

“TALKING TO YOUR SOUL.”
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First Christian Reformed Church
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Scripture Texts: Psalm 42 (and 43)

Prayer: Holy Father, may the words of my mouth and the responses of all our hearts glorify you, exalt Jesus, honor your Word and edify your people according to our need. Come, Holy Spirit, help us I pray.

Introduction.

We have been using this overflowing glass as a symbol of God’s overflowing grace to us in the Gospel. But what about when life doesn’t feel like that at all? What about when life doesn’t even feel half full or half empty, but completely empty? What about when we feel like we got nothing?

Does it mean you aren’t a Christian? Does it mean you aren’t a good Christian? Does it mean that you have been left out or left behind? Remember David is a mature believer. What do we do when life empties our glass? What do we do when we feel like the Psalmist and find more why questions than answers?

Why have you forgotten me?
Why do I go about mourning?
Why have you rejected me?
Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why are you in turmoil within me?

It’s OK to ask why questions. Jesus asked why on the cross, “Why have you forsaken me?”

Psalm 42.

Clearly the Psalmist is in trouble, he is unhappy, his soul is troubled, stirred up, in turmoil. Life is feeling pretty empty. Scholars think this psalm was written by David while he was in exile having fled Jerusalem when his son Absalom usurped the throne.

The Psalmist gives us some hints as to the current state of his soul and why he is experiencing discouragement and despair and despondency.

He is prevented from joining others in public worship at the House of God in Jerusalem. This might compare to someone among us who is confined at home or in a care facility and unable to join their fellow worshippers on Sundays.

He is feeling either distant from God, that he can't get to God and God has forgotten him or abandoned him. He is under attack, he has enemies, those who don't like him and are talking about him and giving him grief.

For us these enemies don't have to be physical, they can be mental, emotional, spiritual. They can be people who have it in for us, or are critical of us, or are making our life difficult. They can be people who place great demands on us.

Whatever the threat, it is a time that tests and tries the soul, and it can lead to wilderness like experiences, to the dark night of the soul, to crying out how long O Lord, and why, why, why.

Looking at this Psalmist you can hear it in his voice and see it on his face. It looks like he is carrying the burdens of the whole world on his back.

He's lower than a snake's belly in a wagon rut. He is anxious, worried, fearful, downtrodden. He is worried about the future and what's going to happen. It is like life is just piling on and spiraling out of control.

It affects his appetite. Have you ever had tears for breakfast, lunch and dinner? We all have had experiences when food doesn't taste good or appeal to us.

And then on top of all of this is the devil, always in the mix stirring things up, taking advantage of our weakness, finding the chink in the armor, the Achilles heel. His goal is to bring all of us down by whatever and any means. Satan wants to get us all to a place like the Psalmist.

This is a very common condition that afflicts all people, but especially God's people. It is so common it is spoken of many times in Scripture and we see many of God's people and leaders struggling with it.

Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Job, Naomi, Elijah, David, John the Baptist, Paul. And then if you read church history there are countless stories of the saints through the centuries wrestling with their own downcast souls and inner turmoil and growing weary in well doing.

That God cares about us in these times is evident in how much time is devoted to it in Scripture and how honestly it is addressed in the lives of His people. The Bible is the most honest book there is, never glossing over our human condition and our trials and troubles.

The bottom line is when we are down, discouraged, defeated, worried, anxious, fearful, what we are really dealing with is *unbelief*, lack of faith and lack of trust in God.

Unbelief is when we are listening more to the devil or more to our own voices in our heads and not to the truth of God's Word, to the truth of the Gospel.

When we get down we forget God, and when we forget God we get down. The Psalmist has forgotten God and thinks God has forgotten him. He has forgotten God's power and God's love and God's relationship with him, who God is and what God has done.

We all do this. We all have bouts of spiritual dementia or spiritual Alzheimer's, spiritual forgetfulness. We start to have doubts.

Self-talk starts in the first thing in the morning when we walk up. It reminds us of all our problems and troubles, it reminds us of all the negative things going on in our lives. It nags us, it starts the tapes (podcasts, playlists) playing, it rehashes old conversations, old arguments, old bad experiences. It reminds us of our sins and failures and shortcomings and where we don't measure up.

Have you ever noticed how much of your thinking is based on what you are feeling rather than on what is real? Most of us think with our feelings, with our gut. Our feelings and emotions control our thoughts and seem to be the final authority.

Why are you downcast, O my soul?

So, what is to be done? What's the treatment? What's the cure?

The Psalmist gives it to us. Instead of continuing to circle the drain, instead of continuing to focus on the problems, instead of listening to the voices in his head, or stewing in his own juices, he takes matters into his own hands, he gets a grip on himself and instead of listening to himself, he talks to himself.

We must talk to ourselves, rather than letting ourselves talk to us. Much of the unhappiness in our lives and much of the false thinking in our lives comes from listening to our sinful selves rather than talking back to our self.

Don't be passive with yourself and let yourself dictate the conversation. He will drag you down. Don't let that inner man, that inner voice wins the argument.

Stand up and say, "Self, listen up. Soul be quiet, I have something to say to you. I am done listening to you and now I am going to tell you what you need to hear."

Psalm 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.

