

# PSALMS: OBEDIENCE AND DESIRE

p s a l m 4 2 : D e s p a i r i n g

## Questions for Personal Study

Read through Psalm 42 a few times. What emotions are expressed?  
What is the situation the Psalmist is in? How do you know?  
In what ways do you feel like you can relate to this Psalm?  
What does the Psalmist do with his emotions? Who does he speak to?  
How might this Psalm help you in hardship and trial? Why?

## Questions for Study in Community

Read through the Psalm a few times together. What stands out?  
Read it again - what is the Psalmist longing for? What does he need?  
Notice the repeated refrain (also in Psalm 43). What is he hoping for? Why?  
The Psalmist is essentially talking to himself. Why? What is he doing?

## Questions for Staying on Mission

What does this Psalm say for those who think strong emotions are ungodly?  
What does this Psalm say to those who think Christians should be happy?  
How might the Psalms in general help someone with doubts about God?

## On Seeing Jesus in the Psalms

Whenever we read the Psalms there is a subtle temptation to apply them directly to ourselves. We need to remember that these poems come from within the Story of God and his workings amongst this people called Israel. These people had a particular experience of God that shaped their picture of Him. They had no idea that God would fulfill his promises by stepping into this world as a man, living a perfect life, and dying a substitutionary death. But we do. We know where the Story is headed, and we must read the Psalms in that light.

As you read, think particularly about how the commands, experiences, and emotions of the psalmist are connected to Jesus. Filter the verses through the cross, reflecting on what they tell us about the need for a Savior in order to bring sinful people into the presence of a holy God. Never forget that though God's grace to you is free, you enjoy your fellowship with God at a great price - God crushed his own Son in order to bring *you* into his courts with joy!

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## A Study in the Psalms

The Old Testament book of Psalms is a collection of prayers, songs, and poems that Israel used in worship of One True God. The reformer John Calvin once called the Psalms an “anatomy of all the parts of the soul,” because in them we see human emotions in all their perplexities colliding head-on with the commands and claims of God. The title of this series, “Obedience and Desire” comes from the central question posed to us by the language of the Psalms: “How is it possible to obey God in the midst of our inmost thoughts and emotions?” In this 4 week series in the book of Psalms our goal is to gain a deeper understanding of God, life, and ourselves. We approach this goal keeping these three things in mind:

First, the Psalms are instructive. They instruct us on who God is, who we are, and how we are to relate to God. The psalms are full of truth for the mind, directing us to a life of rightfully honoring and God. This is the *obedience* part of our series title.

Second, the Psalms are poems. They are meant to stir us deep within and help us to channel our affections for God. The psalmists are laying open their inmost thoughts, desires, and emotions before God, inviting us to examine the status of our own hearts. This is the *desire* part of our series title.

Finally, the Psalms lead us to Jesus. The Psalms point forward to the coming of a Savior, one who mediates between God and men, one who invites us into the joyful obedience the Psalms describe. In each Psalm, we'll keep our eyes open for how we are being pointed forward to the person and work of Jesus.

We'll approach our study of Psalm 42 by asking 3 basic questions derived from the 3 aspects of the Psalms we described above.

## Psalm 42: Emotions

Aspect One - Poetry used to stir our affections and emotions: What is the emotional state of the psalmist? What has been stirred in him?

He is desperate. In verse 1 he states that his soul pants for God.

He is full of sorrow; He is mournful. In verse 3 he states that his tears have been his food day and night; in other words, he is so discouraged that he can't even eat. His soul is cast down & in turmoil (verse 5, 11).

He feels abandoned (verse 9). He doesn't see any signs of God's presence in his life and he is beginning to despair that God has forgotten him altogether. Though he knows in his head that it isn't true, he looks at his circumstances and makes an emotional response.

He is being taunted and ridiculed by his foes, perhaps because it seems that God has so abandoned him (verse 3b, 10). It is not just that he is depressed on the inside; rather, he is also experiencing real mockery and taunting from his enemies.

The emotional state of the psalmist is severely low. This is what would be called a Psalm of Lament, as it is an expression of this man's grief. Not only is his sorrow caused by an inability to praise God the way he would like to, but also he is being taunted and oppressed by others. Here is a man who is tormented from within and from without. He is under pressure from his foes, and he wonders where God is in all this.

#### **Psalm 42: Instruction**

Aspect Two – Instruction: What are the ways in which this psalmist responds to his emotions and circumstances?

He pursues God; he desires only God (verse 1, 2). Despite the discouragement and despair, he is aware that his deepest need is to meet with God. He wants God more than anything.

He remembers the gathering of God's people as they would praise and rejoice in God (verse 4). He longs for those days again, the times of sweet fellowship and worship when the joy of the Lord was overflowing in his life.

He examines his soul and proclaims truth to himself (verse 5, 11). Rather than simply let his emotions sway him, he preaches to himself the reality of God's presence and care for him despite how it seems or how he feels.

He declares that God is sovereign and in control (verse 7). He reminds himself that God is in this situation even though it seems like he is not.

He sings of God's mercy and love (verse 8). Despite feeling so down, the Psalmist stirs his emotions to glorify God because God is merciful and full of love even when he doesn't feel like that is true.

The important thing to consider here is that the man does not ask God to change his circumstances. The psalmist recognizes that God is sovereign and in control, and the man's desire is to only be in the presence of God. Rather than pray for peace in his circumstance, the Psalmist attempts to get his heart to rest in the truth of God's merciful, gracious love toward him.

#### **Psalm 42: Grace**

Aspect Three – Grace: Why does the psalmist respond this way? How does this psalm point to Jesus?

In the midst of terrible circumstances and severe emotions, the psalmist does not lose sight of God's grace and mercy and steadfast love. He acknowledges that God is in control and is therefore able to encourage himself to "Hope in God", because God is a God of salvation.

As Christians, we are able to have hope in midst of despairing circumstances by remembering God's love for us in Jesus Christ. Because of Christ, we have salvation that is not based off our performance or our circumstances. Jesus' death on the cross, removes our own sin and even the sins people commit against us. Therefore we can have hope, even when being persecuted or taunted by others.