

Hope for the Downcast Heart

Psalm 42-43

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This morning we will get back into our Psalms Sermon Series: *Songs for Sojourners*. We are going to work through Book 2 of Psalms, which runs from Psalm 42 through Psalm 72.

To get started in Book 2, we will cover Psalm 42 and 43. Some scholars believe that Psalm 42 and 43 were once a single Psalm and at some point were separated. However, Old Testament and Psalms scholar Christopher Ash believes Psalm 43 was written later and paired with Psalm 42. I agree with him. I think they were written separately but go together by the writer's design.

If you read Psalm 42 and 43 this week, or even hearing them read this morning, you can tell that Psalm 43 has a distinctiveness and vibe that is slightly different from Psalm 42. Let's pray and get to work on these two amazing Psalms.

The superscript at the beginning of Psalm 42 tells us that it was written by the Sons of Korah. Psalm 43 does not contain the superscript, but it was most likely written by them too. The Sons of Korah were priests who served at the temple and led in worship, so they wrote songs to lead God's people in worship.

Psalm 42 opens Book 2 with a parallel of Psalm 1. If you remember Psalm 1, there was a tree planted by streams of water. The water refers to the word of God, specifically the Torah. Psalm 42 opens with the deer that pants for streams of water, but in this Psalm the stream is the presence of the Living God, who we know to be Jesus Christ, the Living Water of God.

Here's the heartbeat of Psalm 42 and 43: *We fight gospel forgetfulness by drinking deeply from the Living Water of Jesus Christ.*

There are three refrains in these two Psalms: Psalm 42:5-6a, Psalm 42:11, and Psalm 43:5. I want to read these three refrains so we can hear the struggle that is going on in the heart of the Psalmist.

*[Ps. 42:5-6a] 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 salvation⁶ and my God.*

*[Ps. 42:11] 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.*

*[Ps. 43:5] 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.*

In these three repetitious refrains we hear the spiritual struggle the psalmist is experiencing. We also hear his hope in God and his confidence that God will save him. For now, I want to zero in on the psalmist's struggle.

Look, this guy is struggling with what the Puritans call the dark night of the soul. He's not simply spiritually depressed or struggling psychologically, but he has legitimate circumstances crashing down on his life. He is deeply discouraged.

This is what I call *Gethsemane's Grief*. This kind of grief is massive and soul-crushing. The Hebrew word “cast down” is the same word Jesus uses in the Garden of Gethsemane when He was experiencing the weight, pain, and darkness of our sin being laid on him. He’s preparing to take our sin to the cross. He was already suffering under God’s wrath for our sin. The temptation and pressure for Jesus was to avoid the suffering and sacrifice of the cross that was before Him. Yet, He didn’t tap out. He stayed in the fight, and that is good news for us as we study these two Psalms.

When Jesus said, “*My soul is very sorrowful*” in the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:3 and Mark 14:34, the word translated as “*very sorrowful*” is the same word for “cast down.” The same word for “soul” in these Psalms also appears in both Gospel texts. Finally, there is an echo of the words, “*my soul . . . in turmoil*,” from these Psalms in what Jesus said in John 12:27: “*Now my soul is troubled (or in turmoil)*.”

“*Turmoil*” means he is *deeply anxious, very disturbed, and greatly troubled*. So, the three repetitions in these refrains triple down on the psalmist’s experience. He feels *dejected*, which means he was *depressed*. He simply had no peace, no sense of God in his heart, no joy, and no rest.

Ultimately, the grief and depression of these Psalms find their fulfillment in Jesus’ experience in Gethsemane. They are Gethsemane’s Grief, and He experienced it for you and me, so that when we go through seasons and circumstances like this, He is able to identify with us and by His Spirit give us support, comfort, encouragement, and strength to persevere.

So . . . what do you do when life implodes? What do you do when Gethsemane’s Grief floods your soul? What do you do when everything seems to be crashing down around you? One of the most difficult experiences in the Christian life is not necessarily suffering itself, but suffering while feeling like God is absent. Have you ever had this experience?

