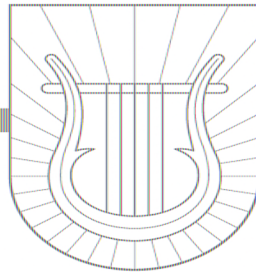


(( PREACHING *the* WORD ))

# THE PSALMS

*Volume 2 - Psalms 42 to 106*

REJOICE,  
*the* LORD IS KING



JAMES JOHNSTON

R. Kent Hughes  
*Series Editor*

“James Johnston’s masterful exposition of the Psalms is theologically rich, pastorally wise, and spiritually rewarding. He clearly explains the distinctiveness of each psalm and then shows, in the light of the New Testament, how each psalm ultimately points forward to fulfillment in Christ. Even Christians who have read the Psalms for their entire lives, as I have, will find refreshing new insight in page after page of this excellent book!”

**Wayne Grudem**, Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus of Theology and Biblical Studies, Phoenix Seminary

“While being sensitive to the original historical context of the Psalms as the prayer and songbook of Israel, Johnston is keenly aware that there is a Christocentric end to which the Psalms point and a Son in whom they find fulfillment, who is Israel’s promised Messiah. Because of this, Johnston recognizes all the Psalms are messianic, and understood in this way means the Psalms are also the Christian’s prayer, song, and life book. Reading this commentary results in thanksgiving and worship. Johnston’s excellent commentary is a great addition to the Preaching the Word series. I commend it to you as both an aid to your preaching and as a companion to your devotional reading and praying of the Psalms.”

**Gregory C. Strand**, Executive Director of Theology and Credentialing, Evangelical Free Church of America; Adjunct Professor of Pastoral Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“*Psalms* will be a treasured volume in this series. The original text is taken seriously and the gospel is made clear. In reading it, my own affections for Christ were delightfully energized. Johnston weds his love for God’s poetry to his heart, which is so joyfully pledged to God’s people.”

**David R. Helm**, Senior Pastor, Christ Church Chicago; Chairman, The Charles Simeon Trust

“More excellent fodder for sermons from this first-rate resource for preachers.”

**Josh Moody**, Senior Pastor, College Church, Wheaton, Illinois; President, God Centered Life Ministries



THE PSALMS  
Volume 2

## PREACHING THE WORD

Edited by R. Kent Hughes

*Genesis* | R. Kent Hughes

*Exodus* | Philip Graham Ryken

*Leviticus* | Kenneth A. Mathews

*Numbers* | Iain M. Duguid

*Deuteronomy* | Ajith Fernando

*Joshua* | David Jackman

*Judges and Ruth* | Barry G. Webb

*1 Samuel* | John Woodhouse

*2 Samuel* | John Woodhouse

*1 Kings* | John Woodhouse

*Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther* | Wallace P. Benn

*Job* | Christopher Ash

*The Psalms (Volumes 1 & 2)* | James Johnston

*Proverbs* | Raymond C. Ortlund Jr.

*Ecclesiastes* | Philip Graham Ryken

*Song of Solomon* | Douglas Sean O'Donnell

*Isaiah* | Raymond C. Ortlund Jr.

*Jeremiah and Lamentations* | R. Kent Hughes

*Daniel* | Rodney D. Stortz

*Matthew* | Douglas Sean O'Donnell

*Mark* | R. Kent Hughes

*Luke* | R. Kent Hughes

*John* | R. Kent Hughes

*Acts* | R. Kent Hughes

*Romans* | R. Kent Hughes

*1 Corinthians* | Stephen T. Um

*2 Corinthians* | R. Kent Hughes

*Galatians* | Todd Wilson

*Ephesians* | R. Kent Hughes

*Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* | R. Kent Hughes

*1–2 Thessalonians* | James H. Grant Jr.

*1–2 Timothy and Titus* | R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell

*Hebrews* | R. Kent Hughes

*James* | R. Kent Hughes

*1–2 Peter and Jude* | David R. Helm

*1–3 John* | David L. Allen

*Revelation* | James M. Hamilton Jr.

