

Session 4 – Psalms 42 & 43

Psalm 42

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?
My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
'Where is your God?'

These things I remember as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.

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

My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon – from Mount Mizar.
Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers have swept over me.
By day the Lord directs his love,
at night his song is with me –
a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God my Rock,
'Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?'

My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'

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

Psalm 43

Vindicate me, my God, and plead my cause
against an unfaithful nation.
Rescue me from those who are
deceitful and wicked.

You are God my stronghold.
Why have you rejected me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?
Send me your light and your faithful care,
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy mountain,
to the place where you dwell.
Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God, my joy and my delight.
I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.

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

Background

In various Hebrew manuscripts, Psalms 42 & 43 are shown as one psalm. Hopefully as we go through them, we'll see the sense of this.

The heading for Psalm 42 in most versions is 'For the Director of Music. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah.' Like so many others, their story is one of failure (a big one!) but also redemption.

What's gone wrong?

Depression can be defined as 'An emotional state of dejection and sadness ranging from mild discouragement and downheartedness to feelings of utter hopelessness and despair' (WHO)

We are not able to definitively say that the psalmist had depression but if we apply the rigorous scientific duck test – "If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck" – then we can at least say he probably had some form of depression.



Let's do the duck test! Look for examples where the various emotions in the WHO definition are expressed – dejection, sadness, discouragement, downheartedness, utter hopelessness and despair.

Most often, the feelings and emotions associated with depression ‘usually occur for a reason – often in the face of a serious difficulty. Most of the serious life events that cause depression are in some way or another connected to loss; the loss of a sense of worth, of an important relationship or role ...’ (Insight into Depression – CWR, p14-15).



Can you work out the loss that might be behind this outpouring of despair?

The refrain

The psalmist is no longer speaking to God but is **talking to himself**.

‘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, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man’s treatment [in Psalm 42] was this; instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself, ‘Why art thou 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, I will speak to you’. (Dr Martin Lloyd-Jones, ‘Spiritual Depression’)

Its importance within the structure of the psalm is clear as **it occurs unaltered on three occasions**.

Within their Jewish scriptures, there was what was known as ‘wisdom literature.’ These included books like Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Some of the Psalms also have a ‘wisdom’ label with the meaning of the word ‘maskil’ not being totally clear but perhaps if it has a meaning it is ‘wisdom’.

The psalmist is imparting wisdom here. He’s **not** giving us the Biblical solution to depression or 4 steps to freedom from depression. This is wise counsel which is helpful to us all when we are discouraged or despairing of our situation or life itself.

Let’s see what this wisdom is:

<p><i>Why, my soul, are you downcast?</i></p>	<p><i>I need to be honest and recognise that I have a problem.</i></p>
<p><i>Why so disturbed within me?</i></p>	
<p><i>Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him,</i></p>	
<p><i>my Saviour and my God</i></p>	



And finally ... do you think that the psalmist ultimately ends up in a good place?