

# The Downcast Soul

## Psalm 42

### Introduction

One of the things that many people are drawn to in the Psalms is the fact that they deal with the inner life / the emotions of the man or woman of God

As human beings - - - we have different moods / emotions in life – often tied to different circumstances;

**Martin Luther: 'If you can't find your life in the Psalms - you have never become a child of God.'**

In the Psalms – we see the Psalmist at times shouting out for joy to the Lord  
At other times - - - we see him crying out to God in despair / in the midst of some sorrow

We see the psalmist – praising and thanking God for His mighty works – and faithfulness  
At other times - - - we see the Psalmist almost angry at God - - - where is He? / Why does He delay? / How long must I wait?

The whole spectrum of emotional responses to life - - - are pictured for us in the psalms

One of those emotions is the downcast soul - - - that is portrayed in Psalm 42

Buzz Aldrin – was part of the Apollo 11 moon landing mission

He and Neil Armstrong walked on the moon

When he came back - - - he subsequently fell into a lengthy depression

He asked himself – ‘What next?’

What’s a person to do when his or her greatest dream or challenge has been achieved?

Counselors today would call this: ‘post-achievement depression’

NASA had expected the astronauts to go on a celebratory world tour - - - the astronauts received heroes welcomes in parades in cities around the world – white House visit / etc. / shaking hands with dignitaries and world leaders across the globe

The US Post office – designed a new stamp with the picture of Neil stepping onto the moon

However – when all the celebrations ended - - - Buzz found himself with no direction

NASA did not seem to have much of a place for him

He took up a role at Edwards Air Force Base – directing a test pilot school

He lost his role there – when a couple of expensive jets crashed under his tenure - - - although the pilots were able to eject and survive

He began drinking heavily – and asked for psychiatric help - - - which he felt - - - at the time - cut him off from future projects with NASA

He divorced his wife – he was floundering

At one point he did a Lawnmower commercial – for Dyna Mark Lawn Tractor

**Buzz: 'I had gone from walking on the moon to selling lawn mowers.'**

Many years later - he became a big proponent of AA – for its role in helping him to overcome addiction

Most people will experience some kind of depression at some point in their lives

For some – it may be triggered by a life event - - - a death in the family / loss of a loved one / an injury or disability / sickness / disappointment

We find the psalmist facing such a reality in Psalm 42

**Psalm 42:6 - 'O my God, my soul is in despair within me; therefore I remember Thee . . .'**

In Psalm 42 – the Psalmist is singing the blues

His blue mood seems to have been triggered by his being driven away from Jerusalem and the tabernacle for a time

The Psalm is attributed to the Sons of Korah - who were worship leaders / singers / gate keepers of the tabernacle

We don't know the exact circumstances as to why the Psalmist has been driven away

He may have been one of the exiles with Daniel – when the Babylonians overran the city

Now – He is surrounded by some who mock his faith in God – He refers to an ungodly nation – Ps. 43:1 [Psalm 43 is a companion psalm]

**Psalm 42:4 - '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.'**

He remembers better days - - - but now is downcast

Why is Psalm 42 in Scripture?

Why does it resonate with so many as one of the great Psalms?

In it we see the person of faith whose life is suddenly overshadowed by some dark cloud [s] – and the Psalmist models for us what a response of faith should be on such occasions - - - how he looks to God to direct him back out into the sunshine again

### **I. Clouds Overhead - vv. 1-5**

We encounter the Psalmist in a dark mood

**Psalm 42:5 - 'Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me?'**

A downcast spirit or mood is a common human experience – but should never be a permanent state for any believer

In fact – the Christian – is called to 'rejoice in the Lord' - - - so we know it is never God's intention for the believer to be content in such a state

**Philippians 4:4 - 'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!'**

Jesus spoke of joy to the disciples on occasion

**John 15:11 - 'These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.'**

What things? A call to abide in Him / stay connected to the vine / etc.

Such things are key to joy while living in a fallen world

In our world – the creation groans under the weight of the curse – there is much that is broken in our world / people get sick and die / there are the traumatic events - - - disease and suffering / violent crime / accidents / disabilities / tragedies / etc.

Joni Earackson went thru a period of intense depression - - - after she dove into shallow water and became a paraplegic at the age of 17

Stuck in a hospital bed / stryker frame - - - she first was angry at God - - - 'What kind of God allows this to happen / What kind of Father? . . .'