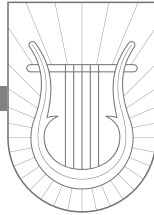
*The Sermon on the Mount* | R. Kent Hughes

(( PREACHING *the* WORD ))

# THE PSALMS

REJOICE, *the* LORD IS KING

Volume 2 – Psalms 42 to 106



JAMES A. JOHNSTON

R. Kent Hughes

*Series Editor*

 **CROSSWAY®**

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

*The Psalms: Rejoice, the Lord Is King, Volume 2 – Psalms 42 to 106*

© 2025 by James A. Johnston

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street  
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law. Crossway® is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover design: Jon McGrath, Simplicated Studio

Cover image: Adam Greene, illustrator

First printing 2025

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated in whole or in part into any other language.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible. Public domain.

Scripture quotations marked NASB 1995 are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. [www.lockman.org](http://www.lockman.org).

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com). The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-3359-4

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-3362-4

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-3361-7

---

## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Johnston, James A., 1966–

The Psalms : rejoice, the Lord is king / James A. Johnston ; R. Kent Hughes, series editor.

volumes cm. — (Preaching the word)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4335-3355-6 (hc)

1. Bible. Psalms—Commentaries. I. Title.

BS1430.53.J65 2015

223'.207—dc23

2014039270

---

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	26	25				
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

To my parents, Art and Muriel Johnston,  
who taught us the Psalms  
at our breakfast table.

“Blessed are those who dwell  
in your house,  
ever singing your praise!” (Psalm 84:4)



*Give the king your justice, O God,  
and your righteousness to the royal son!*

*. . . May his name endure forever,  
his fame continue as long as the sun!  
May people be blessed in him,  
all nations call him blessed!*

PSALM 72:1, 17

# Contents

<i>A Word to Those Who Preach the Word</i>	xiii
<i>Introduction</i>	1
1 When God Feels Far Away (Psalms 42, 43)	13
2 When Good Christians Suffer (Psalm 44)	23
3 A Wedding Song (Psalm 45)	33
4 God Is Our Refuge (Psalm 46)	43
5 Rejoice, the Lord Is King! (Psalm 47)	53
6 The City of God (Psalm 48)	61
7 The Folly and Futility of Trusting in Money (Psalm 49)	69
8 In God's Courtroom (Psalm 50)	79
9 Create in Me a Clean Heart (Psalm 51)	89
10 Trusting God through Tragedy (Psalm 52)	99
11 All Have Sinned (Psalm 53)	109
12 Strangers Are against Me (Psalm 54)	119
13 Betrayed (Psalm 55)	127
14 What Can Man Do to Me? (Psalm 56)	137
15 I Will Sing Praise (Psalm 57)	145
16 He Judges All Judges (Psalm 58)	153
17 Trapped and Surrounded (Psalm 59)	163
18 Faith before Victory (Psalm 60)	173
19 Safe to the Rock (Psalm 61)	183
20 Quiet Confidence (Psalm 62)	191
21 Better Than Life (Psalm 63)	201
22 God Turns the Tables (Psalm 64)	209
23 The Hope of All the Earth (Psalm 65)	219
24 An Invitation to the World (Psalm 66)	227
25 Let the Nations Be Glad (Psalm 67)	237

