

# Joy for the Downcast Soul

Favorite Psalms Part 30  
Psalm 42-43 pt.1 11-29-2015

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Summary: Problems: what was happening to him (oppression, injustice, and taunting) and what was happening in him (dryness, thirst, disturbance, downcast soul, mourning, overwhelmed). Solutions: PEP (Pray for help, Enjoy God, Preach to yourself). It is ok to pray for relief. But relief alone isn't enough. You need joy, which comes when all three tributaries (past, present, and future enjoyment of God) are flowing.

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**Psalm 42** For the director of music. A maskil of the Sons of Korah. **1** As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. **2** My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? **3** My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” **4** These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng. **5** Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and **6** 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 Mizar. **7** Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. **8** By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life. **9** I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?” **10** My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?” **11** Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

**Psalm 43** **1** Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. **2** You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? **3** Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. **4** Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. **5** Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

## Introduction

This psalm is the diary of a man who is on a desperate quest. He is on the hunt ... for God. You don't have to be an expert to pick up on that – it is the first thing he says and the last thing.

**42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?**

Anyone here have any trouble picking up on what he is saying there? Right out of the gate: “God! Where are You? I need to meet with You, now!”

Then look at the end of Psalm 43.

**43:3 Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. 4 Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, the joy of my rejoicing.**

He says that, then repeats the refrain and the psalm is over. He begins, “I’m dying to meet with God. When can I meet with Him? Then he ends, “Guide me to Your dwelling place God, then I’ll come to You.”

And as we go through this psalm you’ll see that his words are words of desperation. This is not just some religious phrasing that he picked up in Sunday school. I have always loved that song based on this text – *As the Deer*. It is such a beautiful song, but maybe a little too beautiful to fit the mood of this psalm. This prayer is loaded with angst and drama and desperation. You get the sense that if this guy doesn’t find what he’s aching for soon, he is not going to make it. He is going to fall apart. That is the feeling I get from reading his prayer.

A bunch of people in this room, already this morning, asked a bunch of other people in this room this question: “How are you doing?” And my guess is that they all said something like, “I’m fine, thanks.” Raise your hand if you believe that every single person in this church is doing just fine - not one person is discouraged. I am not faulting those people for answering that way. What else can you do when you have 10 seconds to talk to somebody? But if we were in a different setting where there were plenty of time to sit down and really listen, I wonder how many people in this room right now would say the same thing that the guy who wrote the psalm said.

### Psalm 42:6 ... My soul is downcast within me

The writer of this psalm is a good man, who is in a bad place. He starts the psalm by saying he’s dry and unsatisfied. Three times he says his soul is **disturbed** within him, and four times he says it’s **downcast**. Twice he says he goes around **mourning**. I believe that these two psalms are in the Bible to teach us how to handle times of discouragement, depression, sorrow, and the downcast soul.

Most scholars believe Psalms 42 and 43 were originally one psalm. I don’t know for sure if they were, but I do know that they go together in some obvious ways. There is a refrain that happens twice in Psalm 42, and again in Psalm 43 – word for word the same. The theme is the same, and the question about being oppressed is word for word the same. And there is only one heading for both psalms, which is unusual in this section of the book. So we are going to study them together.

From what I can tell there is no clear outline. His thoughts jump back and forth from hope to sorrow, his eye is on God, then his eye is on his trouble, talking to God, then talking about God, then talking to his soul, back to prayer – he is just all over the map. And that’s not really any surprise. People who are in anguished desperation usually don’t speak in outline form. But as I have been studying this, it does seem to me that we could organize all his thoughts under two main headings:

- 1) His problems
- 2) The solutions

From what I can tell there are two main problems, and three solutions. And these three solutions are a treasure for us because they will work for anyone, any time, in any place that is discouraged or depressed. So let’s start by looking at his problems.

## The Problems

His first problem is what is happening *to* him, and his other problem is what is happening *in* him.

### What Is Happening to Him

What is happening to him is that he is being mistreated. He is experiencing oppression, injustice, and he's being mocked.

