacrifices of thanksgiving to the LORD. Once there, he would offer a song of praise with his harp in the presence of God, my God.⁸

Thought 1. There is no greater joy in life than basking in the presence of God, than spending time in fellowship with Him. Grasp the psalmist's thirst for a *personal* encounter with God as he addresses the LORD as *God, my God*. God was more to him than just *the* God of heaven and earth; the God of heaven and earth was *his* God. He knew God *personally* through a relationship with Him. The circumstances of his life had kept him from the special place where God's presence on earth was revealed, and he longed to be there.

Today, God's presence dwells within us as believers through His Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is the light who guides us into God's truth (Jn.16:13). Therefore, wherever we are, God is with us. Regardless how severe a circumstance or situation may be, it cannot keep us from living in God's presence. When we are feeling depressed, we need to turn to the Lord right away and ask Him to draw us into His presence. We can enter God's presence through prayer. In fact, we can come directly before His throne (He.4:16). When we are able to take our eyes off our own circumstances and place them on the Lord, basking in His presence, He will lift us from depression and restore joy to our souls. Thus, we can know the joy of the Lord in our hearts even in the most difficult circumstances.

It is critical to understand, however, that sin in our lives hinders our fellowship with God and keeps us from enjoying His presence. We have to resist temptation in order to live in unbroken fellowship with God. But when we do sin—and we all do—we should immediately seek to be restored to fellowship with God. Once we confess our sins to the Lord and turn from them, God promises to cleanse us and to restore our fellowship with Him (1 Jn.1:9).

There is no question that sin is pleasurable for a short season (He.11:25). But what a price we pay for those fleeting moments of sin! We forfeit the privilege of living in fellowship with God. God's presence should be the most important thing in our lives, far more important than the temporary pleasures of sin. No matter what our state of

⁶ Spiros Zodhiates. *AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary*. WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, J. Alec Motyer, Donald A. Carson and R. T. France. *New Bible Commentary*. IVP Academic, 1994. WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

⁸ Scholars who believe that David wrote both Psalms 42 and 43 point to the mention of the harp as an evidence of his authorship.

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mind, we ought to pray for the joy of the Lord always. He should be our greatest joy, far exceeding the joy offered by this world's pleasures, possessions, and people!

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will show you things to come” (Jn.16:13).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn.1:9).

“Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence *is* fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore” (Ps.16:11).

“Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free spirit” (Ps.51:11-12).

5 (43:5) **Encourage yourself in the LORD: Put your hope in God and praise Him, for He is your Savior and God.**

This song closes with the now familiar refrain of self-encouragement. Until God delivered him from his oppressors and returned him to Jerusalem, the psalmist determined to live above depression and despair. As he evaluated the reasons why he was so downcast and disturbed, he realized that his hope in God was greater than the circumstances that depressed him. God was *his* Savior and *his* God. Triumphant, he resolved to praise Him regardless of his circumstances.

Thought 1. This song teaches us what to do when we are deeply discouraged or suffering from depression: we have to encourage ourselves in the LORD and focus on the great hope we have in Him. Without the Lord, life on this sin-cursed earth is difficult at best. It is filled with natural disasters, devastating tragedies, and endless problems beyond our control. Yet God has given us hope to sustain us in these times. This hope is the anchor of our souls (see outline and notes—He.6:16-20 for more discussion). God has promised to give us sufficient grace to carry us through every trial, and He has promised that He will work out every circumstance for our good (2 Co.12:9; Ro.8:28). Our role is to trust Him and to press on with the full assurance of His promises. He assures us that His promises will come to pass, and it is impossible for God to lie (He.6:11-18). Therefore, through faith and perseverance, even when everything seems to be against us, we should praise God, for He is our Savior and our God. Our hope is in Him and Him alone.

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Ro.15:4).

“And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (He.6:11-12).

“And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God” (1 S.30:6).

“Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD” (Ps.31:24).