

Hope for the Discouraged

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It's no secret that Christians often find their own experience reflected in the Psalms and so it's no secret and no wonder that the Psalms become quite a favorite book amongst the people of God. It's a real spirituality, you might say, for real-life. And, you know, we're all constituted a little bit differently, some of us are more prone to being optimistic, some are more wired toward pessimism and different points in between, and so Psalm 42 is a good Psalm for those of you that are prone to melancholy; those of you that are prone to discouragement and perhaps even if you're not prone that way naturally, you find yourself in a life circumstance as you're here this evening where you are really in a gloomy frame of mind because of the way that life has been going for you. Well, Psalm 42, you find your partner in sorrow writing and speaking on your behalf.

The writer of Psalm 42 is discouraged. He is down for multiple reasons, and in this Psalm, he calls himself to hope in his unchanging God. And I've said in the past, I don't believe I've said it too often here and this may sound kind of funny to you and I know you'll be busting out laughing on the live stream when I say this, how would I have any way of verifying if they do that or not, right? But the truth of the matter is that the most important preacher in your life is you. You must be able to preach to yourself, speak to yourself and exhort yourself and know how to encourage yourself and to lift yourself out of the melancholy and the discouragement that your soul sometimes finds itself in. This is the most important aspect of spiritual living is the ability to deal with your own soul; to have your mind speak to your emotions in a way that they will respond to; to use your thinking in order to address your feeling with truth that will sanctify your heart and change the direction of things. Your feelings about life flow from the way that you are thinking, not the other way around, and one of the great travesties of modern Christianity today is that it is geared toward producing feelings in people as opposed to informing their minds with truth. Feelings are doomed to lead you astray eventually because eventually your circumstances will turn negative, your circumstances will not be like you want them to be, and then what do you do? You see, you as a Christian were never designed by God to live on emotion or to live in response to circumstances. Your responsibility, your duty, your opportunity, your prerogative, your privilege, is to live in response to truth instead of your passing feelings. This is, of course, increasingly difficult in our day and age because everything from politics to entertainment to whatever else you might point to in life is designed to produce emotional responses in you. Marketing and all of the different media aspects that you get into play off your emotions because

emotions are an easy way to get people to do things on impulse. You and I are meant to be different as Christians. What did Jesus pray in John 17? He said, "Father, sanctify them in the truth," that you would be set apart for truth, that truth would define your entire approach to life and that everything would be a response to truth rather than to emotion, and here in Psalm 42, we find how to use truth to bring our emotions in line with what they need to be. Rather than sinking deeper and deeper into the quicksand of discouragement, truth comes and becomes the means properly handled by you in your own life, to lift you out of that. So that's what we're going to look at here this evening, Psalm 42 is our text.

Now, I should say and we'll get to see some of this next week as well, Psalm 42 and Psalm 43 are very closely related together. They have a common refrain, a common echo. Look at Psalm 42:5. We're just kind of going to circle around the Psalm before we get into it. Psalm 42:5, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence." Look at verse 11 of Psalm 42. You see this echoed again, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God." And Psalm 42 ends there in our English text but as you continue reading on, you go to the end of Psalm 43:5, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God." So there is this common refrain in both Psalms that lead many commentators to treat them together. As you read commentaries, you'll often find Psalm 42 and Psalm 43 treated together in the same chapter. In some of the early manuscripts, we are told that these two Psalms are put together, not in all of them but in some of them, and so it's reasonable to view them as a single Psalm. Look also at Psalm 42:9, you'll see the complaint or the lament. In Psalm 42:9, halfway through it says, "Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" Then you go over to Psalm 43:2, "Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

So all of that simply to help you see that these Psalms are very closely related together. We're not going to treat them together tonight. We're going to separate out Psalm 43 and treat it separately and I'll talk more about that, their relationship next week, but I just want to point that out to you, that we kind of have bookend Psalms, Psalm 43 maybe being an extension of Psalm 42, and amplifying the theme that we're going to see here this evening. So one of the things that I'm very happy about here tonight is that we'll be able to treat this theme of dealing with discouragement, dealing with depression if you want to use that term, we're going to be able to treat that twice over the next two weeks and I think that's going to be helpful to us.