### Oppression

He mentions the oppression twice.

**42:9 ... Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?**

Then again in 43:2.

**43:2 ... Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?**

To be **oppressed** means to be mistreated by someone more powerful than you. These people are in positions of power, and they were using that power to take advantage of him and the pain that he was going through as a result was intense.

**42:3 My tears have been my food day and night**

When mealtime comes, instead of eating, he cries. Day and night, he just can't stop crying.

**42:10 My bones suffer mortal agony**

Literally it says they **shatter my bones**. Suffering has to get pretty intense before you could describe it that way. If you have a rough day at school or work you might come home and say it was a pretty frustrating day. But how bad would things have to get before you would describe it this way: "I feel like all my bones are shattered inside me"? He is in unbearable anguish.

### Injustice

We don't know all that was going on, but evidently it involved some false accusations against him, because he asks for vindication.

**43:1 Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men.**

One of the most painful hardships a human being can endure is injustice. If circumstances just don't bounce your way, that's one thing. But when someone more powerful than you is treating you unfairly – that is really hard to take, especially when you have no recourse.

### Taunting

That's hard, but the oppression and injustice weren't even the worst part. The worst part was the taunting. Both the tears and the shattered bone comment are connected to the taunting.

**42:3 My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"**

**42:10 My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"**

When his enemies got the upper hand, they taunted him with regard to the most important thing in his life – his relationship with God. Where is your God?

Sometimes we hear that from atheists.

“Where was God on 9/11?”

“Look at all the evil in the world, and all the pain and suffering – where is your God?”

Atheists like to capitalize on mysteries, as if my inability to explain something somehow disproves the existence of that which I can't explain.<sup>1</sup> So atheists might use this taunt, but actually, I doubt the people in this context were atheists. I don't think they are doubting the *existence* of God; I think their point is that God has abandoned the psalmist. They are saying, “This God that's so important to you – He has turned against you. He has rejected you.” That's a painful thing to hear – especially when you are under God's discipline. We all have things in our lives that we know are displeasing to God, we all have repentance that we know falls short of what it should be, so when the pain and suffering and hardship really intensify, and stack one on top of another with a relentless pounding, and they just aren't going away like normal trials, and the devil is saying, “God has rejected you” – we can start to believe it.

We don't know all the back story and what it was that made this guy susceptible to this taunt, but it was definitely getting to him. They want to make it feel like God has abandoned him and rejected him, and it is working. That is exactly how he feels.

**42:9 I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me?”**

**43:2 ... Why have you rejected me?**

He feels not only forgotten by God but rejected. Obviously he doesn't believe that's true, or he wouldn't be praying to God. But that's how it felt – like God looked at him and said, “I don't like what I see. I do not accept you – I reject you,” and He turned away and left him and forgot about him. That is how the psalmist felt. That is how he felt, and the way it looked both to his eyes and to the eyes of the people around him. This is like a kid getting a whipping from his dad, and his brother is standing there saying, “See, Dad hates you.” The psalmist is under God's mighty hand, and his enemies are using that to try to make him doubt God's love.

So that is what's happening to him. But worse than that is what is happening in him.

## What Is Happening in Him

### Dryness and Thirst

What is happening in him is discouragement and depression. Think of all the ways he describes himself – dry and thirsty. What does it mean to say your soul is dry? Life is a desert – no refreshment, no

