

Title: Looking to God in depression**Passage: Psalm 42****Introduction:**

Well, it is a blessing to be able to bring God's word in the month of November. We will be Looking to God in the Psalms. Everyone loves the Psalms. The Psalms are full of emotions and real experiences which really resonates with our souls. We might have a favourite Psalm or 2 which really expresses how we might be feeling but we can't put in our own words. Everyone loves the Psalms, and I think it would be great to look to God as we explore a few Psalms this month.

Context:

We are looking at Psalm 42 today. A bit of context before we look at the Psalm more closely. The heading for this Psalm gives us helpful information for the context. The sons of Korah were a group of priests who were in charge with the ministry of singing. 2 Chronicles 20:19 describes them saying, *"the Korahites, stood up to praise the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice. "*

The heading implies that this psalm was probably used in public worship and was sung. The meaning of Maskil is unclear but it comes from the Hebrew verb to make someone wise or to instruct. And so, this is about a song that instructs or to make one wise. What is interesting about this Psalm is that it is a psalm which deals with Spiritual Depression. It is a song which is intended to shape our minds and hearts to think and feel wisely. The immediate situation is that the Psalmist is literally unable to come to corporate worship. And he describes his feelings.

Notice with me in verse 3, *"My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"* and in verse 10 again, *"As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"*. Verse 3 & 10 show us that there are external circumstances which are not in his favour. There is external oppression with voices mocking him. They are like deadly wounds in his bones.

And then there is the internal condition of the man. Verse 5 says, *"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?... My soul is cast down within me"* and in verse 11 again *"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me"*. You can feel his struggles. In verse 3 he describes his tears as being his food day and night. In verse 7 he describes the roaring waterfall which is powerful and dangerous. These waters have waves that sweep over the psalmist. This is the language of someone is drowning... someone who is struggling. Who is suffering. Who has a form of depression. In verse 9 he feels like God has abandoned him. *"I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?""*

Today maybe you are feeling depressed. Today maybe you are struggling with what is happening because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Maybe you are just sick of it all. Maybe you have fears for the future. Maybe you are heartbroken or hurt because of someone. Maybe you have been struck by sickness or old age and you feel like there is no hope. Maybe you have lost a loved one. Maybe you feel like life is hard. Maybe you are angry, or you want to give up. Maybe God feels far away.

Although the psalmist is filled with external circumstances which are oppressing him and his internal emotional condition is depressed and full of turmoil, the psalmist is full of hope and he is

fighting for hope. In verse 5 and 11 he fights for hope, *“Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”* The psalmist is fighting for hope and he gives us an example of what it looks like to navigate through depression. How to navigate through suffering. How to look to God in depression.

We are looking only at Psalm 42 today. You might be wondering why I read Psalm 42 and 43 together. It is because in many Hebrew manuscripts Psalm 42 and 43 are regarded as one Psalm and maybe when you heard it read, you could hear how it fits together. You will notice that they share similar words. In Psalm 42, the refrain in v 5 and 11, comes up at the end of Psalm 43. *“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.”*

You see the Psalmist does not end this Psalm with the ending he desires. Even at the end of Psalm 42 and 43 he is still fighting for hope and freedom from his suffering. So, to lower some of your expectations, this is not a comprehensive solution to Spiritual Depression but wisdom to help you navigate through depression or maybe to help someone else navigate through suffering.

There are at least 4 things that Psalmist does in Psalm 42, and we will look at those one at time.