26	The King's Procession (Psalm 68)	245
27	Man of Sorrows (Psalm 69)	255
28	An Urgent Prayer (Psalm 70)	265
29	Trusting God to the End (Psalm 71)	273
30	The King We Long For (Psalm 72)	283
31	A Crisis of Faith (Psalm 73)	293
32	A Prayer in the Ruins (Psalm 74)	303
33	Christ the Judge of All (Psalm 75)	311
34	The One to Be Feared (Psalm 76)	321
35	A Sleepless Night (Psalm 77)	329
36	The Law Can't Save Us (Psalm 78)	337
37	Pour Out Your Anger (Psalm 79)	347
38	A Prayer for Revival (Psalm 80)	355
39	God's Answer (Psalm 81)	363
40	Give Justice (Psalm 82)	371
41	Judgment and Hope (Psalm 83)	379
42	Longing for Home (Psalm 84)	389
43	Restore Us Again! (Psalm 85)	399
44	The Poor and Needy King (Psalm 86)	409
45	Zion, Glorious City of God (Psalm 87)	419
46	The Darkness of Death (Psalm 88)	429
47	Unkept Promises (Psalm 89)	439
48	The Everlasting God (Psalm 90)	449
49	The Shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91)	457
50	A Song of Thanks (Psalm 92)	467
51	The Lord Reigns! (Psalm 93)	475
52	Getting Even (Psalm 94)	483
53	Two Invitations and a Warning (Psalm 95)	491
54	His Glory among the Nations! (Psalm 96)	499
55	Good News of Great Joy (Psalm 97)	509
56	Joy to the World! (Psalm 98)	517

57	Holy Joy (Psalm 99)	525
58	Shout for Joy (Psalm 100)	533
59	The King and His Kingdom (Psalm 101)	541
60	The Lord Builds Zion (Psalm 102)	549
61	Bless the Lord, O My Soul! (Psalm 103)	559
62	God Our Sustainer (Psalm 104)	567
63	God Keeps His Promises (Psalm 105)	575
64	Worship Our Merciful God (Psalm 106)	583
	<i>Notes</i>	593
	<i>Scripture Index</i>	625
	<i>General Index</i>	651
	<i>Index of Sermon Illustrations</i>	667



# A Word to Those Who Preach the Word

There are times when I am preaching that I have especially sensed the pleasure of God. I usually become aware of it through the unnatural silence. The ever-present coughing ceases, and the pews stop creaking, bringing an almost physical quiet to the sanctuary—through which my words sail like arrows. I experience a heightened eloquence, so that the cadence and volume of my voice intensify the truth I am preaching.

There is nothing quite like it—the Holy Spirit filling one’s sails, the sense of his pleasure, and the awareness that something is happening among one’s hearers. This experience is, of course, not unique, for thousands of preachers have similar experiences, even greater ones.

What has happened when this takes place? How do we account for this sense of his smile? The answer for me has come from the ancient rhetorical categories of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.

The first reason for his smile is the *logos*—in terms of preaching, God’s Word. This means that as we stand before God’s people to proclaim his Word, we have done our homework. We have exegeted the passage, mined the significance of its words in their context, and applied sound hermeneutical principles in interpreting the text so that we understand what its words meant to its hearers. And it means that we have labored long until we can express in a sentence what the theme of the text is—so that our outline springs from the text. Then our preparation will be such that as we preach, we will not be preaching our own thoughts about God’s Word, but God’s actual Word, his *logos*. This is fundamental to pleasing him in preaching.

The second element in knowing God’s smile in preaching is *ethos*—what you are as a person. There is a danger endemic to preaching, which is having your hands and heart cauterized by holy things. Phillips Brooks illustrated it by the analogy of a train conductor who comes to believe that he has been to the places he announces because of his long and loud heralding of them. And that is why Brooks insisted that preaching must be “the bringing of truth through personality.” Though we can never perfectly embody the truth we preach, we must be subject to it, long for it, and make it as much a part of our ethos as possible. As the Puritan William Ames said, “Next to the Scriptures, nothing makes a sermon more to pierce, than when it comes out of the inward

affection of the heart without any affectation.” When a preacher’s *ethos* backs up his *logos*, there will be the pleasure of God.

Last, there is *pathos*—personal passion and conviction. David Hume, the Scottish philosopher and skeptic, was once challenged as he was seen going to hear George Whitefield preach: “I thought you do not believe in the gospel.” Hume replied, “I don’t, but he does.” Just so! When a preacher believes what he preaches, there will be passion. And this belief and requisite passion will know the smile of God.

The pleasure of God is a matter of *logos* (the Word), *ethos* (what you are), and *pathos* (your passion). As you preach the Word may you experience his smile—the Holy Spirit in your sails!