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<sup>1</sup> Whenever God does things we don't understand, they jump on that and demand that we give answers, and when we can't, they take that as proof that God doesn't exist. Don't get discouraged when people do that to you. It is not a sound argument. It is totally illogical. Think about it - we say there is an eternal, all-knowing, infinitely wise God out there. Then the atheist comes up with a question about God and His motive is that we don't know the answer to it, and that is supposed to be proof that God doesn't exist. If there is something about God that I don't understand, how does that prove that He doesn't exist? It is actually just the opposite. If God really is infinitely wise, and my brain is limited, then wouldn't you expect that there would be a whole lot of things about God that I wouldn't understand? If somebody believes in a god that he can fully understand, and he knows everything about that god's motives, why he does everything he does – wouldn't that make you a little bit suspicious that maybe this god of his doesn't really have infinite knowledge? I don't even understand everything about my wife, and she is just another human being – at the same level as me. I don't even understand how my computer works, and that is far less complex than a human being. So if there were a god that I could fully understand, he would have to be something less than my wife and less than my computer. And anything that is not even as great as my piece of junk computer is not great *at all*. So don't be thrown off by the atheist who mocks you for not understanding everything about God. If he asked you a question, and you don't know the answer, you can just say to him, “Do you really want to risk your eternal destiny on my ability to know everything about an infinite God? If you ask someone a question about how white blood cells work in your body, and he didn't know the answer, would you stop believing in white blood cells?” The atheist doesn't understand everything about the universe he believes in either, but that doesn't disprove the existence of the universe.

thriving. There are some times when you experience hardships and troubles, and you handle it just fine. Your soul has some strength and resiliency and ability to handle trouble. But then there are those desert times when everything inside you just dries up and there are no reserves. Even small hardships knock you flat because there is no thriving, flourishing inner strength.

And so his soul is thirsty. Think of all the various sensations in your body is capable of feeling. Softness against your skin, hot, cold, itching, irritation, rest, fatigue, being pinched, being squeezed: if you had to take one physical sensation and describe your life right now with that physical sensation as a metaphor, which one would you pick? This guy picked thirst. Thirst isn't a big deal when there is water around. But if you are ever in a situation where you are desperately thirsty and there is nothing to drink anywhere near, that can become about as desperate as any desire or longing can possibly get. This man was desperately unfulfilled.

## **Disturbed**

Another word he uses to describe his soul is **disturbed**. That word means turbulence – when you have a lot of anxiety and turmoil inside that just keeps boiling, and you would give anything for just an hour of inner peace. Sometimes hardships come and they are painful, but they don't rattle you. They hurt, but you can still maintain peace and calmness in your heart as you deal with them. But other times they get under your skin, and no matter how hard you try, you can't stop dwelling on them. Even in times when you really need to be focusing on something else, those problems are always there just grinding away inside your soul nonstop. That is what was happening to this guy.

## **Downcast**

And that kept going until he finally became downcast. The word **downcast** means to be bent down in the dirt. Instead of having high spirits, you have low, depressed spirits. It is very close to our word *depression*.

Depression can be one of the most agonizing kinds of suffering, because it takes away your strength. Sometimes it comes after a whole lot of incremental steps, other times a wave of darkness can just engulf you out of nowhere for no apparent reason and all of your ability to feel happiness is just gone. You can't enjoy the pleasures of life, and you have no strength, no energy, no motivation, and no hope. A friend of mine who was depressed wrote this: "I have no energy or reason to fight. I am numb and have tried all the things I know to try. I know that I will not be able to function like this much longer. There is no one to talk to. I'm suffocating. I can think the best thoughts all day and I still feel like this. No one knows how badly I want to die. My thoughts are obsessive and will not stop. They keep saying, 'I want to die.'" Not all of us have gotten to that extreme, but everyone suffers the dark night of the soul to some degree. We all know what it means to be really, really down.

## **Mourning**

So this guy is dry, unfulfilled, disturbed, downcast, depressed, and then he says **why must I go about mourning?** The word **mourning** literally means to be in the dark. Sometimes life is bright and hopeful, and other times we find ourselves in a frightening, chilling darkness of soul where you can't see. You can't see any meaning to the things that are happening to you. You can't see the way out of your condition. You can't see anything hopeful coming on the horizon – there is nothing to look forward to. You just feel confused and lost and without hope.

## Overwhelmed

Then one more description of how he feels: in 42:7 he says it's like **waves and breakers** are sweeping over him. If someone walked up to him at church and said, "Hey, how are you doing, Psalmist?" he would say, "I feel like ... I'm out in the middle of the ocean, and there's a huge storm, and these massive waves are just crashing over me one after another." He was overwhelmed. Sometimes you can handle one trial – or two or three, but when they just roll in like waves, and every one of them crashes over your head and shoves you down under, and before you can get your breath another one comes – that sense of being overwhelmed like that can be debilitating.