Many believers know what it means to pray and wonder, “*Is anyone listening?*” We know what it means to open the Scriptures and feel like the words do not immediately comfort them; instead, they sound and feel empty and hollow. We know what it means to worship with other believers while carrying the weight of a private burden that no one else sees or feels. Friends, there are seasons of life when our pain and trials are so dire that they seem to overshadow God’s promises. Have you ever been there?

Do you know what happens when we go through *Gethsemane's Grief*? Do you know what it can cause? Biblical counselor Paul Tripp has a term for a condition he calls *Gospel-Amnesia*. This is when suffering causes us to forget the promises found in the person and work of Jesus’ death and resurrection. We forget the fact that He died in our place and for our sins by taking the wrath of God that was stored up for us upon Himself. We forget that He paid that penalty for our sin. We forget that He rose victoriously from the dead on the third day to save all who call on him in faith and repentance. Gethsemane’s Grief can cause us to develop *Gospel Amnesia*.

I want to work through these two Psalms and consider the psalmist’s struggle. I think we see four experiences in these Psalms that can cause *Gospel Amnesia*.

I. God’s Absence (Psalm 42:1-2)

These first two verses describe what feels like God’s absence to the psalmist. He compares his longing and thirst to a deer stranded in a desert where it can find no water anywhere. The imagery here is simply beautiful and precious. Listen to these first two verses again:

¹ *As a deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God.*
² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?*

The first thing we must see is that the psalmist’s problem is not simply that he is suffering. His greatest problem is that he feels separated from God. He feels God is absent in his suffering. Notice the threefold repetition of his longing for God. He says:

*My soul pants for you.
My soul thirsts for God.
When shall I come and appear before God?*

His longing is not primarily for God to change the circumstances of his suffering. His longing is for God Himself. Just a side note here and food for thought. How do you pray when the suffering, turmoil, and trouble hit your life like crashing waves? If you're like me, and I'm ashamed to admit, my first response is,

"Lord, please fix my problem, my situation, this person, or take some burden off of me."

My initial response is not,

"Lord, all I need is your presence. This is my great need and desire."

Listen, there is nothing wrong with bringing to God the request for Him to fix your situation. Scripture certainly invites us to do that. But here's the deal: Underneath every request is a deeper hunger and a far greater need. Ultimately it is, *"Lord, I need You."* Saint Augustine famously wrote,

"Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You."

Gethsemane's Grief can cause Gospel Amnesia and cause us to believe God's silence is God's absence. Have you ever been there? Have you ever believed that God's silence meant He is absent? Now, listen to me because I want you to hang on to that thought and that experience because we are going to keep going.

II. God's Adversaries (Psalm 42:3, 9-10)

The next experience we see in Psalm 42 that causes Gospel Amnesia is found in vv. 3 and 9-10. God and His people have enemies. Listen to these verses:

³ *My tears have been my food day and night,
while they say to me all the day long,
"Where is your God?"
⁹ I say to God, my rock:
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning
because of the oppression of the enemy?"
¹⁰ As with a deadly wound in my bones,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me all the day long,
"Where is your God?"*

Look, this is not simply relational pressure but the adversaries of God seeking to oppress God's people to the point where they abandon and forget God. They want to make life so difficult that God's people walk away from God.

Do you see the trajectory here? At the beginning of the Psalm, the psalmist felt like God's silence meant God's absence, and now God's adversaries make God seem absent. These guys were attacking him and taunting him. Their objective was for him to abandon God. So, as the pressure mounts, the attacks mount, and the taunts mount, it seems that God has abandoned him. So, the temptation for the psalmist is to walk away from God.

Gethsemane's Grief is powerful and can lead you to conclude and eventually say:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? ² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

You see, if left unchecked, the Grief of Gethsemane will cause Gospel Amnesia and will come to the wrong conclusion. If we are not careful, we will pray:

Why have you forgotten me? Since you have forgotten me, and my pain is so great, I will forget you?

Beware of Gospel Amnesia! Hold that thought and let's keep going.

III. God's Judgment (Psalm 42:7)

The third experience of Gethsemane's Grief that can cause Gospel Amnesia is the experience of God's judgment or discipline. God's discipline is actually the correct word, but sometimes when God's people experience the discipline of God, they wrongly believe they are under God's judgment. Look in v. 7:

Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.