*R. Kent Hughes*

# Introduction

The Psalms have sometimes been called the heart of the Bible. This is true physically, of course; if you open your Bible to the middle, you will probably land somewhere in the Psalms.

But they are the heart of the Bible theologically too. The Psalms are the whole Old Testament in miniature. This one book interacts with the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi: creation, the call of Abraham, the exodus, the Law of Moses, the monarchy, Israel's disobedience, the exile, the return, and the hope of a greater kingdom. This means that to study the Psalms is to study the whole Old Testament.

Add to this that the Psalms are the Old Testament book quoted most often in the New Testament. Jesus and the apostles turned to the Psalms again and again to preach the kingdom of God, to prove the resurrection, and to establish key doctrines. The Psalms are the heart of the Bible theologically.

The Psalms are the heart of the Bible personally too. As poems, they speak to our own hearts. As poetry, they touch our emotions at a deep level with the beauty and truth of their words.

Since we are coming to the heart of the Bible, we should reorient ourselves to this book as a whole. How should we read the Psalms?

## The Psalms Are a Book

This may seem obvious, but this significant fact is often overlooked. More precisely, the Psalms are a book of books—one book made up of five smaller books (Psalms 1—41; 42—72; 73—89; 90—106; 107—150). Each has its own unique message that fits with the other four. Together the one larger book tells a story from beginning to end.

Some people picture the Psalms like a group of inspirational poems bound together with no rhyme or reason. They think the Psalms are as random as a deck of shuffled cards. They act as if the scribes finished the book of Psalms and asked Gomer Pyle to bring the final manuscript down to the print shop. As Gomer was on his way, he tripped on the stairs and the papers went flying. He didn't want to get in trouble, so he quickly gathered them all together, totally out of order, and brought them to be printed and bound. Some people treat the Psalms as if something like this happened—they act as if the Psalms are a totally random collection of poems.

In fact, the Psalms have been carefully put together in order for a purpose.<sup>1</sup> This is a book. The fact that they have been arranged in five distinct



and distinctive books is the first clue that there is order to the Psalms. As we walk through Books 2—4 in this volume, we will see again that they have been carefully arranged. There is a story that is told through each book of the Psalms and through the Psalms as a whole.

To understand how the Psalms fit together, think of a cantata like Handel's *Messiah*. If classical music isn't your thing, think of a musical like *Oklahoma!* or *Les Misérables*. Each song can stand alone but put them together in order, and they tell a story. The Psalms are the same way—each can stand alone, but together they tell a story from beginning to end.

As a unified book, the Psalms as a whole provides the context for interpreting an individual psalm. Some psalms have details in the superscription that provide additional context, often from a historical book like 1 Samuel. Most individual psalms don't have any other clear context besides their place in the Psalter, however, and historical reconstructions are simply speculation. Scholarly speculation perhaps, but speculation nonetheless. The categories of form criticism (praise psalms, laments, etc.) are helpful for observing details of the text and similarities with other psalms; ultimately, though, these categories don't provide additional meaningful context. So too with the proposed function of a given psalm in the worship of Israel; with few exceptions, these cultic settings are speculative and shouldn't govern interpretation. Rather, the book of Psalms itself provides the primary context for interpretation. James Mays wrote: "In their transmission and shaping and collection as items in the book of Psalms, they, with all the other poetry of the Psalms, 'ascended' into another genre. They became Scripture, text whose hermeneutical context is the literary scope of the book in which they stand and the other books of Israel's scriptures."<sup>2</sup>

### A Book about Christ

The Psalms are a book about Christ. They are Christian Scripture. The Old Testament is part of the Christian Bible, and each book points forward to Jesus.

Some think that the Old Testament teaches Judaism and belongs to Jews while the New Testament teaches Christianity and belongs to Christians. That is not the case. The entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is Christian Scripture, including the Psalms.

### *New Testament Evidence*

Jesus and the apostles certainly believed the Old Testament was Christian Scripture. The Apostle Paul told Timothy that studying the Old Testament

would lead him to faith in Jesus. “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14, 15).