All of us experience times like that, to one degree or another. Sometimes it's mild; other times it's severe. It can be anything from just getting a case of the blahs that lasts for a few hours, to full-blown, clinical depression that puts you in a hospital bed. It could be a child or a teenager who wakes up one day and just doesn't see the point of school, doesn't really have any friends, and he can't seem to get the motivation to do anything. It could be a single person who wants to get married but just sees the years going by and still no spouse. It could be a man who feels absolutely overwhelmed by all the responsibilities of his job, his marriage, being a dad, take care of the house, his ministry - dozens and dozens of tasks that need to be done, and not only does it seem impossible to get them all done, it is overwhelming just trying to keep track of them all. His wife isn't satisfied, his kids are complaining, the church is pushing him to do more, his boss is unhappy with him, and he just feels completely deflated.

## The Solutions

So that is the problem - painful, overwhelming things were happening *to* him, and painful, overwhelming things were happening *in* him. So what's the solution? Enough about the problem – how do you recover from the dark night of the soul? God is going to give us the ultimate pep talk here. And I don't mean pep talk in the traditional sense – it is just that there are three points, two of them start with a P, and the other one starts with an E. So if you can remember the word PEP, you can remember these points. When you are down and discouraged, Pray for help, Enjoy God, and Preach to your soul. Pray, Enjoy, Preach.

## Pray for Help

If you want, you can ask God to just take the hardship away.

"Just make it go away, God. Make these people stop hurting me."

"Make this illness go away."

"Make my car stop breaking down."

"Provide me with the money I need to pay my bills."

You are just like this psalmist – you have got things happening *in* you and you have got things happening *to* you. And it's ok to ask God to do something about those painful things that are happening to you. Will God sometimes say *yes* to that prayer? Yes, if that is ultimately what is best for you in that moment. Will God always say *yes* to that prayer? Obviously not. If He did, we would all be in heaven right now. There would be no suffering. Sometimes – many times – suffering is what is best for us in a particular situation, so God has to keep the trial going because He has promised to always do what is best for His children. But in many cases, your best interests and His greatest glory can be achieved by you asking for relief, and God granting it. And when that is the case, He will answer the prayer for relief. So don't think there is something unspiritual about asking God to just take the hardship away. The psalmists do that all the time – including this one.

**43:1 Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men.**

## **God Is Sovereign over the Hearts of Men**

He asks for two things – to be rescued and to be vindicated. If someone is oppressing you, to be rescued means to get to a point where they're not oppressing you anymore. That is what he is asking for – “God, make this oppression stop.” Is God capable of answering that prayer? Or is God so hogtied by human free will that He is up in heaven saying, “Sorry, I can't intervene here because this involves free will”? No, rescuing us from people who are mistreating us is no problem at all for God. It's easy for Him. He could do it in His sleep (if He ever slept, which He doesn't). God is so powerful and so wise, He can figure out ways to prevent people from doing evil things to us even while leaving their free will intact. I can't figure out how God manages to do that, which is one of the billion reasons why I am underqualified for the job of being God. But it is just simple, elementary stuff for God.

**Jeremiah 20:11 the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced**

God is fully capable of delivering us from anything or anyone.

But what about that other request – **vindicate me**? Vindicate me in the eyes of whom? Not the eyes of God – God already knows the truth about him. He is asking to be vindicated in the eyes of men. This guy is being wrongly accused, and people are believing those lies about him. When he asks for vindication, he is asking for God to make it so that those people don't believe the lies anymore. So instead of people having a negative opinion about him, they will have a positive opinion about him. Now let me ask you this – is God capable of answering that prayer? Is God capable of granting you favor or disfavor in the eyes of the people around you? Absolutely. God can do that effortlessly.