Now, let's go back to the beginning of Psalm 42 here as we get into the text. You'll notice that the heading says, "A Maskil of the sons of Korah." That probably gives the indications that it's an artistic Psalm and it's an artistic Psalm that is expressing wisdom, and what is the wisdom here? Well, my brothers and sisters in Christ, it is perhaps the most practical and important wisdom that you could have in your practical daily living, it answers the question, it gives wisdom into the situation: what do you do with yourself

when you're deeply discouraged? How do you respond to that? How do you handle yourself in the midst of it? You know, we're so conditioned in our modern culture that everything is answered by popping a pill in order to answer whatever is wrong with the physical or the immaterial part of the body. We are so accustomed to that that it might surprise some to think that there's actually biblical wisdom to answer to the need, and that's what we're going to find here this evening. There is biblical wisdom that answers the problem of discouragement, that gives you hope in the midst of it.

Now, Scripture tells us and this is an important part of understanding maybe a little bit of the setting of the Psalm, this is the first time that we have seen a Psalm as we're going through, a Psalm that was not either anonymous or was authored by David. I think 37 of the first 41 Psalms were authored by David. Here we have something different, not a Psalm of David but a song of the sons of Korah, and Scripture tells us that those men served in the temple and that their responsibilities in the temple included singing and playing instruments in the course of public worship. You're going to see that reflected as we go through the Psalm and see how it echoes into the things that this man is saying to us as we read what he has written.

So I'm going to break this Psalm into two sections here tonight. In the first five verses, we're going to see the reality of discouragement, and secondly, we're going to see the response to discouragement. The reality of discouragement or we might say the remedy for discouragement. That's going to be our simple outline here this evening. And let me say one other thing by way of important introduction. As you read this Psalm, one of the things that you'll find as he is expressing his deep discouragement, one of the things that you won't find is you won't find him confessing sin. This is not a confession of sin that he is writing here, it is a man dealing with discouragement in his soul, and not all discouragement is a product of sin. We need to understand that. Sometimes faithful Christians are dealing with discouragement and it is a misdiagnosis at times to attribute that discouragement directly to sin as we're going to see here. The question becomes how do you deal with that and so I say that simply to say this, I want you tonight to approach this Psalm in sympathy with the Psalmist. There are some teachers who would treat the Psalms and when they see expressions of discouragement, they condemn the Psalm writer for being sinful in his approach to life. To me that's unthinkable. That's not the purpose, that's not the point, that's not the teaching of these Psalms, rather we are seeing a pattern for a godly person to find hope and to deal with their soul and their own discouragement, and the way that you view that takes you in two completely different directions.

So, point 1 here this evening: the reality of discouragement. The reality of discouragement. This Psalm opens up with a, you might say, a deep sigh. He is expressing a deep desire for God's presence in the midst of intolerable sorrow in his life. Look at Psalm 42:1. He creates the picture of a dehydrated animal standing on its last legs looking for water that would revive it in the midst of its dehydration. Verse 1,

1 As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God.

Using the name Elohim, expressing the power of God with that particular name of God, saying, "God, my soul is thirsty. I am longing after you. I have a desire that cannot be quenched." And in the midst of that desire, what is it that is producing that desire? It is a lot of sorrow and difficulty that is in his life. If you look at verse 3, we're going to kind of take a closer pass through the Psalm and just kind of see some themes here. I want you to see the sorrow that sets the tone for the Psalm because it will help you understand what he has to say. In verse 3 he says, "My tears have been my food day and night, While they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" He's writing this out of a sense of weeping, a sense of desire for God and he's weeping and he's hurting as he writes. In verse 6, he says, "O my God, my soul is in despair within me." And in verse 9, he says, "I will say to God my rock, 'Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?'" Do you see the tone, you see the spirit of what's being said? "God, I'm panting for you. God I'm weeping so much that it's like I'm eating my own tears. I'm mourning. I'm in despair, O God."

So you're immediately struck by the immediate honesty and transparency of the Psalm writer as you read this Psalm. It's very refreshing. It is quite in contradiction to that picture of Christian life that is always sugary and always upbeat that is promoted by guys with million dollar dental work that they are happy to display on their books and everything is happy. Well, you know from your own personal experience, don't you, that that is not real life. You know that that's not reality and so certain brands of so-called evangelicalism come and present this happy view of prosperity and God will give you whatever you want, well, you know by experience that's not true and as you come to Scripture, you see this is not the picture that Scripture gives of spiritual life at all; that there is this room for this to be a part of the reality of spiritual life.