The Scriptures that Timothy had learned from infancy were the books of the Old Testament. Paul said that the Old Testament is not only able to make you “wise for salvation” but is able to “make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” In other words, according to Paul, the Old Testament teaches salvation by faith (cf. Romans 4). And the object of Old Testament faith is the Messiah, Jesus.

Paul was repeating what Jesus himself taught his disciples. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples and told them that the Old Testament spoke of him.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:44–47)

There is an important point we need to notice here that is not clear in English. The grammar suggests that Jesus considered the Psalms to be part of the Prophets.<sup>3</sup>

In Greek the word “the” does not appear before “Psalms.” So literally this should be translated, “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and Psalms.” When two nouns are joined by the conjunction “and,” preceded by the definite article “the,” these nouns are linked.<sup>4</sup> So here Jesus refers to the Psalms alongside the Prophets. He sets the Psalms with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel as prophetic Scriptures that point to him.

Peter preached the Psalms as prophecy at Pentecost in Acts 2. He quoted Psalm 16 as he preached that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

For David says concerning him,

“I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;  
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;

## 4 Introduction

my flesh also will dwell in hope.  
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One see corruption.  
You have made known to me the paths of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence."  
(Acts 2:25–28)

Why did Peter think that Psalm 16 talked about Jesus's resurrection? He explained:

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. *Being therefore a prophet*, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. (Acts 2:29–32)

David could not have been writing about himself because his body did see corruption, as evidenced by his tomb. Thus David must have been writing about Christ. When we read the words of David, we are not just reading the words of a poet—we are reading the words of a prophet.

And, significantly, Peter said David spoke for Christ in the first person. When David said, "You will not abandon *my* soul to Hades," Christ was speaking through him and announcing his resurrection a thousand years before he died and rose again. Christ spoke through David's "I's" and "me's."

The New Testament regularly says the words of the Psalms are the words of Christ. We see this when the writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 40:

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body have you prepared for me;  
in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.  
Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,  
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.' "  
(Hebrews 10:5–7)

Psalm 40 is a psalm of David, but the writer of Hebrews reads this as the voice of Christ.

Jerry Shepherd identifies at least twelve New Testament examples of the Psalms being read or presented as the voice of Christ himself.<sup>5</sup>

### *Scholars*

Evidence such as this leads many Biblical scholars to affirm that Christ speaks in the Psalms. Augustine called Jesus *iste cantator psalmorum*, “himself the singer of the Psalms,” because when David speaks in the Psalms, he is speaking for Christ.<sup>6</sup> Tertullian, the great North African theologian from the second century, said about David: “He sings to us of Christ, and through his voice Christ indeed also sang concerning Himself.”<sup>7</sup>

Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner has said that the writer of Hebrews “assumed that his readers would hear the words of David as the words also of the Messiah.”<sup>8</sup> Bruce Waltke concurs: “The writers of the New Testament are not attempting to identify and limit the psalms that prefigure Christ but rather are assuming that the Psalter as a whole has Jesus Christ in view and that this should be the normative way of interpreting the psalms.”<sup>9</sup> Even more recently Jason DeRouchie writes, “A Christian approach to the Psalms demands that we read the whole as messianic music, whether as songs ‘by Christ’ or ‘about Christ.’”<sup>10</sup>

Christ is the main character of the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. It would be strange indeed if the largest book in the Bible, the Psalter, was not about him.

### *The Psalms*

The book of Psalms itself tells us that it is about Christ.

Psalms 1 and 2 are an introduction for the whole book of Psalms. They share at least a dozen words in common and fit closely together.<sup>11</sup> For instance, the same word “blessed” is at the beginning of Psalm 1 and the end of Psalm 2, like bookends. In Hebrew the word “meditates” in 1:2 is the same word translated as “plot” in 2:1. The blessed man of Psalm 1 mutters God’s Word while the nations of Psalm 2 mutter rebellion. Both psalms end with a warning that the wicked and their way will be destroyed (1:6; 2:12).