**Genesis 39:21 the LORD ... granted [Joseph] favor in the eyes of the prison warden.**

**Daniel 1:9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel**

**Exodus 12:36 The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for**

**Proverbs 16:7 When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.**

God is fully capable of making people like you or not like you. He is totally sovereign over everything, including that. Are there some things that you can do it will have an impact on whether people like you are just like you, or trust you or not trust you? Of course. But ultimately it's up to God. You can be the most trustworthy person on the planet, and if God doesn't grant you favor in the eyes of men, people won't trust you. And even if you have lied or stolen or done all kinds of things to destroy people's trust, if God grants you favor in the eyes of man, they will still trust you. The book of Proverbs teaches us things that we can do to maintain a good reputation. And that's wise. But ultimately it is God who decides how people feel about you and what they believe about you and what their attitude will be. If they had a sinful attitude, God never causes the sin but He is still sovereign over whether or not it is allowed to happen.

So if people are believing lies about you, can you pray and ask God to vindicate you and give you favor in those people's eyes? Absolutely. That is exactly what the psalmist is doing here.

“But what if I don't deserve it?”

If you think this is about what you deserve you are really in the wrong religion. Don't ever hesitate to ask for something just because you think it's too much to ask. God loves to show His infinite riches and generosity.

**Psalms 116:12 How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD.**

The only thing you can do to pay God back for what He has given you is to put His generosity on display by lifting up your empty cup and asking for more.

## Enjoy God

So the first principle in dealing with discouragement is to pray for help. Ask God for relief, ask Him for strength, ask Him for whatever you desire. He loves to answer our prayers.

However, relief from your suffering isn't enough. You can get relief – that person can stop hurting you, your boss can stop treating you unfairly, that bully at school can back off, your spouse can stop whatever it is they are doing to hurt you, your financial troubles could go away – all that could happen, and you can still be just as depressed as ever. What you need is joy, and it takes far more than the mere absence of suffering to have joy in your heart. And this guy senses that. You can tell he does because of how he prays, and because of what it is he is thirsty for. That one verse where he asks for vindication – that is the only place in either psalm where he asks for relief from his suffering. Relief from the suffering would be nice, but he knows that's not nearly enough. He needs something far greater than that. He needs the joy and hope and life that come from being in the presence of God. That is the only way out of the pit that will last. This is the E in PEP – Pray for help, and then Enjoy God.

This is why he starts out the psalm talking about how he is so desperately thirsty – not for different earthly circumstances, but for the presence of God. And at the end of Psalm 43, he begs God to guide him - not into paths of comfort and ease – but into God's presence. Don't ever be satisfied with just getting rid of your sorrow. You have to go beyond that to joy – real, happy, emotional joy.

We only have time today to just introduce this, so we will plan on getting into it in a lot more depth next time. But for now let me just give you the basic picture. In order to have happiness in your life you need to enjoy God through His past grace, His present grace, and His future grace. Think of each one of



those as a creek flowing into the river of your life. The water in the three creeks represents joy. God's design is for you to live life with all three of those creeks constantly pouring joy into your life.

Discouragement is caused by a blockage of the inflow of joy into your life. Some big boulder tumbles down and blocks off the inflow of one or more of those streams. If any one of those streams gets clogged up, you won't have enough joy and your life will dry up. All three have to be flowing. You have to have a constant practice of enjoying God's goodness from the past, enjoying His goodness in the present, and enjoying His future goodness.

And if enjoying the past and future sounds a little strange to you, it shouldn't. We enjoy the past and the future all the time. God enabled us to enjoy the past through the gift of memory. All you have to do is think back about some wonderful thing in the past, and if it is a pleasant enough memory, joy will flow right into your life just from thinking about that past thing.

The same goes for enjoying the future. You see someone at work that is happy and in a great mood and walking on cloud nine all day because tomorrow he is leaving on his dream vacation. He is anticipating what is going to happen tomorrow, and he is already happy today. Why is he happy today? He's not on the beach yet. None of the pleasures of the vacation are happening yet. He is at work, and work is just the same as it always is. But he is happy because God gave us the ability to enjoy the future here and now just by anticipating it. That's what hope is – enjoying some wonderful thing in the future now.