And let's say something else about it in defense of the Psalmist and hopefully in defense of some of you in the midst of your hardship and the discouragement and the weight that you feel on your soul, let's recognize that this man has great godly desires. He's saying, "God, I want you. God, my heart is longing for you. I want to be in conscious fellowship with you. I want to have this sense of your divine presence and it is absent from my life right now." So his desires are godly. His desires are righteous and they are unfulfilled. We don't criticize someone for having righteous desires. Where would the righteousness of our response be if that's what we were doing? No it's much different from that.

Now, as you read this Psalm and as we consider the reality of his discouragement, we're going to do something important. We're going to see as he goes through here, we're going to see that he identifies the human causes for his discouragement. There are some very practical difficulties that he is facing that are contributing to this sorrow of his soul and this is actually one of the keys for you in dealing with your discouragement, is to try to get beyond the feeling and say, "Why is it like this? Why am I in the midst of this sorrow? Why are my feelings speaking to me like this?" Well, here for the Psalmist, he lays out discernible human causes for his melancholy spirit and there are three that we can see as we go through here.

First of all it's this, and by the way, there is this guy that gets into the pulpit with me who tries to get ahead of me and what I'm saying and I sometimes I have to pull him back and say, "No. No, I am in charge here, not you," and so there is kind of this mental conflict that goes on in the middle of my mind. What I want you to see is this, is that as we're seeing what the Psalmist expresses, I think that you're going to find things that you yourself can identify with in your own spiritual life and the things that the human causes that point people and push people into a direction of discouragement and to see the cause is to be way ahead of the game in dealing with the symptoms. We don't simply try to perk people up, we want to get to the cause of things so that we can deal with it in a godly way.

What are some of the causes of his discouragement as he writes this Psalm? First of all, he is spiritually isolated. He is spiritually isolated. Somehow his circumstances are keeping him from the people of God. Look at verse 2, he says,

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?

Now, what he's saying here in the context of the Old Testament economy is this, remember that in the Old Testament, God had uniquely set aside the temple as a place where he uniquely manifested his presence and the people would gather and the Jews would gather for exuberant worship in the temple with their festivals and with other manner of worship. The temple was the center of their worship and it was the place where God's presence could be known, where it was uniquely manifested and to come into the temple therefore was to appear before God. And somehow as he expresses this, he is asking the question, "When will I next be able to do this? When shall I come and appear before God? I want to be in the presence of the worshiping people of God. My soul thirsts for that. I want to be in the presence of the living God. When will I be able to appear in order to do that?" His desire to appear before God means that he misses the temple with God's presence and the appointed worship that God had given to his people in the Old Testament. He is isolated.

We'll see that explained a little bit further in just a moment but, you know, it's not this aspect of fellowship and gathering together. I can tell you a secret about other people because you're all gathered together here tonight and so that's good, and you're all faithful to do that. It's never a surprise to me to hear that people are struggling spiritually when they have been away from the people of God for a period of time, whether health reasons or, you know, disobedience reasons, or work or all of that. When you're away from the people of God, you're moving into a situation where you're more prone to discouragement because part of the reason that God has appointed corporate worship is for us to feed off of one another, that you would be an encouragement to me and hopefully I would be an encouragement to you. And when you separate yourself from that like removing a coal from the fire and setting it off by itself, that coal goes out where it would stay warm if it was with the other coals.

Well, we're not meant to be isolated spiritually and so someone who is going through discouragement might step back and say, "Have I been isolated from the people of God for whatever reason?" Because that isolation leads to these feelings of discouragement and separation. That's one of the human causes of it. So I just encourage you and commend you for being here tonight and being so faithful to corporate worship. This is one of your safeguards against falling into deep spiritual discouragement. It's good that you're here. This is part of the health of your soul and it's important for us to stay committed to that and to not withdraw from the people of God.