1. He thirsts for God (v1-2)

The first thing I want you to notice in this psalm is that the psalmist thirsts for God. He begins with his desire for God. Look at verse 1 and 2, *“¹ As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”*. In the midst of his suffering and depression, the Psalmist has a heart for God. He uses the image of a deer panting for streams of water. And in the same way, the psalmist thirsts for God. He wants to be sustained by God. Right now, his diet is made up of his tears day and night. But he wants to experience God’s presence in his life because he knows ultimately only God can satisfy his deepest longings. He knows that God is the ultimate source of his joy, peace and satisfaction. Because he is the living God (verse 2). I want you to notice that he is not thirsting for an escape route from his external circumstances, he is not thirsting for an escape route from his internal pains. But he is ultimately looking to the source of life. It is not wrong to want to be free from pain and suffering. But the reality is, in a broken world full of sin, there will always be the damages and affects of sin. There is only true hope in God. Having a relationship with God and having fellowship with him. The great joy that there is from God can overwhelm and conquer the greatest pains in life. Throughout the Psalm, he will keep talking about the salvation that there is in God. The psalmist helps puts our pain, suffering and circumstances into perspective. He looks at life through the lens of the living God. Because God exists, and he is living and active, there is hope and joy in him. The Psalmist thirsts for God.

2. He remembers God given experiences (v4)

The second thing he does is that he remembers God given experiences. In verse 2 he ends by saying, *“when shall I come and appear before God?”*. It is the technical expression which

describes appearing before God at the sanctuary. He misses worship. And in verse 4 it further elaborates that he is thinking particularly about times of worship. He remembers past corporate worship experiences. Look at verse 4,

4 These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival.

The Psalmist cries out in verse 3, in his grief his tears flood down his face and seem to become like food. And then he remembers... and then he remembers in verse 4 and compares it with the good old days. He remembers the time where he would go down to the house of God and worship with God's people. The memory and experience of being in the presence of God and worshipping him helps him fight his suffering and depression. *"These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:..."*

Now the problem with verse 4 is that in our 21st century church, corporate worship has become more about entertainment and what the church can do for us rather than what church is supposed to be all about. You may have seen some churches which operate like it is a festival every Sunday. I have seen some churches where the minister comes in on a zipline and he is hanging a few metres high while he is preaching. Some have a consumeristic approach when it comes to church and what it means to be a Christian. There are some who have a low view of church and worship.

Gathering as God's people is for the praise of his glorious grace. It is ultimately looking to God and what Christ has done for us on the cross. It is about what God has done and our response to him. Our experience when we gather as God's people should be great and full of joy not because our favourite song was played. It should be great and full of joy not because we can see our friends. But it is great and full of joy because it is a reminder and present experience of Christ's redeeming work. Church exists because Christ has saved sinners and purchased for them new life. And God's children gather to the praise of his glorious grace. God's children gather as an expression of a spiritual reality. We gather to hear from the living God and respond to Him. In corporate worship we encounter the living God and hear his words preached.

The psalmist thinks back to the times of corporate worship and it reminds him of how real God is. The psalmist's second point won't make sense if you have a low view of corporate worship. I was given advice by an experienced and wise minister once, he said that there are many who will walk into your church only hoping to walk out as soon as possible. Friends, gathering as God's people week in and out should be the highlight of your week. You should be excited to gather on a Sunday every week, not just once a month, or on Easter or Christmas. God has ordained corporate worship as a means to build up the church. I know we are facing a difficult season in the life of the church with restrictions. And it will be a difficult few months or even years as things re-open... And we might not be able to gather like we used to. If you are waiting to regather, my prayer is that you would grow in your longing for God. That is a good thing. Thirst for God more. And if you have had the opportunity to regather, oh may you not take this time for granted.

Last week was reformation Sunday. I had the privilege to go to Hong Kong in 2017 for a Reformation Conference celebrating 500 years of the reformation. There were over 4000 Chinese leaders and mission workers from around the world. 77% of them came from unregistered churches in mainland china. Many of them would and will be persecuted for their faith. It was a once and a lifetime opportunity for so many ministers and missionaries who have given up their life for God's glory. I remember crying with joy when I heard the whole room of faithful brothers and sisters in Christ praising God. I recorded them singing A mighty Fortress is our God. There in that room, was evidence of God's spirit working in a persecuted nation. I can assure you in the past few years, many of them would have been oppressed externally and struggled internally. But they will remember the opportunity they had to worship God in Hong Kong. But, actually, they don't even need to remember a time like that. Because they can remember every single week where they have the opportunity to worship. Psalmist remembers those God given experiences he had, and it helps him fight for hope.