So you enjoy God in the present by experiencing His presence. You enjoy God in the past by remembering times when you experienced His presence. And you enjoy God in the future by anticipating times when you will experience His presence again. And you can see all three of those in this guy's prayer. Regarding the past, he remembers.



**42:4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.**

**6 ...My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you**

He knows the solution to his downcast soul is to remember. That stream of joy from the past can get clogged up by misuse of our memory, or by ingratitude. And he knows he has got to get that stream of joy from the past flowing again.

And he also wants to get the stream of joy from the future flowing again, so he talks about hope in the refrain.

**42:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and 6 my God.**

**42:11 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.**

**43:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.**

He is calling on his soul to hope in God's future grace. Think about how creative God is. Isn't it true that He gave you some new joys just this past year that you never experienced before your entire life? He never runs out of ideas, He is infinitely generous, infinitely rich, infinitely powerful, and you cannot even fathom the height or depth or length or breadth of His love for you. He has some marvelous things in store for you in 2016. Unclog the stream of joy from God's future goodness through hope.

And then most important of all – enjoy God here and now, in the present. That is the biggest desire of his heart. He wants to enter into God's presence and have an experience of His presence that will satisfy that craving in his soul – that thirst. He wants an experience of God that will take away the dryness in his life. He wants an interaction with God that will fill the emptiness in his soul.

**42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?**

He knows joy will only come when he is able to meet with God.

**43:3 Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. 4 Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, the joy of my rejoicing.**

Nothing in this world will be enough to give him joy in the midst of this darkness except that. He has got to experience God's presence. Nothing else will be enough. That is what he wants now, that is what he remembers in the past, and that is what he hopes for in the future.

## Conclusion

So that is just kind of a roadmap of where we are going in this study: the way out of depression is to pray for help, and then to enjoy God's kindness from the past, in the present, and coming up in the future. The third point is Preach to yourself, but that will have to wait, because there is a lot more to say about enjoying God's presence.

Now, if you are depressed, my guess is that this sermon hasn't helped much. In fact, you might be even more discouraged now than you were at the beginning, because you're thinking, "Great, my only shot at joy is past present and future enjoyment of God, but if I think about the past it gives me no joy at all, only sorrow. And if I try to have fellowship with God in the present, I open my Bible, I pray, I have my devotions, and, honestly, it's boring. It's dry. My prayers bounce off the ceiling. There is nothing enjoyable about it at all. And when I think about the future, all I can see is blackness. I don't have anything to look forward to. I know His promises should make me happy, but they just don't. So now

what?” If that is you, please understand that all I have had time to do in this sermon is give you a basic sketch. I told you what would bring you joy but I didn’t have time to talk about how to do those things. But this psalm has a lot to say about how, so take heart. Hang in there, come back next week, and we will plan on digging into how this is done, and specifically how you can manage to do it when you are totally depressed and you don’t have any motivation or energy. There is hope. There is a way out of the darkness. It might take us a few weeks to get through it all, but for this week take the first step by just resting on this promise:

**Zephaniah 3:17 The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love.**

He will quiet your troubled heart with His love. Spend this whole week just leaning on that promise. Write it on your hand, put it on a Post-it note, memorize it, write it on the mirror in your bathroom – do whatever it takes to keep it in front of you all week long.

Do you want to hear some fantastic news? Any time you had your devotions and you walked away without joy, it is because you didn’t experience the presence of God.

“How is that good news?”

It’s great news because if you experienced the presence of God and it turned out to be boring and didn’t give you any joy, you would really be hopeless. But that never happens. The presence of God always has a strengthening, joy giving, life-giving effect on the human soul – always, always, always. It has never failed one single time in the history of the world. And so all you have to do is find a way into the presence of God. Just as this psalmist says, if you can get into His dwelling place He will be the joy of your rejoicing. And the more times that happens, the more you will start racking up memories so that you can have joy flowing in from the past and the more you will anticipate it happening again in the future, and pretty soon all three streams will be pouring joy in your life.

