

Our focus for worship today is: *Desperation for God*

I. **OPENING PRAYER:** Pray for our souls to hope in God and praise Him in expectation, amidst the seemingly dry and challenging seasons of life.

II. **COMMUNITY CONNECTION:**

Share a time when you were famished or extremely thirsty for a prolonged period. How did the waiting affect your mind, body, and spirit?
Describe the experience of finally tasting food or drink. Compare that incident to how you long for God. To what degree do you long for Him?

III. **CHRIST CONNECTION: PSALM 42**

As a psalm to be sung by the congregation, the structure of Psalm 42 is similar to our modern hymns and praise songs. The worship leaders – sons of Korah – wrote this song with 2 verses (v1-4 & 6-10) each followed by a repeated refrain found in v5 and v11. The repeated chorus is a song tool to emphasize and highlight the truth declared in those lyrics. It is a way to keep this truth at the forefront of the singer and listener's attention. Given this unique structure, the outline of today's discussion will focus on the 2 verses as separate **sections A & B**. For **heading C**, we address the repeated refrain as one unit of thought.

A. WHEN I FEEL DRY & DISTANT, I AM DESPERATE FOR GOD'S PRESENCE & PEOPLE

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.*

"...So my soul pants for You, O God." The psalm begins with an interesting picture of a soul *panting* for God. *Panting* depicts one who is gasping and heaving with a sort of breathlessness seen in a dehydrated animal. The deer in this Psalm analogy is not one in a luscious green meadow. This deer is likely lost in an arid and dry scorched land searching for a water source. Like the parched deer, we desperately crave and thirst after God. *Panting & thirsting* is significantly more than a desire. This longing manifests in all our being – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It shakes us to our core for we are fixated on Him to satisfy our deepest need. He is our Life as He is the living God. Not a lifeless idol, but the one true living God. He is the Living Water for our thirsty souls. Also, He is the living God for He is the resurrected Lord. Not dead in the grave, but alive and powerful to save.

"When shall I come and appear before God?" This phrase may indicate that this Psalm may have been written during the exile in Babylonian captivity. Without a temple and or a homeland, the Israelites were prisoners in a foreign land. Thus they longed to return to the House of God to experience His presence and participate in His worship. In this season of life, they felt distant from God. We can hear the psalmist's yearning for God's presence amidst this spiritual desert. To add insult to injury, their enemies mocked God with the constant challenge: Where is your God? It is not just "Where is God?" but "Where is *your* God?" *Your God* assails the beloved fellowship between God and His people. Not only did they imply that God abandon them but assaulted His character by questioning His goodness and compassion. This mockery of God brings His people to weep incessantly. This parallel imagery of thirsting for God and feeding on tears is startling.

"These things I remember...I used to go along with the throng...to the house of God..." The writer recalls the days when God's name was only exalted and not belittled. A time when God's praise and honor was the focus of celebration of festivities. He relives in his mind the fellowship experienced with other worshippers as they sang with joy. Further, he had the privilege of being the lead worshipper in the procession of praise. These memories weighed heavy on his heart. He longed being with God's people and hearing God's praise echoing through the streets. Those streets are now silent. The house of God is now rubble. They were indeed desperate. Desperate for God's presence and His praise once again.

- Describe a time when you felt dry or distant from God. Why did that come to be? What did you miss about the nearness of God?
- How are you affected by words that mock God or His character? Share how you responded/reacted when someone questioned, "Where is your God?"
- Share what it would mean to hear God praised in the full assembly again. How is our longing for God's people a reflection of the depth of our relationship with God?

B. WHEN I AM OVERWHELMED & OVERBURDENED, I AM REMINDED OF GOD'S LOVE & LULLABY

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 *The LORD 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?"*

"...my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You..." While in a distant land heading east towards Babylon, the writer chooses to remember God. The word *remember* is not only to bring back to mind but to profess and say aloud. Remembering God is to awaken your mind to His character, His promises and His works. In the mire of his soul's despair, he retells his soul about God.

"Deep calls to deep...Your waves have rolled over me." The expression of *deep calls to deep* speaks of a constant deluge of water, where it pulls you down progressively deeper. Like a swimmer caught in a powerful undercurrent, the writer is overwhelmed by the troubles and challenges in his life. *Your breakers*. These trials are not random occurrences with malicious intent, but sovereignly ordained by his good God. While the experience can feel crushing, the writer finds solace that God is in control and His will is good.

"The Lord will command His lovingkindness...His song will be with me..." Even though he feels like he is drowning by the waves of life, he sees the sun piercing through the storm clouds. He is reminded of the God's love. All throughout the day, the Lord's lovingkindness is put on full display for all to see. Every act, every provision, experienced by every creature is an act ordered and instructed by God in His grace and mercy. From the warmth of the sun to the complex conversion of toxic CO2 to breathable oxygen by photosynthesis – all is directed by the Sovereign will of God in love. Furthermore, in the coolness of night, God's melody lulls us to rest each night. God's lullaby is heard in the song of His salvation accompanied by the orchestra of creation as it echoes nightly across His created universe. What does all of these reminders drive the psalmist to do? It brings him to his knees. It drives him to pray. Pray to the God over his life. The God who holds his life in His hands.

