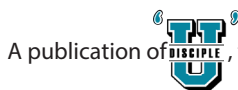


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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
 Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- 1 What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you?
 ...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- Referring to the text of Psalms 42-43 on the following page...
- 2 Notice the three blocks of text (42:1-5; 42:6-11; and 43:1-5) all end with **very similar wordings/ideas**.
 Note too, that words which are linked together (eg. ) are the same Hebrew words.
 Finally, note that blocks of content shaded the same color (eg.) discuss related ideas.
- 3 • The psalmist **clearly** is in pain, is being attacked by adversaries, and feels abandoned by God. But notice that, although he has a lot of questions for God, and clearly is disappointed with God's apparent distance, **nowhere** does he **accuse** God of wrong-doing! He **longs for** the God (42:1-2) who he says has **"forgotten"** and **"rejected"** him! How do you explain that?
- 4 Do you think that **you** would be able to be deeply disappointed with God's lack of help, and yet still long for relationship with him—as much as a thirsty deer longs for water? Why or why not?
- 5 • David "connected the dots", realizing that the **living** God was the source of **his** **life**.
 Read Colossians 3:1-4. What clarity does Paul add to this issue?
 What do you think it would take to come to the place where **you** can say, "Christ is my life"?
- 6 • David's adversaries "kicked him when he was down", taunting him with, **"Where is your God?"**. This was doubly painful, since it was exactly that—the presence of God—for which David longed. Notice the four occurrences of the Hebrew word for "face", translated as **"before"** **"presence"** and **"countenance"**. In 42:2, David wonders when he'll be able to come before God's face again. In 42:5, David says that **God's face** is a help to his down-cast face, and then look what happens! By 42:11 and 43:5, David anticipates that **his own face** will have been helped **by God's face**.
 Numbers 6:25–26 says: "Yahweh make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; Yahweh lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace." Tell about a time when the experience of the nearness of God, or a recognition of his aid, brought a noticeable "lifting" of **your** countenance.
- 7 • Regardless of how you feel now, even if you feel "rejected by God", tell him that he is your **"rock"**, and the **"God of your strength"** (42:9 & 43:2). Can you do that—by faith?

- 1 A standard, soft-ball question designed to get discussion going. Don't take too long on this, however... Pay attention, however, to any strong negative responses or major areas of confusion. Take note, and make plans to grab coffee and talk further.
- 2 Talk through the way this passage is laid out, and the system of notation discussed here. Then...
- 3 Because life is hard and God's ways are confusing, we need to have certain "bed-rock, non-negotiable, fundamental assumptions" which help us interpret confusing and painful events. Among these are:
 - God, the judge of the whole earth, always and only acts justly. Genesis 18:25
 - God proved his love, wisdom, and power through the crucifixion of Christ. The crucifixion was the most unjust, malicious, wicked action—and yet God brought the greatest good out of it. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ must be used as the ultimate "grid" for interpreting life.
 - The "argument from greater to lesser" proves that, since God did not spare his own Son (the most precious thing to him), he will certainly not spare any lesser expense for our good (Romans 8:32). When you spend a fortune buying a Lamborghini, you'll not deny it the cost of an oil change!
- 4 Explore two common, sinful responses to disappointment with God: [1] blaming him and blowing up at him, and [2] withdrawing from him and "punishing" him. How can we avoid those wrong responses when we're disappointed with God's lack of intervention in our problems?
- 5 How is "Christ our life" spiritually, physically, and in terms of our life-goals?
- 6 You likely will need to "prime the pump", so be prepared with your own answer to this question. (But wait for others to think and answer. Check your watch—20 seconds feels like an eternity!)
- 7 Lead your group in affirming your faith in God's goodness toward you—regardless of appearances. If God spares us from hell, which we deserve, and does **nothing** else for us, he's been merciful.

Sermon Summary (Key Texts: Psalms 42-43)

As we're studying the psalms, we find that Psalms 42 and 43 clearly go together because they repeat the same phrase over and over again: "Why are you in despair, O my soul? Why are you disturbed within me?" All of us feel despair from time to time, and these psalms identify some of the causes of despair and how to cure it.

I. The Condition of Despondency Four times the author says he is in despair (see 42:5, 6 & 11 and 43:5). The word "despair" means "to melt, to sink down, to collapse." It describes someone who has absolutely given up. Despair comes to those who are spiritually strong and to those who are spiritually weak. At one point, Elijah, Moses, and Jonah each were ready to throw in the towel; "God, just take me home!" Perhaps you yourself are despairing right now. The psalmist wrote: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." He is spiritually dehydrated; parched. He asks, "When can I see the face of God?" He believes in God, but at this moment God doesn't seem real to him. God seems distant to him, and his faith is running dry. Notice that there's no indication that the psalmist is experiencing dryness due to sin. Nor is it due to some terrible tragedy or suffering. There are a couple of references to enemies, but they don't seem to be an imminent threat. He's just sad that his enemies are seeing his spiritual dryness and sorrow. Yes, it is possible to feel spiritually dry because of guilt, or because of tragedy or oppression, but the psalmist appears to be spiritually dry in the absence of those kind of experiences. If we don't have a connection with God spiritually, it results in a profound sense of emptiness and spiritual disorientation.