So I just want you to picture this: think of some hardship that might happen this coming week that would be the sort of thing that could easily put you into a tailspin. Something that, if it happened, you would struggle with discouragement. I want you to imagine that thing happening, and now picture yourself turning to God and actually experiencing His presence. And the experience of His presence is so profound, and your heart is so delighted by that experience, that you come away with a joy that is greater than the sorrow. Do you believe that God’s presence has that property? Do you believe the promise of Zephaniah 3 that He *will* quiet you with his love?

None of the principles we are going to learn about how to draw near to His presence will work until you are desperately thirsty for His presence. Not thirsty for anything else – just for His presence. And that will never happen until you really believe this promise. Do you believe it? Do you believe the promise of Psalm 80:19 that says all that has to happen is for God’s face to shine on you, and you will have restoration? Do you believe the promise of Hosea 5:1 that if He just turns His face toward you, it will turn your misery into healing? Do you believe the promise of Psalm 16:11 that in His presence there is abundance of joy, and perpetual pleasure? Or the promise of Psalm 21:6 that the joy of His presence will make your soul glad? Spend a week resting on those promises, and next week we will talk about how to experience His presence.

**Benediction: Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

## **Application Questions (James 1:25)**

- 1) When was the last time you were in a time of darkness, and you had an experience of the presence of God that brought you peace and joy that was greater than your heartache? Tell the group about it.

- 2) We are all vulnerable to discouragement in different ways. Which kinds of hardships in life tend to be the greatest threat to your joy and hope?
- 3) Which stream of joy tends to get blocked off most easily in your life – joy from past memories of God’s goodness, joy from present enjoyment of God, or joy from hope in future kindness?

## Expanded Discussion Questions

Dryness of Soul, Disturbed, downcast, mourning, and overwhelmed...These are five of the heart-felt emotions that were mentioned under the “What is happening in him” section of the sermon. The overall dryness of soul and all of its negative results can be equated with being in a “time of darkness”. With these heart-felt emotions the result is a sense of separation from God, and it is at this time that we often feel as though we are in this dark place in our life when we are overcome by dryness of the soul. But there is always hope in God...that is the sum of the psalm’s content, put your hope in God...

Another aspect of the sermon were the “Solutions” to getting our hearts in the right place during our time of darkness of the soul; PEP – Pray for Relief, Enjoy the Presence of God, and Preach to your Soul.

**From the Sermon:** “The presence of God always has a strengthening, joy giving, and life-giving effect on the human soul – always, always, always. It has never failed one single time in the history of the world. And so all you have to do is find a way into the presence of God.”

- 1) When was the last time you were in a time of darkness, and you had an experience of the presence of God that brought you peace and joy that was greater than your heartache? Tell the group about it.
  - a. Do you recall if any aspects of PEP played a part in you receiving peace and joy from God?
  - b. Enjoy God – the personal presence – The subject of the presence of God was not given in much detail, (but will be in future sermons), so, can you describe what the presence of God is?
- 2) We are all vulnerable to discouragement in different ways. Which kinds of hardships in life tend to be the greatest threat to your joy and hope?
- 3) Which stream of joy tends to get blocked off most easily in your life – joy from past memories of goodness, joy from present enjoyment of God, or joy from hope in future kindness?
  - a. Which stream seems to flow unhindered
  - b. Why?

**Take away:** Darkness of the Soul, Discouragement and Blockage of the streams of Joy will come into our lives, but we have great and precious promises from God to help us get through these times of darkness. For some, it seems like an eternity to get to the place of relief, and back into the presence of God with all the joy that He gives, but we got through it, you and I have a history with God, if you look back you can see that God has indeed walked with you through the difficult times. No matter how dark it is now, look back at that time when He was there! So, if you are in a dark place now, rejoice, even if by faith, that God will help, He is our defense. This week, recall a time when God opened up the flood of grace into your life, use this memory in your devotions and times of prayer, even if you are downcast, thank God for that victory...