The imagery of v. 7 is the language of judgment, but it is not judgment for God's people. I'm going to get a little ahead of myself here, but I have to in order to explain this text.

For those who are in Christ, we must remember that God's judgment against our sin fell on Jesus on the cross. He took our curse of sin on the cross. The waves of God's judgment and breakers of God's wrath repeatedly washed over Jesus on the cross. Verse 7 ultimately points to Jesus' experience on the cross. He went through that so we wouldn't have to.

So, here's the deal: In life we may experience the harsh realities of living life in a broken world. It will be painful and cause us deep grief. It may feel like judgment, but it's not. Sometimes it is God's discipline, and sometimes it is simply the harsh reality of living life in a world broken by sin. However, it is not judgment because that fell on Jesus on the cross.

We don't know why the psalmist experienced what he did, but this is very graphic language describing him going through one trial after another, like waves that keep breaking on his head and drowning him in his pain and sorrow.

It's a powerful picture. The language describes someone overwhelmed by forces beyond his control. The waves are crashing. The waters are rising. The psalmist feels like he is drowning. Many people know this feeling. Perhaps this is your experience right now.

There are seasons when troubles and trials hit with the force of a hurricane. One problem becomes another problem. One burden becomes another burden. One illness becomes another illness. One sorrow becomes another sorrow. And eventually we cry out: "*Lord, how much more can I endure?*" The psalmist does not minimize the power and persistence of the storm. He lets it build so that we feel the dryness of the parched soul needing water and the powerful force of the storm that hits with relentless destruction.

Sometimes, when we go through seasons of life like this, it can cause Gospel Amnesia. In these seasons we get a taste of Jesus' grief in the Garden of Gethsemane. It can almost be too much for us to bear. There is one more grief of Gethsemane to consider.

IV. God's Design (Psalm 42:4)

By God's sovereign design, some of us may have a melancholy disposition or demeanor. Also, we live in a world broken by sin, and our bodies don't work right. They feel the effects of the Fall, and as a result, some of us may be more prone to experiencing depression, anxiety, or being melancholy.

Listen, when you read v. 4, you get the feeling that the psalmist is fighting for joy. Perhaps the psalmist struggled with a melancholy disposition. Then, when life is difficult, and trials come in like a flood, life feels harder for them than for most. This ongoing struggle might cause them to have Gospel-Amnesia.

The Bible is filled with stories of men like David, Elijah, and Jeremiah who *seemed* to have a natural inclination to fall into dark feelings and thoughts. Likewise, church history tells us of men like the reformer Martin

Luther, the celebrated 18th-century hymn writer William Cowper, and even the beloved 19th-century pastor and preacher Charles Spurgeon who dealt with dark emotional struggles. Bottom line: Some of us are more naturally disposed to getting the “*blues*” or being melancholy.

There can be a host of other contributing factors to why we get depressed: Loss of dreams, unmet expectations, disappointment, hurt, isolation, or even a chemical imbalance may contribute to a melancholy demeanor.

However, when we go from one trial to another, and hard experiences pile up and even snowball on us, we may feel forgotten by God. It feels like one wave crashing down on us after another. The bottom line is that in these moments, all of us could develop Gospel Amnesia.

So, here are the experiences that can cause Gospel Amnesia: God’s absence, God’s adversaries, God’s discipline, and God’s design.

Here’s the question: *How do we fight Gospel Amnesia when we’re suffering?* In Psalm 42, there are chinks of light sparkling in it that culminate in the brilliant light of Gospel Awakening in Psalm 43. Listen to Psalm 43:1-4,

*Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
against an ungodly people, from the deceitful
and unjust man deliver me!*

² *For you are the God in whom I take refuge;
why have you rejected me?*

*Why do I go about mourning
because of the oppression of the enemy?*

³ *Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;*

*let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!*

⁴ *Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy,
and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.*

The overarching principle that Psalm 43 gives us to fight Gospel Amnesia through our trial, pain, suffering, and grief is to preach the gospel to our hearts. It is as if it has been building up to Psalm 43, and in vv. 1 and 3 we hear the crescendo,

“VINDICATE ME, O GOD AND DEFEND MY CAUSE.”

*Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;*

*let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!*

He’s been talking to himself throughout Psalm 42, but when we get to Psalm 43 it is as if a switch flips. Now he strongly preaches the truth of God to his heart. Listen to what he says to himself:

*“In God I have hope. God is my salvation! He has covenanted with me to save
me, and He will not break His covenant. I have no grounds to be cast down, so I
will praise Him! He will send out His light to lead me. He will send out this truth
to lead me to His dwelling.”*

No one talks to you as much as you do. You are constantly having a conversation with yourself in your mind and heart. The question is: *What are you telling yourself? What gospel are you preaching to yourself?*

The great 20th-century preacher Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his book on *Spiritual Depression*, comments on Psalms 42 and 43. He says:

Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you; they bring back the problem of yesterday. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? [You are] talking to you. Now this [psalmist's] treatment [in Psalm 42 and 43] was this; instead of allowing this [random] self to talk to [continue], he starts talking to himself, 'Why are you cast down, O my soul?' he asks. His soul had been repressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says: 'Self, listen for a moment, [now] I will speak to you.'

Martyn Lloyd-Jones is not saying we need to tell ourselves to “do more and try harder.” He’s not saying we need a bunch of empty self-talk and platitudes to help us get over our pain. He’s not saying those things at all.

The Doctor is pointing us back to what the psalmist did. The psalmist preached the truth of God’s word to his heart. He said,

“Send out your light and your truth and lead me to worship and lead me back home to Your holy presence.”

Now, for us, on this side of the cross, we need to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to our hearts. The Light is Jesus and the truth is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus said He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

So, let me show you what I mean by making application to these two Psalms, and identifying the truths you and I can preach to our hearts when we are in the darkness of Gethsemane’s Grief.

First: *Bring your unvarnished pain to God in prayer.* Friends, Psalm 42 teaches us that faith in Jesus is not pretending everything is okay. The psalmist does not hide his sorrow from God. He doesn’t minimize his trials. As a result, he brings his questions, his tears, and his confusion to God. God is not threatened by our honest prayers. He loves it when we pour out our hearts to Him [Ps. 62:5].

Second: *God’s silence does not mean God’s absence.* Throughout Psalm 42, the psalmist experienced the silence of God, but he didn’t believe God was absent. Instead, he longed to experience the presence of God like a deer that thirsts for water in the wilderness. This deer finally finds the stream and drinks deeply from that stream.

So, instead of despairing when it seems that God is silent, we need to remind our hearts that *God’s silence doesn’t mean He’s absent.* How do we know He’s not absent?

We look to the cross of Christ! We remember that Jesus was forsaken so that we would never be forsaken. He endured the silence of God on the cross, the darkness of God on the cross, and the wrath of God on the cross so we would only know the presence of the Living God in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Living Water of God that quenches our hearts when we feel the pain of suffering, trial, and depression of Gethsemane’s Grief. So, we cry out in confidence knowing that God’s silence is not His absence. He is with you, and He will never leave you or forsake you.

Third: *Keep reminding yourself of these truths.* The repetition of the refrains in Psalm 42 and 43 teaches us to keep preaching to our hearts, keep crying out, and keep going before God with our pain. We don’t know how long the psalmist waited for God to remedy his circumstances. What we do know is that because of the person and work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, by His Spirit, He is present in our pain. He will quench our thirst for His presence.

Here's one other thing: You will need to pray today's prayer tomorrow and the next day and the next. We will need to preach to our hearts and pray to the Lord Jesus, the same truths and prayers over and over. Like the psalmist, we may need to pray these words because we have no other words:

*Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
[Soul] Hope in God; for I [know I] shall again praise him,
[for Jesus is] my salvation and my God.*

Fourth: *Don't interpret who God is through your circumstances.* Remember, we have an enemy, and he will taunt us in our pain. With words like:

*Where is your God? I thought you were a Christian. If God loved you, then He
would not put you through this pain. I guess God is not good after all.*

In these moments, we need to remember v. 7:

*Deep calls to deep
at the roar of YOUR waterfalls;
all YOUR breakers and YOUR waves
have gone over me.*

It is critical how you frame the pain that comes into your life. *If you believe God is punishing you or judging you, then you have forgotten that Jesus took your punishment and judgment on the cross.* When you think like this, you'll misunderstand who God is in your pain. You'll blame God and run from your Heavenly Father instead of to Him.