Now, secondly, not only is he spiritually isolated from the people of God, just the opposite, he's got the opposite situation, secondly: he's surrounded by enemies. He is surrounded by enemies. Men were taunting him and making life difficult for him. Look at verse 3, he says,

3 My tears have been my food day and night, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

And if you drop down to verse 9, you can see this as well, that he is surrounded by people who are hostile to him, that mock his faith, that mock his love for God, love for his word. Verse 9, "I will say to God my rock, 'Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?' As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me, While they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" Now, I know that some of you live in the midst of this in the environment in which you work. Some of you maybe in the environment of unequally yoked households. I get that and so I don't need to describe to you the discouraging wet blanket that that can be on your soul when the people who are with you not only are not sympathetic to what you're doing, they are actively hostile to you, and it weighs on you and it wears on you again and again and again. Well, you can relate then to what the Psalmist is going through, this incessant pounding against his soul starts to take an affect and these, speaking of the men around the Psalmist because I wouldn't want to say it about the people that are around you that are doing this to you, these reprobates are making sport of his discouragement as he writes the Psalm. They know that he is isolated from the people that he wants to be with. They know that he is discouraged and he's going through a hard time and what are they doing when they say, "Where is your God?" They are saying, "Why isn't your God helping you? Where is your God when you need him? What good does it do you to follow this God that you claim to worship? Look at your miserable condition. Your God, if he exists at all, has abandoned you. You are wasting your time. You are an earthly fool. There is nothing to be said to you. We mock you. We taunt you." Well, that would weigh on you. Time after time after time, day after day after day, no wonder the poor man is discouraged as he's writing this. He was alone and his spiritual comrades were not around him to support him and encourage him but there was nothing about his circumstances to answer the taunts that were being made at him. So he is alone, he is receiving incoming fire again and again and again with no ability to respond to it, nothing that would help answer his critics.

And it's even worse than that for him, remember we said he was a son of Korah, involved in temple worship, well, you're going to see that he misses his prior role of leadership. He misses his prior role of leadership. So he is spiritually isolated, he is surrounded by enemies, and he misses his prior role of leadership. Look at verse 4 with me. He says,

4 These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me.

"The emotions that I'm feeling are just bursting out of their boundaries and overwhelming me." There is an overwhelming flood that's going on here and he goes on to explain it in verse 4, he says,

For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, With the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.

He's saying, "I used to be up front leading the people of God in worship and I loved that." Why? Not just because I wanted to be up front, but because as you saw in verse 1, his desire is for God and so he loves God and he loves leading the people of God in the worship of God and it was such a joyful time for him as multitudes responded to God in worship and he was in the middle of that, humanly speaking. He had a role to play in leading them and he said, "Oh, I loved that but it's a memory now. That's not part of my life. I miss that. There is this void and absence in my life." He had something that was special to him that was gone now. Poor guy. It's probably something of the feeling that someone who has just lost a spouse feels, maybe somebody that's retired or lost their job suddenly. The things that they gave themselves to, that their time and energy and emotion were invested in and they found their love and satisfaction in, that you found your love and satisfaction in and suddenly it's torn away and it's gone and you're left with this void in the midst of it and it's so common. I always feel badly for people in those situations for multiple reasons but when I hear them say, "I shouldn't feel this way," there's just a certain added dimension of compassion and sympathy I feel for them there because, of course you feel that way. Of course you feel the loss. You can't give yourself to 40 years of marriage and have that loss and have that taken away and then suddenly, you know, act like nothing ever happened. You can't take two who have become one and rip away half and not feel the effect of that, and here in Psalm 42 you see the Psalmist separated from the people of God, surrounded by enemies and feeling the absence of that which he had given his life to in the past. No wonder he's discouraged. These are the realities of discouragement.

You know, friends, one of the things that I think is helpful and healthy for us to be mindful of is to have a realistic view of what Christian life is supposed to be. You are a Christian, yes, you overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved you. Yes, God works all things together for good for those who love him. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. We're not contradicting a bit of that in what we say. What we're saying is, what we're being realistic in is this, is that we are still humans living in a human realm with human things that we love and hold dear and when those things are assaulted or when they are taken away from us, we're going to feel the impact of that and what this Psalm tells us is

that God has anticipated your need in that, God has given preparation in his word beforehand and says, "This is the way forward for you when you are in the midst of it." For the Psalmist, his present circumstances were a complete reversal of his earlier joy. He was not leading worship, he was not at the temple, he was with the enemies of God instead and of course it's hard.