She was basically hospitalized for surgeries / therapy – for a year and a half - - -

One day – she went to the Chesapeake Bay to go swimming with her sister - - - and she returned home a year and a half later - - - as a paraplegic

She then went to live with her sister - - - and for about 4-5 weeks - - she just didn't want to live

She told her sister - - - just close the drapes – / lights out - - - and leave me alone

But she hit a moment - - - where she cried out to God in despair - - - as she recalls – it was a real turning point - - - she said – ‘God – I can't do quadriplegia - - - so if I can't die - - - please show me how to live.’ The next day – she let her sister get her out of bed and up in a wheelchair - - - out into the living room - - - and it was a big step in the process of moving on from despair

She ultimately became a voice to encourage others in the Lord – and her story has encouraged millions

In an interview with Eric Metaxas - - - she finished with – ‘I don't love my quadriplegia - - - but I love where it takes me - - - and the people we have been able to help - - - I am having a blast!’

She would say to those who may be triggered by a life event - - - a botched surgery / a great disappointment / a loss of loved one - - - when you wake up in the morning - - - let that thing be the thing that drives you into the arms of God

That is what the Psalmist is doing here – [key\*\*\*]

**Psalm 42:1, 2 - 'As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee O God.'**

His despair is driving him into the arms of God – but it's not automatic - - - he chooses to go in that direction

Times of depression can have a good spiritual purpose in the work of God

It reminds us of our weakness - - - and of our dependence upon God

**John Piper: 'From time to time He allows us to taste that former darkness so that we will come trembling back to the word and prayer and the cross, and lay hold on God in a fresh way and to love our salvation more than ever.'**

Can a Christian get depressed? Absolutely - - - but he or she ought not stay there

Depression may be God's way of calling us to a more fervent seeking of Him / turning from a complacent attitude towards sin / becoming thirsty afresh for God

Who was the Psalmist?

Sons of Korah

Korah – was famous for leading a rebellion against Moses - - - and was struck down by the Lord – along with 250 others - - - but his sons did not fall under the judgment – and they became worship leaders in the sanctuary

Some of them served as gate keepers to the tabernacle / they were responsible for items in the tabernacle / some were singers

This Psalmist was a worship leader – that was part of his life

Now - - something is off

He remembers better days

**Psalm 42:4 - '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.'**

The Psalmist has been driven or taken away from his familiar scenes of worship – the tabernacle / temple – some kind of trauma has occurred

He is weeping – he refers to his tears – v. 3

He is praying – pouring out his soul – v. 4

Prayer is one thing - - - pouring out one's soul is a whole other matter

David – when he committed adultery with Bathsheba – the child born to them became sick - - - David fasted / wept – laid all night on the ground - - - [for a whole week] - - - he poured out his soul – he wept tears of shame

Amy Grant – I think was trying to capture this in her song – 'Better than a Hallelujah'

God loves a lullaby in a mother's tears in the dead of night - - better than a hallelujah sometimes

God loves the drunkard's cry – the soldier's plea not to let him die - - - better than a hallelujah sometimes

Why? – they are pouring out their soul

Pouring out your soul – means taking your problems to God

To aggravate matters – others are taunting the psalmist / ‘Where is your God?’ – v. 3

But – the Psalmist - - - chooses to look to the Lord

**Ps. 42:5 - 'Hope in God for I shall again praise Him.'**

He makes a choice as to where he places his hope

Time magazine once did an article on the connection between religious practices and personal well-being / emotional well-being

There have been a number of studies that have shown - - - far and away -- - the effect of religion upon one’s inner life is positive

Whether – it is recovering from a traumatic event - - - to simply dealing with the day to day burdens of life - - - people of faith have an edge

*TIME*: "Scientists have found, again and again, that those with a spiritual practice or who follow religious beliefs tend to be happier than those who don't. Study after study has found that religious people tend to be less depressed and less anxious than nonbelievers, better able to handle the vicissitudes of life than nonbelievers."

People of faith – they put their hope in God and His promises – v. 5

That is what Job did – in the midst of Satan’s attacks

**Job 19:25 - 'I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth.'**

**II. Put your Hope in God - vv. 6-11**

The Psalmist builds on this theme of putting his hope in God

He is confident in God

**Ps. 42:8 - 'The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime; and His song will be with me in the night.'**

In a book titled: ‘The insanity of God: a True Story of Faith Resurrected’ - - a story is told of Aisha – a 24 year old widow and former Muslim who was arrested for her outspoken testimony for Christ in a large Islamic country. She was being detained in the basement of a police station – and in her moment of despair – she said that she intended to scream out to God that she couldn’t take any more. But when she opened her mouth in protest and despair,

a melody of praise came from her soul instead. She began singing praises and was surprised and strengthened by the sound of her own voice and the sense of God's presence being with her.

