



LESSON 15: DOWN IN THE (SPIRITUAL) DUMPS

PSALMS 42/43

BACKGROUND

Psalms 42/43 are *Songs of Lament*; psalms that express distress and sorrow as they appeal to God for deliverance. When you read these psalms, it will be obvious that they go together. Most Bible scholars consider them to be originally one psalm. (Chapter divisions in the Bible are mostly man-made.)

The inscription at the beginning of *Psalms 42* indicates that it is a *maskil* (a musical term) of the Sons of Korah. The Sons of Korah were a family of singers in Israel who passed along their musical office from generation to generation. They were known to be outstanding musicians and several of the Psalms come from them.

In Israel, pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate the festivals of *Passover*, *Firstfruits*, and *Tabernacles*. Pilgrims presented their offerings and with great rejoicing, worshipped together. *Psalms 42/43* are the poetic expression of a person (a *Son of Korah*) who is spiritually discouraged because he is not

able (for unknown reasons) to go to the temple in Jerusalem and help lead worship – something he loves to do! Because of his circumstances, God seems distant and his soul downcast.

We, too, may find ourselves in the "spiritual dumps" for one reason or another. Perhaps, because of some extenuating circumstances, we are not able to do what God has called and gifted us to do. Maybe we have a deep, unfulfilled desire that seems like it will never be satisfied. It could be that our "enemies" have the upper hand and our circumstances seem more than we can handle. Sometimes, for no discernable reason, God just seems distant or absent. Examining how this *Son of Korah* handled his spiritual depression will help us cope with ours.

As you read these psalms, notice the pattern of *Lament . . . Hope . . . Lament . . . Hope*, etc. We will use this pattern as we study and meditate on *Psalms 42/43*.

DISCUSSION STARTER

- What is the longest you ever had to go without being able to quench a strong thirst? How did it make you feel?

PREPARATION

1. Before you read *Psalms 42/43*, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth (John 16:13). We have been using the prayer, *Holy Spirit, think through me until your ideas become my ideas*, or King David's prayer, *Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law*.
2. Read *Psalms 42/43* slowly and thoughtfully in at least two translations. Try reading these psalms *out loud*, letting your imagination "see" and "feel" what the psalmist is describing.
3. Write down some word pictures or phrases from *Psalms 42/43* that resonate with *your* soul right now.

QUESTIONS

LAMENT: PSALM 42:1-4

4. What does the psalmist desire?

What word pictures show the depth of his desire?

5. *Reflect* on the images of a thirsty deer and flowing streams. Is thirst a pleasant sensation? What function does thirst serve? Is thirst necessary? How does all this relate to our desire for God?

♥ What does the absence of God feel like to you?

♥ Make your own metaphor: As a _____, so my soul _____ for you.

♥ In 42:2, the psalmist asks to "meet with God". How do you meet with God? What happens in your soul when you meet with God?

6. The psalmist compares God to water. Write every way you can think of that *God* is like *water*. (You may want to consider the following references in your answer: **Revelation 21:6 and 22:17; John 7:38-39; Jeremiah 2:13.**)

♥ Describe a time you were thirsty for God and how your thirst was quenched.

♥ How thirsty are you for God right now? What could a person do if they didn't feel thirsty for God, but wanted to?

7. What does the psalmist's suffering cause him to do? **42:4**

How can memories be helpful and also unhelpful?

HOPE: PSALM 42:5

8. What does the Psalmist do to help himself cope with his distress?

What phrases in his dialogue reflect his doubt and which ones reflect his hope?

HOPE - confident expectation. When we hope, God hasn't showed up yet, but we are poised and waiting for when he will. Hope, in essence, is waiting for God to act, confident he will. Hope focuses on all that is true about God – his character and his actions. Hope says, "You are my God no matter how long I have to wait, because I know You will come through." Hope leads us away from despair and becomes our comfort in a hard time.

♥ What does the psalmist say he will do when he is discouraged?

♥ What is your strategy for hope during a hard time?

LAMENT: PSALM 42:6-7

9. In 42:6, what does the psalmist decide to do?

How do you think this will help his downcast soul?

♥ Describe a time you felt alive and close to God. Would remembering this during a hard time comfort you? Why or why not?

10. How has the water imagery changed in 42:7 from that in 42:1-2?

What does the water signify now?

Do you see the water in 42:7 as a positive or negative image? Explain your answer.

♥ Picture a time you have been close to a large waterfall, swift rapids or crashing waves. How does the strength and energy of these waters relate to how the psalmist is feeling?

HOPE: PSALM 42:8

11. How would the actions of both God and the psalmist, as described in 42:8, encourage hope during a difficult situation?

♥ What are some specific things you could choose to do, when you are discouraged, that would strengthen your hope in God?

LAMENT: PSALM 42:9-10

12. In his misery, what questions does the psalmist ask God in 42:9?

♥ Is it okay to question God when we are discouraged? (**Matthew 27:46**) What purpose does it serve?

13. Although the psalmist basically asks the same question in 42:9 that his foes ask in 42:3 and 10, what is the difference?

♥ How do those close to you relate to you when you are down in the spiritual dumps? Do they help or hinder? What can you do for others when they are spiritually discouraged?

♥ What is the purpose of the psalmist telling God what he is feeling and how his enemies are treating him?

HOPE: PSALM 42:11

14. When you are spiritually discouraged, what is the value of entering a dialogue with yourself?

♥ What is the difference between talking to yourself and letting self talk to you?

LAMENT: PSALM 43:1-2

15. How does the psalmist's statements in **43:1-2** reflect the equation *Doubt + Faith = Hope*?

HOPE: PSALM 43:3-5

16. How does the psalmist express confidence that God will hear and answer his prayer?

♥ What pictures come to mind when you think of God sending forth his **truth** and **light**? How does God's truth and light help us when we are discouraged?

17. What does the psalmist plan to do when God delivers him?

♥ How can making plans for what you will do when the hard time is over help you when your soul is still downcast?

18. What do you plan to do when God delivers you from your hard time?

RESPONSE:

We all get discouraged and disheartened at various times for various reasons. These are uncomfortable times when we may feel that God is distant or even absent. Discouragement often feels like an unquenched thirst, but the thirst serves a purpose. It drives us, like the panting deer, to the heart of God. God is our only hope and the only one who can bring comfort and hope to our thirsty and longing souls.

What are you discouraged about right now or what is something you deeply desire, but for various reasons, you cannot have or experience right now? Tell God about it. Follow the psalmist's example and pour out your soul, expressing what is on your heart. *In the space below, write a prayer to God telling him what you are feeling. Like the psalmist, tell God what you would like him to do.*

Listen to God through his Word. Write out a verse from *Psalm 42/43* that best speaks to your heart right now. Express how this verse comforts you or write what you think God is saying to you through this verse.

Ask God a question. Form your own question or use one of the following: God, what do you want me to see? How do you want me to handle this? What should I do? How will you comfort me? What do you want to say to me? How will you use this for good?

Let God answer your question by writing a letter from God to you. Don't be concerned if these are God's words or not. You can evaluate them later. Just write and let the words flow like water. What do you *think* God would say to you? (As you write, you may want to imagine yourself in a scene of a Gospel story, sitting and talking with Jesus.) **Write your letter on the back of this page.**