Beloved, what you should see as you read this Psalm is that this Psalmist had tender desires that were under attack. He had a tender heart. It was under attack and the righteous desires that he had were being withheld from him and so if you can identify with that, find sympathy with this Psalm, God put this Psalm in the Bible in part for you, for people just like you to find their encouragement and strength in. And if you're more prone toward optimism and cheery and you don't really have these difficulties with nighttime in your soul, well, let this Psalm at least temper your reaction to those who do. Sometimes it's easy to be a little bit overbearing toward people that are going through discouragement and to chastise them when what Scripture says that we should do, Romans 12:15 is, we should weep with those who weep. So we let this Psalm bring tenderness to our hearts.

So as you're dealing with discouragement, what do you do initially? You look at the reality of it. You look for the reasons for it. Sinclair Ferguson helpfully says this and I quote, he said, "This Psalmist experienced discouragement. He traces it to particular causes. There are specific reasons for his condition and realizing that is half the remedy that he needs." You say, "Why am I feeling this way? Ah, losses. Ah, spiritual isolation. Ah, I've got people attacking me all over. You know, I've got critics all around me. No wonder I feel weighed down. There is a human explanation for this." Well, when that happens, what we need to do is this: you recognize it, you understand it, you say, "Okay, this is life," when you feel the weight of it but, beloved, what you must do then is this: you cannot give into the feelings. You can't surrender to them as if a wave was coming over and you just dive into the wave and start breathing in water. No, that will drown you. That will kill you. That's not a good idea. You don't give into the feelings. It's okay to understand why they are there but you don't stop at that. You don't allow yourself to collapse under the weight of it. You don't let yourself fall into that somewhat perverse sense of enjoying the discouragement that you feel and feeling sorry for yourself. You don't give in to it. You understand the sources of it, the reasons for it, but what you do is you go further and you have a responsibility.

Let me give you an illustration that I've always found helpful in this regard. You have to understand what the nature of faith is. You have to understand and appreciate what it is that being a Christian, belonging to the God of the Bible, what that means and how it impacts the way that you live life and what you are supposed to do with it. Your faith is not like a thermostat. I used to think that it was and I learned the hard way that it's not. You know what a thermostat does, thermostats regulate things so that there is a stable temperature in the environment and if the temperature gets too high, the thermostat kicks in and lowers it down to a reasonable degree of temperature, if it gets too cold, it automatically operates and so without you even thinking about it or doing anything, the thermostat is regulating the environment in which you live.

Now, I used to think, I didn't really understand that I thought this way but you go through trials, let's put it this way, you go through trials and you think that faith is just automatically going to rise to the occasion of the trial that you're facing without any effort on your part; that just part of the reality of being a Christian is hard times hit, discouragement comes and then it just naturally occurs. That's not the biblical pattern. That's not the life of faith. Here's the point: faith in that condition of soul is not passive. Your faith is to be active. In the midst of your discouragement, you have a responsibility in which you are to act and that you are to do something. There is something for you to do in the midst of it and that's what we're going to see as we go to our second point: the remedy for your discouragement. The remedy for your discouragement. How does the life of faith, how does the life of being a Christian, inform the way that you respond to deep discouragement? And here's where you have to become your own best preacher. Your pastor can't do this for you, a radio teacher cannot do this for you, you are the one who has to take responsibility and deal with yourself in this way.

Circumstances may explain your sorrowful feelings but you as a Christian can go further than that. You are not condemned to live under the weight of discouraging circumstances without any remedy for your soul. There may be legitimate reasons for your sorrow. Oh, write this one down. This is one of those little pivot phrases: there may be good reasons for your sorrow but there are even better reasons for you to have hope. There may be good reasons for you to be downcast, "I'm isolated. I'm under attack. Life has changed badly for me." Well, that's a good reason to be discouraged, in one sense, but beloved, as a Christian, as a Bible-believing, born-again Christian, saved by the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have a better reason for hope in the midst of your circumstances than you do to be discouraged and you need to call these things to your mind. This is exactly what the Psalmist teaches us to do in verse 5.

Look at it with me. Notice how he starts to speak to himself now. In verse 5 he says,

5 Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become
disturbed within me?

Then he gives himself, he gives his own soul an imperative. He says,

Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence.