There is power in praise!

She began to sing even more loudly. The police upstairs stopped moving about and began to listen to her voice. Later that night – the police chief came down and released her. “I don't understand” – he said “You are not afraid of anything!” He shook his head, ‘My wife, my daughters, and all the women of my family are afraid of everything. But you are not afraid of anything. I want you to come to my house so that you can tell everyone in my family why you are not afraid. And I want you to sing that song.’

Sometimes we just need to stop and sing God's praises!

**Psalm 33:1-3 - 'Sing for joy in the Lord, O you righteous ones; praise is becoming to the upright. Give thanks to Him with the lyre; sing praises to him with a harp of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy.'**

Don't underestimate the power of praise / corporate worship

Sing out - Remind yourself of who God is / what He has done / what He has pledged Himself to do

He knows that God has not literally abandoned him

He is wrestling with his emotions - - - he feels forsaken – v. 9

He may even be angry

But – as he works thru his feelings - - - he comes back to

**Psalm 42:11 - '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.'**

God's not dead

He recognizes that his feelings are not all there is to reality – in fact feelings are quite fickle / changeable - - - it is God's truth that we put our trust in – His Word

**Thomas A Kempis: 'Put no trust in your present feelings, for they will soon change. While we live, we are most changeable, even if we wish not to be.'**

Sometimes we find ourselves to be cheerful, at other times sad; now calm, then agitated; one day fervent, the next lukewarm . . . sometimes grave, other times frivolous. You must rise above all this changeableness by being wise and firm in mind, not attending to how you feel nor how the winds of instability blow you about, but with your mind entirely set upon the Lord.'

Put your hope in God and His promises

I got a strange phone call about 6 months ago

The man on the other end was very agitated [no small talk / no introductions] – blurts out – ‘Give me one reason why I shouldn’t kill myself’

I was somewhat taken aback - - I said – ‘Well – I don’t think you should’

He said – ‘I know that - - but why?’

I said - - here’s what you need to do - - you need to get out your Bible - - - and get down on your knees and call on the Lord and ask Him why you shouldn’t kill yourself - - - you’ll find that God loves you / Jesus died for you

He said – ‘Ok – I’m going to do that’ – thanks / click

I said a prayer

One of the ways we put our hope in God – is by listening to His Word

Clouds start to lift when we say, ‘speak Lord – for Thy servant is listening’

**Matthew 4:4 - "It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."**

The Psalmist sort of takes himself in hand here - - - tells his inner self what to do

**John Stott: 'It is remarkable to note how the author speaks to himself. He will not give in to his moods. He takes himself in hand and reproaches himself for his depression.'**

John Piper once noticed another aspect of depression - - - and it is how closely aligned the body and the soul are

We are fearfully and wonderfully made – and the body has its own mechanisms for lifting one’s spirits



Piper noticed while doing his doctorate - - If your body is tired - - - you tend to be irritable / snap at this person / or that

Well – I thought patience was a fruit of the Spirit - - - well – it is - - - but you can make the Spirit’s job easier by getting a good night’s sleep!

He points to the fact that physical exercise releases dopamine / other chemicals to our body - - that tends to lift one’s spirits

John Piper: 'Don't become a couch potato. It is deadly. God made muscles for work, and he made the heart to sustain the workload. He made the brain to produce antidepressants in response to vigorous exercise. Don't spare yourself in this. Get a bike. Ride twenty miles as hard as you can . . . or run or swim or do weights or dig in the garden. Work hard and you will be surprised how closely connected are the body and the soul.'

John Piper: 'I know that depression hurts my ministry, my marriage, and my parenting. So for the sake of kingdom purposes I am off to the gym.'

### Conclusion

When we remind ourselves of what we have in Christ - - - it leads us to joy

William Bridge: 'You have God for your portion, Christ for your Savior, the Spirit for your Comforter, heaven for your inheritance, the angels for your guard, and all things in the earth under your feet . . . and can you read over all this inventory of mercies and sit discouraged in the midst of them?'

God loves us / Jesus died for us / rose again – our hope is in the promises of God thru Jesus Christ

We encounter these promises as we get down on our knees and open our Bible and say – ‘speak Lord - - for your servant is listening!’