II. The Causes of Despondency These psalms mention three causes of spiritual dehydration.

[A] For some reason, he has forsaken regular worship and fellowship with other believers (42:4). It seems that this is due to his moving away (v. 6). This actually happens a lot: you move to a different location, away from fellowship, and you find that your prayer life, your thought life, your faith was dependent on other people. God seems more distant. Of course, he isn't actually less present, but it seems that way. Truth is, you're not as mature as you thought you were in your practice of the spiritual disciplines. God did not design us to be Lone Ranger Christians. The Psalmist was learning that he needed the support of a believing community. We all do. **[B]** The psalmist also has been exposed to a hostile spiritual environment (42:10). At best, our culture leaves God out; at worst, it mocks us who believe in God. A hostile environment can contribute to spiritual dehydration. **[C]** He was depressed (42:3). He'd lost his appetite. He probably wasn't sleeping well either. Now he's in a tailspin of depression. When Elijah experienced depression, God gave him sleep and made him dinner (1 Kings 19:3-8). The Bible is more multidimensional than many of us realize. It ministers to the whole person—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. A number of factors can contribute to the kind of despair the psalmist is describing. And this world cannot satisfy our deepest longings. As C.S. Lewis said, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." We were built for God, and nothing else will satisfy us.

III. The Cure for Despondency When you're in that downcast situation, where God seems distant or unreal, there are three things this text tells us to do. **[A]** Pray, even when you don't feel like it (42:4). If God doesn't seem real to you, pray to him about the fact that he doesn't seem real to you. Pray about your prayerlessness! If God seems distant and unreal and you don't talk with him, he'll remain unreal to you ten times longer than if you do talk to him. Pray into the darkness and you will find that the darkness begins to lift and God comes into focus. **[B]** Determine to live in hope. These psalms have three stanzas (42:1-5; 42:6-11; and 43:1-5), and each refrain gets a little more hopeful. The psalmist is talking to himself, not just listening to himself. If you only listen to your heart, you are in big trouble, because a despondent heart says, "Things are never going to get any better." Instead, the psalmist says: "Listen, self! You need to get your eyes off of your circumstances and onto your God!" He doesn't simply say, "Stop feeling bad!", because our feelings come from what we hope in, rely upon, look to for happiness or security. We need to ask ourselves, "Why is ____ so important to me?" Then, you need to **[C]** Comfort yourself with God's unconditional love. In v. 6 & 8, the psalmist challenges himself concerning where his hope lies, and then he comforts himself with God's unconditional love. We need to do the same. The cross of Christ assures us of God's love.

- 1 As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God.
- 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the **living** God; when shall I come and appear **before** God?
- 3 My tears have been my food **day** and **night** while they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"
- 4 These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me.
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.
- 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**.
- 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.
- 7 Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls;
all Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me.
- 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**.
- 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?"
- 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.

- 1 Vindicate me, O God, and plead my case against an ungodly nation;
O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!
- 2 For You are the God of my strength; why have You rejected me?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?
- 3 O send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me;
let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling places.
- 4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy;
and upon the lyre I shall praise You, O God, my God.
- 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.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

The Psalms give us guidance in overcoming despondency. Study each of the following passages, noting what they have to say about gaining enduring joy. What does the blessed man **do**? How is the blessed man **described**? What do these passages say **God does** for us? What do you learn?

- Psalm 1:1-6 _____
- Psalm 2:12 _____
- Psalm 3:5-6 _____
- Psalm 4:4-8 _____
- Psalm 5:11 _____
- Psalm 9:14 _____
- Psalm 13:5 _____
- Psalm 16:5-11 _____
- Psalm 19:8 _____
- Psalm 32:1-6 _____
- Psalm 40:1-4 _____
- Psalm 41:1-3 _____
- Psalm 84:4-12 _____
- Psalm 106:3 _____
- Psalm 112:1-9 _____
- Psalm 119:1-7 _____
- Psalm 127:2-5 _____
- Psalm 128:1-6 _____
- Psalm 144:15 _____



Each of us—including our children—are unique individuals with our own particular emotional make-up. Think about yourself, your spouse, and each of your children. Which one's tend toward optimism? Pessimism?

Think about your day, and be ready to answer the question, "What was your high-point and your low-point today?" Then, tonight at the dinner table, ask that question of each family member, allowing each person to share his answers.

(Think through to whom you should put that question first—they can help you "prime the pump" so that everyone else will have a greater likelihood of answering.)