He says, he takes himself in hand, it's as if he's looking at himself in the mirror and talking to himself and addressing his own heart and he says, "Why are you in this downcast position? Why are you in despair?" It's as if he's waking his soul up, rousing it out of its discouraged slumber and saying, "Wake-up and remember what your whole existence is about." He says, "You hope in God." Hope here, not being the way we use it in English, "Well, I hope I win the lottery. I hope I find \$1 million." Maybe it happens, maybe it doesn't. No, hope biblically speaking is a confident expectation – let me slow down here. The fast guy started to talk again. Hope is a confident expectation that is based on the character and promises of God. God has revealed himself in his word. He

has made known to us what he is like. He has told us what he is going to do in the future. He has explained to us clearly and infallibly in Scripture what it is and how it is that he deals with his people and he deals with them well all of the time, even though they might go into some valleys along the way. That's who God is.

Now, verse 5 here, implied in verse 5, I'm going to give you a \$.25 theological word here, verse 5 is premised on the immutability of God. Immutability being a theological term which means that God is unchanging. God does not change. He does not go and come and differ in the way that he is. He is consistent with his being. He is consistent with his attributes. He is consistent with what he has revealed himself to be. Beloved, this is the anchor that holds your soul in the midst of discouragement. The immutability of God is the great lifeline to your soul that you grab hold off when the waves are coming over your spiritual head.

Here's what it means. We've said things like this a lot, we'll say it this way this time: beloved, even in the midst of your worst discouragement, even in the midst of the present despair of your soul, God always acts consistently with his wisdom, with his holiness, and with his love. God is perfectly wise. He knows everything that there is to know and – watch this – he knows the best way to bring you from where you're at to the place of his blessing. He knows what he's doing as he deals with your life. Absolutely. Without exception. You might not understand it, you might stagger under the weight of it but how does a football player get stronger except that they lift weights that press against their muscles and the strength has to rise to the occasion? How is it that a soul grows stronger except against the resistance of contrary forces? God is wise to know how to build your soul up, to strengthen you for what lies ahead. God is perfectly righteous in the way that he deals with you also.

Look, God would never do you wrong. The mere thought of that, the mere thought that he would is incorrect. It's not right. God would never do anything unrighteous, would he? God would never violate his righteousness in his dealing with you. Would it even be possible, would it even make sense that the Lord Jesus Christ would redeem your soul with his own blood at Calvary only to turn around and deal unkindly and unrighteously with you? That's absurd. That makes absolutely no sense. That would violate the whole purpose of redemption for Christ to do that in his dealings with your soul. No, he would never act unrighteously with you. He would never act unwisely with you.

And let's say one other thing as well. This is where people in our camp, I think, are most prone to fall short and to miss and to minimize or neglect a certain aspect of God as they are going through their trials. 1 John 4:7-8, "God is love." God is love and it's because of his love that the Lord Jesus Christ went to Calvary for you. "Greater love has no man than this, than that he lay down his life for one of his friends." The whole fountain, the whole source of your spiritual life is found and rooted in the eternal love of Christ for your soul. Look, that doesn't get suspended during your trials. It is operative at all times. The love of God is always operative in your life, even in the midst of your worse trials. Always. The holiness, the righteousness of God. He's always dealing with you in a

righteous way. He's always dealing with you in a loving way. He is always dealing with you in a wise way.

Now, how does that have anything to do with your present discouragement, Christian? Here's what it has to do with it: when the Psalmist says to his own soul, "Hope in God," he's saying, "Have a confident expectation that the outcome of this present discouragement will be a full manifestation of the wisdom, righteousness and love of God for your soul." You know God to be like that, therefore expect him to deal with you in perfect consistency with his revealed attributes because he can't do anything else. The God of truth cannot lie. The God of love cannot deal unkindly with you. The God of omniscience can't make a mistake.