You have to get serious with yourself, grab yourself by the shoulders and give yourself a shake to get your attention and be the one to start asking the questions and preach to yourself.

"Self, why are you down and discouraged, why are you beating me up? What business do you have of being downcast, of being all upset and in turmoil?"

Get strong, get forceful. Like you would to someone you know and love who is mired in negative and false thinking. Don't surrender to your emotions, take control of them.

Like when Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." That's enough of that kind of talk.

"Soul stop looking to yourself and put your hope in God. Do you know who God is, do you know what God has done, do you know what God has said in His Word and promised to do? Soul, you have forgotten some things, therefore I will remember and remind you."

I am created by God for His glory and He has made me in His very image. He sent His only Son to the cross to die for me, so we could be forgiven and reconciled. My worst sins are forgiven, my worst failures are overcome by God's grace. God takes those who are weak and foolish and uses them for His glory so there is no boasting.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

He is like the prodigal's father, who is ever watching and waiting for me to return from the far country of my sin and come into his embrace. He is ready to forgive before I am ready to confess.

Satan is a defeated enemy, he can't touch me or do anything that God has not first approved and will use for His glory and my good.

My salvation is fixed and secure and kept in heaven for me.

These trials and troubles are only to refine me and make my faith stronger.

God cannot ever leave me or forsake me.

God is absolutely sovereign and in control of all of His creation, even over my troubles.

The hairs of my head are numbered.

Not a sparrow falls to the ground, that God doesn't know it.

He knows my thoughts before I think them.

He clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of the air, am I not of more value to Him?

God is the God of my salvation and He is my God.

God is my God, what can man do to me?

The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? (Psalm 118:6)

If God is for me who can be against me.

God is able to do even more than I can ask or imagine.

Soul, God is a God of grace and all His ways toward me are grace and can only be grace.

All God's ways for me lead to righteousness and glory.

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Listen, self: If God is for you, who can be against you? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for you, how will he not also with him graciously give you all things? Who shall bring any charge against you as God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died — more than that, who was raised — who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for you. Who shall separate you from the love of Christ? (Romans 8:31–35 paraphrased)

Psalm 73:26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

And then as a final act of defiance, tell your soul that rather than continuing to be sad, you are going to sing, to worship God, to praise Him because He is your God and He is your salvation, and you are going to begin the praise and thanks in faith, before the deliverance, before the relief.

Implications and application.

First, notice what happens when life gets hard, when we experience heartache or affliction and we feel desperate. There is a sense in which when life gets really hard, it also gets really simple. Trouble boils life down to the bare bones, the bare facts. What do we need? Where do we turn?

Notice the Psalmist doesn't seek relief from his situation or his enemy's destruction, he doesn't ask for comfort, an easier life, or that things would get back to the way they were. He seeks God Himself. Not the gifts of God, just God, sweet fellowship with God.

My hope is in God. I desire to be in the House of God, to sing and praise God.
My soul pants for you, O God, my soul thirsts for you like a parched man in a desert.

Thirst is an unrelenting appetite. When you are dying of thirst, it doesn't let you forget for a moment. When you desire God with that kind of appetite it will be well with your soul, regardless of what your circumstances are.

Second, notice his desire for corporate worship. Too many people in crisis retreat into isolation. Don't neglect this or under value it. What is happening here is supernatural, the Spirit of the living God is here, God meets us here, engages us here, speaks to us here, and ministers to us through each other. This is where God builds and strengthens our faith, it is a corporate affair.

Third, notice the repetition. David doesn't preach the Gospel to himself once or even twice but three times (42:5, 11, 43:5). He is not going to give any ground to the enemy, to his soul in the grip of grief or despair. He is relentless, fighting fear with faith, fighting sorrow with hope.

This is why memorizing Scripture is so important. We need ready access to the truth, to be able to recall and remember what God says. Get His voice in your head.

Fourth, practice this at home, practice it until you get really good at it. Preach it while you are driving, shaving, doing dishes, on the internet, at the doctor, when thinking about that issue at home or at work, when you are discouraged, after you fail.

And help others practice it. Help your spouse. Phama is one of the best preachers of the Gospel to me. I struggle with fear and doubt and discouragement and heaviness and carrying the burdens of the church on my shoulders. I spout off negative thoughts and feelings and she is on it like a duck on a June bug. She will say, "Don't talk to my husband that way. That's not true, that's a lie right out of the pit of hell."

Help your spouse recognize the lies and help them preach the Gospel. Help your kids. Call out the self-talk that is false, help them learn the truth by applying Scripture, teaching the Gospel. You know how kids are controlled by their emotions and feelings and have a hard time controlling them. They need help talking back to their emotions, reigning them in.

And yes, I know how easy this is to say since I only raised boys. If you have some drama queens in your house you have a harder job, but don't give up.

Preaching the Gospel to ourselves every day lifts us out of the pit of despair and despondency, out of fear and hopelessness. It gets our focus off ourselves and our empty glass and onto Jesus and His full glass of grace.

We have a far better Gospel than David, or a far more complete Gospel to preach to ourselves, with a far greater hope as we have seen the fulfilment of God's faithfulness to all His promises.

May the Lord increase your hunger and your thirst for God. And may he grant your desire through the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Psalm 42:1-2 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.

Psalm 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.