3. He preaches truth to himself (v5, 8, 11)

The third thing the Psalmist does is that he preaches truth to himself. If you look at verse 5, 11 and in psalm 43 at the end. He says to himself, *"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me."* He is talking to himself and then he says, *Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God,*

And in verse 8, "By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. He affirms God's goodness and grace to himself. He preaches God's truth to himself. He is not running away from his feelings. He is being real. He is struggling, His soul is cast down. He has real feelings which hurt. And he recognises that, but he combats that and fights for hope and joy by preaching truth to himself. Gospel truth. He preaches to himself that there is hope in God and he needs to hope in Him. He preaches to himself and says that God is his salvation and his God. He preaches to himself day that the Lord is steadfast in love. He affirms God's goodness and grace and preaches it to himself.

One of the things about depression and suffering is that we often hear the voices of our emotions and give in to the worse case scenarios. We allow the negativities of the world dictate what we believe and hear on a day to day basis. We can feel like there is no hope, no joy. If you have suffered with some form of depression you might describe that time of your life like one of those black and white movies. No colour in your life. The psalmist does not allow his feelings to control his life. He preaches the truths of God to himself. He says, look self, hope in God. Now it is different to waking up in the morning and looking at yourself and saying you are beautiful. That is self-centredness. Rather it is preaching to yourself saying God is good and his promises are sure. He is faithful when I am unfaithful. As post new-testament people we can preach to ourselves what Christ did on the cross for us. I am a child of God and I have hope for eternity. Regardless of my situation, even though it hurts, God is good, and he is faithful, and he will sustain me till I meet him in glory. And you can add all sorts of gospel truths. That is why theology so important. That is why it is so important to know more about Jesus. The psalmist preaches truth to himself to fight for

hope and you need to preach God's truth to yourself in times of despair and suffering. There is a Colin Buchan song where he sings, truth is still true, even if you don't believe it. And there is wisdom in that. Gospel truths don't change even if you are suffering. We read in **Romans 8:31-39** great truths of the gospel,

You will notice also that he preaches truth to himself by singing and praying to God (v8)

Look at verse 8, *and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life*. The psalmist has a life of prayer and praise. It doesn't necessarily mean he is praying and singing joyful and happy songs. More likely he is praying and singing songs pleading God to intervene and to sustain him. Do you have a life of prayer and praise? Are you praying regularly and singing to him? The psalmist teaches us to pray and sing with faith. I am sure some of you have your favourite song to sing when you are down and that is a good thing. Continue to sing and pray to God, the God of your life.

4. He looks to God (v1-2, 5, 8, 11)

And finally he looks to God. Throughout this Psalm. The Psalmist looks to God. He begins by looking to God. He ends with looking to God, and he looks to God and asks him why. It is a legitimate question to ask God why? Why am I suffering? It doesn't mean you will get an answer. But because he knows there is hope in God, he fights for hope in his depression by looking to God. At every single moment of his experience he remembers and looks to God. That is why he preaches hope in God. That's why he cries out to God. As Christians we look to God because we know that there is hope in all the sufferings and pains of this world. We look to God because he has given us his one and only Son Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins. Those who repent and believe in Jesus have hope in this life. We have hope of a sure eternal reality where *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."* (Revelation 21:4) And God will never be far away because *"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God"* (Revelation 21:3). So, as you look to God, you need to look at the gospel and hear the story of his death and resurrection every day in your battle with depression and suffering.

Conclusion:

The Psalmist thirsts for God, he remembers God given experiences, he preaches truth to himself, he sings and prays to God, and he looks to God. Every church is navigating through the difficulties of Covid-19. Everyone is or will face some of form of suffering. We need to look to God. I pray that this Psalm would be helpful in your walk of faith. May the Lord increase your thirst for him and may you find great joy in the gospel.