So in the midst of your discouragement, you look at yourself in the mirror, as it were, and you say, "You hope in God." And this takes spiritual effort, especially under the weight of chronic problems that never go away, of chronic relationships that just weigh on you. I understand that and if you're in that position, it is all the more imperative, it is all the more necessary for you to gather up the spiritual energy and tell yourself, "No, I will hope in God despite everything that is around me. I will walk by faith, not by sight." You see, as a Christian, my brother and sister in Christ, as a Christian, look, the eternal God who first saved you and blessed you and you had those early days of joy in your Christian experience, he hasn't changed. He hasn't shifted. Your circumstances have but he hasn't and, beloved, if he helped you in the past, if he rescued you and saved you in the midst of your sin and rebellion against you, beloved, isn't it obvious that his intention is to continue to help you and bless you going forward now that you're child of God. The spiritual logic of Scripture and the spiritual logic of the way that he deals with our souls is inescapable and what you are to do in the midst of your discouragement is to say, "I will lay hold of that. I will trust in that. I will hope in that even though there is nothing circumstantial to reinforce it in my life. I will trust in God no matter what."

What is he doing here? Look at verse 5 with me again. He says, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence." He says, "You hope in God. In the midst of this despair, you hope in God because what lies ahead in the future is another round of praise to God for the way that he has helped me." And this is so certain, this is so certain that you appropriate it as a present reality even though the experience of it is still future to your soul, and that is where you root your confidence. It's rooted in his revelation found in Scripture and for us in the New Testament, it is confirmed by the shed blood of Christ for sinners. We are in a position of strength even in the midst of our worst difficulties. It's that God that he's calling to mind.

Look at verse 6 as we need to speed things up a little bit here. Verse 6, he says,

6 O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You
from the land of the Jordan And the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.

Hermon being the northernmost mountain range of the land of Israel. He is separated from Jerusalem. He is geographically removed and he says, "I am remembering you from

this location that is far from the central place of worship that you appointed for your people." He's far from the temple and he feels far from God. Notice this, well, let's look at verse 7 before I say that. Verse 7,

7 Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; All Your breakers
and Your waves have rolled over me.

What he's saying here, it's like one deep wave is calling to another deep wave to come and combine their forces in overwhelming him in the midst of his difficulty. His troubles are calling upon him repeatedly. They are falling upon him again and again and it's just like a waterfall drowning him in the midst of it. That's what his spiritual experience has been like and in the midst of that desolation, in the midst of that difficulty, look at the ringing statement of faith that he makes in verse 8. He says, "The LORD," this time using the divine name Yahweh, the God of covenant faithfulness and loyalty to his people.

8 Yahweh, will command His lovingkindness in the daytime; And His
song will be with me in the night, A prayer to the God of my life.

He's saying, "God even in the midst of these overwhelming repeated chronic trials, God is going to command his loyal love to bless me in the end and that is my ringing statement of faith. I will not surrender that ground even in the midst of these trials here." He recognizes that God is still sovereign in his sorrow, he confesses the faithfulness of God and, beloved, here's what you need to grasp hold of in the midst of your discouragement, despair and anxiety: God's loyal love to you means this, God's loyal love to his people means that a time of praise, a time of reversal of your discouragement, is certainly coming and what the call of faith is, is to thank God for that now; to express your hope and confident expectation in that even though there is nothing circumstantially to prompt you to say that. You can say that because your faith is built not on the circumstances of your life, not on prosperity or money or anything like that, your faith is premised on the unshakable foundation of the revealed character of God in his inerrant word. Amen. That's why you can have hope. That is the remedy for your discouragement.

Now, in the midst of this, the present extended hardship for the Psalmist, it seems like that circumstances are inconsistent with that confession of faith he just made. Look at verses 9 and 10 with me.

9 I will say to God my rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go
mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" 10 As a shattering of
my bones, my adversaries revile me, While they say to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"

What's happening here? It seems like he has circled back into the despair and depression, doesn't it? He's back into the mourning. After he has made these great statements of faith, he is back in the mourning. He's cycling again, so it seems. Beloved, your own life experience tells you how to be able to understand this. He had said in verse 5, "Hope in God." Verse 8, "The LORD will command His lovingkindness." So he starts out

discouraged, he rises to faith and he comes back down, "Why am I going about, my adversaries are reviling me all day long?" Don't you know by personal experience the fact that as you're going through these long trials, that you have times where you're strong, you're confident, and then another wave hits and knocks you back and you're discouraged again? Don't you know that by personal experience? Well, he's the same way. We are of like flesh with the Psalmist and so it's not that those setbacks mean that the original statement of faith was insincere or not real, it simply means that you come right back to the same point and you fight the same battle in your soul again. That's what he does in verse 11 when he comes right back to the same place. He started out weak, he rises in faith and confesses his confidence in the lovingkindness of God, another round of discouragement comes and he fights the same battle again with the same weapons.