"I will say to God my rock, Why have you forgotten me..." During his prayerful communion with God - as his unshakeable foundation – the psalmist articulates the burdens on his heart. He asks not to doubt God's goodness, but rather to seek God's answers. He trusts that there is a purpose behind these trials and sufferings. He seeks God to know His purpose. While he may not receive all the answers specifically, the psalmist is confident of God's power and strength as his Rock.

- Have you ever felt like you were drowning in your troubles? What sustained you when you felt overwhelmed?
- List different ways the Lord reminds us of His lovingkindness every day. What are the songs that God has used to minister to you when your soul was burdened?
- Describe the difference between questioning God and seeking God with questions. What does the difference reveal about our heart?

C. WHEN I AM DISTURBED & DESPAIRING, I AM CONFRONTED WITH A CHORUS OF HOPE IN MY GOD & HIS PRAISE

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.*

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.*

"Why are you in despair, O my soul..." After delineating each experience in v1-4 and v6-10, the psalmist confronts his despairing and disturbed soul with poignant rhetorical questions: Why...Why? He examines and questions the condition of his own soul. He does not allow His soul to wallow in despondency and gloom. Even while acknowledging emotions from the troubles and trials, he does not leave it there. He moves the focus from the circumstances to the solution. He transfers the spotlight from the emotion to the Eternal One. Yes, his despair is real. The dryness and distance are real. The troubles overwhelming and burdening is real. But even more so, he reminds himself that God's hope is real. This hope in God is the light that overcomes any darkness of one's soul. It is the radiance that conquers any despair. It can resurrect any heart from the any depths of discouragement to the heights of praise.

Hope in God. The psalmist commands his soul to hope, even when it is hard to hope. He repeats this refrain twice as the pinnacle of the Psalm. Hope is the climax of the chorus. *Hope in God.* It is not hope in yourself. Not hope in humanity. Not hope in the church. Not even hope in hope. It is hope in God. The living God. The resurrected God. That is why our soul can hope. *Hope* is not a wishful thought or optimistic desire. *Hope* is waiting with confident expectation. It is the confidence in the person in whom you place that trust. It is hope in the God of the universe. The God of the resurrection. The God of life. The God who is our life.

"For the help of His presence...the help of my countenance..." How does God help? God answers with Himself. His presence is the only provision we need. It is the only help we need for our souls. Synonyms for *help* in the Hebrew is *deliverance* or *salvation*. Thus, we hope because of His delivers us by His presence. His presence is in His Word speaking to our weary souls. His presence in the person of Christ – whose blood defends against the accusations of the enemy and intercedes for us before the Father. His presence dwells in us by His Spirit– who strengthens us in our weakness and helps us to endure and persevere. Ultimately, our hope in God will find its fulfillment not only here on earth but in His glorious presence in Heaven. That is why we have an eternal hope in an eternal God. With that hope, our downcast faces will be lifted up and transform to reflect the glory of our God and Christ.

"...for I shall yet praise Him..." Although it may be dark and dim at this moment, we know that God will be praised in the end. This is a guarantee. He is not done with us yet. Our story is not finished at this moment. We may be struggling to sing now, but we will be victorious participants in His worship. We will exalt Him for His deliverance. For He will deliver. He is our Savior. He is our God. He is our hope. To all our souls, He is our hope. We will yet praise Him – our Hope and our God!

- What solutions do we often turn towards when we are in a spiritual depression? How is it different than the world's approach to despair?
- Why do we need to tell ourselves to "Hope in God?" What does it look like to hope in God daily? Describe how our hope in God translates in the way we interact with the Word, prayer, worship & fellowship.
- Share how God's presence has been your help. Share how God's presence uplifted you in difficult times.
- Commit this repeated chorus in verses 5 & 11 to memory in anticipation of His answer and help.

ROMANS 8:28-39

Is your soul troubled by the pandemic? Is your heart in disturbed by injustices? Is your spirit anxious by the economy? May we tell our souls to hope in God. Trust in the Sovereignty of God. Trust in the Goodness of God. Trust in the ability of God. Trust in the power of God. As we see the radical change of our lives by His gracious will, His effectual call, His powerful Word, His sufficient work, and His enduring seal of the Holy spirit – we can put our complete confidence in God. It is evident in our new nature. In our blood bought relationship with Him. Nothing will separate us from Him. Not any trouble. Not any trial. Not even our sin. Not even ourselves. We rest in His Sovereign goodness and grace – in this broken world until our eternal glory with Him.

- How does God's Sovereignty give you hope in suffering? In sickness? In a pandemic?

IV. CARE CONNECTION:

Spend time praying for:

- Our downcast souls to be awakened by our true hope in God
- Unity in the church
- All affected by COVID virus & illnesses
- Care needs / concerns
- Unbelieving friends & family