

While fighting all-too-common feelings of spiritual longing, abandonment, and depression, you must keep on encouraging yourself to wait hopefully for God. He promises to lead you—yes, on a cruciform path through many dangers, toils, and snares—but ultimately out of darkness and into the joy of his presence.

Introduction – In 1954 Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached a sermon series called Spiritual Depression.

Background – First, Psalms 42 and 43 function as introductory psalms in Book 2 of the Psalter (42-72), which has a general theme of “communication to the nations” of God’s message and care. Coming at the beginning of Book 2 of the Psalms, they introduce the general feelings and repeated themes. Second, read together, it becomes obvious that Psalms 42 and 43 are a single psalm. So when I refer to “this psalm” I am talking about both of them as one psalm. And last, this psalm is called a *maskil*, which probably means something like “to have insight” or “to be skillful.” In other words, this psalm has a very useful lesson to teach us, but we need to deliberately meditate on it to be wise enough to make practical use of it.

I. Diagnosis: The Longing Soul

A. Is thirsty for a more satisfying experience of God, even through many tears (vv. 42:1-3)

He has a longing soul, and he’s got a really bad case of the longings! Like a deer panting for flowing streams, for living waters, he testifies, “my soul thirsts for *God*, for the living God.” In verse 2 he says, “When shall I come and appear before God?” He wants to feel God’s presence. But his thirst is not quenched because God is not available to drink. All he can drink are his tears—all day and all night! While this parched soul pants for God, he is tormented as they say to him all day long, “Where is your God?” What a terrible place for a longing soul to be—alienated from the one you long for more than anything else, drowning in your tears, and persistently mocked for longing. What do you do when you feel like this?

B. Actively remembers worshipping God, even when the memory gives heartache (v. 42:4)

His soul is longing for God, so he calls to mind those happier times of corporate worship with God’s people. Back when the massive crowds would journey to Jerusalem for a holy festival, he had the privilege to lead the procession. Imagine the scene. Glad shouting everywhere. Songs of praise. Like your very best memories of coming to church. Happier times! It makes you smile, doesn’t it? But only for a fleeting moment, because then you snap out of it and the reality of your loneliness rushes upon you again. Because reimagining the past doesn’t change the present. God is still out of reach.

II. Symptom: The Depressed Soul

A. Feels distant from God and overwhelmed by God, at the same time (vv. 42:5-7)

1. First, your problems may not disappear right away. In fact they probably won’t. One symptom of a longing soul is a form of spiritual depression. The psalmist feels contradictory emotions: God seems far away, and God seems to be pouring it on, all at the same time! To put into graphic imagery how it seems to him God is far away, the psalmist describes his geographic location in Israel—either for real or in his mind’s eye. From the land of Jordan and the Hermon mountains, he will remember God who is at the other end of Israel, way down south in Jerusalem in the temple on Mount Zion, God’s holy hill (v. 43:3). Some scholars believe the psalmist is waxing poetic, making 9,000 foot Mount Hermon into a metaphorical molehill compared to the spiritual significance of Jerusalem’s holy hill. In other words, geographically and spiritually, Mount Hermon, which the surrounding nations viewed as the abode of their pantheon of pagan gods, is a long way from the true God, my God, the God of Israel.

2. If God feels distant, then paradoxically he may also feel overwhelming at the same time. Hermon is the land of Jordan in the sense that it is the source of Israel's Jordan river. Perhaps the psalmist set out in his mind on a journey to the source of Jordan's waters, somehow setting out on a spiritual quest for God as the source of all living waters. But look how in the span of two verses this dreamscape quickly becomes a nightmare! "All *your* breakers and *your* waves have gone over me" (v. 7). These are God's waters of primal chaos. Spiritual depression feels like God is far away and like he's trying to drown you. At the same time.

B. Feels abandoned by God and wounded by enemies, at the same time (vv. 42:9-10; 43:1-2)

It's bad enough when God feels distant, but it's worse when it feels like God has turned his back on you. No wound cuts deeper than to be forgotten. Remember the "they" who taunted in verse 3, "Where is your God?" They are the psalmist's enemies who mock him in his longing for God when he's spiritually depressed. How do such taunts feel? "As with a deadly wound in my bones" is literally "in murder in my bones." Spiritual depression as a symptom of soul longing feels like God has turned his back on you, and like unbelievers mocking your trust in God, all at the same time.

III. Cure: The Hopeful Soul

A. Continually speaks God's answers to his own honest questions (vv. 42:8, 11)

What the Bible means by talking to yourself is addressing that inner voice that speaks lies to you. That voice is none other than you talking to you. It sounds ridiculous on the face of it, but you all know what I mean. You know your inner voice because it's *your voice*, and no one knows you better than you do. Here's the point. You hate it when people lie to you. After so many lies you stop listening to them, right? So why do you tolerate you telling you lies? You shouldn't! God says you should talk back to yourself! The key to avoiding confusion is you address your soul by speaking God's answers to your raw, honest questions. When you're spiritually depressed, say something like, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?"

B. Prayerfully waits on God for the full experience of future salvation (vv. 43:3-5)

1. We find little snippets of prayer in Psalm 42, and in verse 8 the psalmist tells us *about* his prayers to God. But not until the beginning words of Psalm 43 does he offer a long, sustained prayer up until the last refrain. For the psalmist, his enemies are an ungodly people (literally *notched*, meaning they stand for everything opposed of God's steadfast, covenant love). They are led by a lying, wicked ringleader—a deceitful and unjust man—sort of a Judas Iscariot figure. (Do you see how Jesus could have identified with the same longing and spiritual depression we find in this psalm?) So the psalmist prays that God would support and defend his cause, and protect him from the enemy's oppression. He prays for God's light and truth to lead him back into God's presence. We also must pray like this to fight spiritual depression.

2. Look where God's light and truth lead. To the altar of God! It is the place that foreshadows and prefigures the perfect, ultimate, and final altar of God—the cross of Jesus Christ. God in Christ dwells at the altar, which is to say that if you want to be in God's presence, then you'll only find him paradoxically at the place of cosmic suffering, at the cross. Because it's only at the cross where your soul's longings, your spiritual depression, and your prayers are taken off your shoulders, and onto the shoulders of the Savior who sings this psalm of lament with you.

Conclusion – When Jesus followed God's light and truth to the altar, he found sorrow and suffering and alienation and death on a cross. And on the third day he rose from the dead that you might have the hope of resurrection life and exceeding joy in God's presence. Therefore let us remind each other again and again to pray to God and talk to ourselves. "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."