Look at verse 11,

11 Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become
disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of
my countenance and my God.

You see, and here there are two things that I want to say as we close here, very practical that I hope will be helpful to you. First of all, is to recognize this, this is so helpful: first of all is to recognize that to deal with chronic discouragement, to deal with a deeply rooted despair in your soul, you're not going to deal with that one time and live happily ever after, that is not the battle of faith. You fight this battle, you affirm your faith and don't be surprised if a half hour later or three days later you're back having to fight it again. That is not a sign of weakness. That is not a sign of defeat. It is not a sign of insincerity. I say this to encourage you and strengthen you. It is simply a sign that the battle is real and that it is difficult, and any study of any war would show that there had to be a sustained offensive against an enemy before victory could be declared. Don't be surprised if in your spiritual battles that you're fighting the same thing again and again. You still come back to the same place: hope in the immutable God who is a God of wisdom, righteousness and love and who never fails his people. That's always the answer that you go back to.

Secondly, this remedy for depression, this is a challenge but a good one and helps you see where I believe the battle lies. This remedy for depression that we're talking about, this remedy for discouragement, is more than simply renewing the outward motions of your quiet time. It is not, this is not simply saying, "Okay, I've got to read my Bible more and I've got to pray more." It's deeper than that. It's more significant than that. It's more meaningful than that. Those things help inform it but what this is talking about is something different. It's recognizing, coming back to what we said before, you have to preach to yourself. In other words, what this is about is not you going through the motions of a spiritual discipline, it is about you in the seat of your deepest affections and convictions about life, affirming to yourself what you know to be true about God's loyal love, his wisdom and his righteousness. You come to this point, you say, "What kind of man, what kind of Christian woman am I going to be? What is going to define my inner man?" And you say, "What's going to define my inner man is I believe God for what he

has revealed himself to be, that he is a God of wisdom, righteousness and love. I believe that when Christ died on the cross, that he loved me by name and shed his blood for me by name and that he set his affection on me, never to take it away. That's what I believe. And because I believe that, I am going to with all of my being, from the deepest source, the deepest wellspring of everything that I am as a person, I am going to entrust myself to that and be confident and rest in the assurance that the outcome of my life and the outcome of my present discouragement will be an abundant manifestation that God was faithful to me just like he said he would be." That's a lot different than saying, "Read your Bible more," isn't it?

This is leading us into what the convictions of life are going to be and as you shape those convictions, you use your mind to speak to your emotions. You say, "This is the truth that will govern the way our life goes. This is the truth that will define the way that we view life. Not emotions responding to circumstances but the whole inner man responding to the revealed character and promises of God with trust, certainty, conviction and rest." And from that position of strength, you speak to yourself, you preach to yourself and you say, "Soul, hope in God for the help of his countenance, the help of my countenance in my God. Hope in God for the day is coming when you will praise him effusively for the wonder of his faithfulness to whom he said he was and what he has done for you in Christ." Hope in God. You can never go wrong.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, I pray for the brothers and sisters in Christ that are so faithful to be here and that you have brought to be with us here tonight here in the room and over the live stream as well, for those who will somehow hear this perhaps in future media. Father, we pray for a deep work of your Holy Spirit deep within our hearts that would supernaturally help us, supernaturally enable us to grab hold deeply of these convictions about your love, wisdom and righteousness, and to let that set the course about the way we think about all of life and the way that we respond to discouragement and despair. We thank you that you are a gracious God to us; that in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have a Savior who is sympathetic with our many infirmities. We are weak and frail creatures of flesh, O God, seeking to love you and to live for you in the midst of a hostile environment and with a heart that so easily wanders into unbelief. Have mercy on us. Have mercy on these here that deal deeply with discouragement, with despair, with anxiety that never seems to let loose. Father, may you bless them. May you encourage them. May the wonder of your character, faithfulness and love, be like the rise of the sun upon their souls, shining light and warmth where darkness and cold had once dwelled instead. O God, you are our God, and we will ever praise you and rest in you. And Father, we know that the one who believes in you like that will never be disappointed and resting in your wisdom, righteousness and love, we go forth now in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

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