Listen, this is so important: Pain may be piled on pain, but here's what we need to remember. All of this pain is Father-filtered. Verse 7 says: *Your waterfalls, Your breakers, and Your waves.* He reminds us that all of this is under God's sovereign control and purview. None of it is outside of His providence and, therefore, His purpose for your life. Remember, the enemy hates God, and he will taunt God's people in our pain. However, he has no power to do anything to us outside of God's sovereign will.

Fifth: *Find your hope in Jesus Christ.* Psalm 42–43 began with thirst and ends with hope. The psalmist began asking: *"Where is my God?"* But he ends declaring: *"My salvation and my God."*

The psalmist's circumstances have not necessarily changed. The enemies have not disappeared. The struggles have not vanished. But something has changed in his heart. His eyes have moved from his suffering to his Savior. He remembers God's covenant promise and, by faith, he leans into it for comfort.

This is the heart of Christian hope. Hope is not believing that life will always be easy. Hope is believing that God is always faithful. The thirsty soul can endure because Jesus has opened the fountain of grace. The lonely soul can endure because Christ promises His presence. The troubled soul can endure because God's steadfast love remains.

So when your soul is cast down, preach this truth: *"Hope in Jesus."* Not because you are strong enough. Not because you understand everything, but because God is faithful and that faithfulness is seen and realized in the God who gave His Son for you will never abandon you.

I want to show you one more amazing truth as we close. Look in Psalm 43:4. I want you to circle that verse. Now, listen to it again:

*Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy,
and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.*

Here's where we've been. We've fought Gospel Amnesia with Gospel Awakening, Gospel Preaching, and now we conclude with Gospel Growth.

Watch this in Psalm 43:4 because this is amazing. Now, listen closely because I'm not saying the psalmist got to this place immediately. But at some point the switch was flipped in his heart, and he began to lead again.

Remember, v. 3: *God lead me with your light and truth*. Now, in v. 4, he says *he will go to God's altar with exceeding joy and will lead God's people in worship again*.

This is Gospel Growth. His difficulty became his discipleship. His suffering became his sanctification. His grief became his growth in godliness. Eventually, his pain became his platform. His trial became his testimony. His misery became his ministry.¹

If you are in the Grief of Gethsemane right now, I'm not saying you will come through it quickly, but you will come through it, and you will experience Gospel growth because of it. Through Jesus suffering in Gethsemane, by Him being cast down in your place, and Him going through the turmoil of His trial, His abandonment by His disciples, His experiencing the curse in your place and being your salvation, He will take your difficulty and deepen your discipleship. He will take your suffering and grow your sanctification. He will take your grief and grow your godliness. He will take your pain and make it your platform. He will take your trial and make it become your testimony. He will transform your misery so that it becomes your ministry.

. Listen, I'm not a big contemporary Christian music guy. As a matter of fact, I rarely listen to contemporary Christian radio. I listen to old stuff or people who write and produce theologically rich hymns.

However, one of my favorite Christian songs is by a band called Casting Crowns. They wrote a song called *Praise You in This Storm* in 2005. It captures the message of Psalms 42 and 43. Listen to the words:

*I was sure by now
That You would have reached down
And wiped our tears away
Stepped in and saved the day
But once again, I say amen
And it's still raining
[Pre-Chorus]: As the thunder rolls
I barely hear Your whisper through the rain
"I'm with you"
And as Your mercy falls
I'll raise my hands
And praise the God who gives
And takes away
[Chorus]: And I'll praise You in this storm
And I will lift my hands
For You are who You are
No matter where I am
And every tear I've cried
You hold in Your hand
You never left my side
And though my heart is torn
I will praise You in this storm*

¹ I can't take credit for these last three. I heard them in Josh Howerton sermon he preached on May 31, 2026. I thought they were helpful so I built on the idea of how suffering serves God's purposes and added my own.