Psalm 1 introduces us to a blessed man who loves God’s Word and lives by it. In fact, the grammar of Psalm 1 says that this ideal man is perfect—he has never sinned (v. 1).<sup>12</sup> Psalm 2 identifies this sinless man as the King God set on the throne over the whole world.<sup>13</sup> The word “Anointed” in Psalm 2 is the word *Messiah* in Hebrew or *Christ* in Greek. The New Testament is quick to recognize that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one to whom Psalm 2 refers (e.g., Acts 4:25–27; 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5).

According to Psalm 2, this anointed king rules for God over the world. The world hates God and his King—it fights against them. But God strengthens his Christ to rule and judge the world with unopposable power.

In a real sense, the rest of the book of Psalms is about this King, his kingdom, and his people. What will happen to God's King? Will life be easy or will he have trouble? What will his enemies do? How will God protect him and give him victory? What will happen to his people? Will their lives be easy or hard? Will the world finally follow this King? The King described in Psalms 1 and 2 sets the agenda for the whole book of Psalms.<sup>14</sup>

How does King David fit into all this? The background for understanding David's place in the Psalms is the covenant that God made with David in 2 Samuel 7.<sup>15</sup> God promised David that one of his descendants would rule forever:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. (2 Samuel 7:12, 13, 16)

This great Son of David is the King who is introduced in Psalm 2. David is not only his ancestor but also the model for who this King would be. David's experience as God's anointed king foreshadows what Christ experienced as God's greater Anointed King.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer discussed the relationship between David and Christ, the Son of David:

According to the witness of the Bible, David is, as the anointed king of the chosen people of God, a prototype of Jesus Christ. What happens to him happens to him for the sake of the one who is in him and who is said to proceed from him, namely Jesus Christ. And he is not unaware of this, but "being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ" (Acts 2:30f.). David was a witness to Christ in his office, in his life, and in his words.

The New Testament says even more. In the Psalms of David the promised Christ himself already speaks (Hebrews 2:12; 10:5) or, as may also be indicated, the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 3:7). These same words which David spoke, therefore, the future Messiah spoke through him. The prayers of David were prayed also by Christ. Or better, Christ himself prayed them through his forerunner David.<sup>16</sup>

Significantly, after the introductory Psalms 1 and 2, Psalm 3 is a psalm of David, linking him immediately with the king who has just been introduced. The superscription of Psalm 3 sets the tone for David/Christ's experience. It refers to

Absalom's rebellion, when David's own son turned many in Israel against him. The rebellion against Christ, described generally in Psalm 2:1–3, now becomes specific. He will suffer at the hands of his own people and will be betrayed by those close to him. This is precisely what happens in the rest of the Psalter.

With this in mind, the Psalms are about Christ in several ways. On the one hand, they make specific predictions that were fulfilled in Christ. On a deeper level, they point forward to Christ through the life, words, emotions, and experiences of King David as a whole.<sup>17</sup> In the Psalms, King David is a model of the great King to come.

### A Book with a Story

What is the big picture of the Psalms? It is such a large book that it is hard to wrap our minds around it. Books 1 and 2 focus especially on David and his kingdom. Books 3 and 4 reflect the troubles and questions Israel faced during the exile in Babylon. Book 5 looks forward after the exile.

#### *Book 1 (Psalms 1—41)*

Almost all of these psalms were written by David. David calls out again and again for God to rescue and deliver him from his enemies. The world hates and attacks God's king, but God is for him, and God rescues him from all his enemies, even from death itself. This was true for David, but it was especially true for Jesus Christ, the Son of David.

#### *Book 2 (Psalms 42—72)*

As we turn to Book 2, we notice that David is not the author of the first nine psalms. Instead they are connected with a group of Levites called "the Sons of Korah" (Psalms 42—49)<sup>18</sup> and "Asaph" (Psalm 50). And yet they speak prophetically with the same voice as David in Book 1. The trouble and suffering of the speaker in these psalms matches perfectly the experience of the Davidic king through Book 1.<sup>19</sup> Most of the psalms in Book 2 are still written by David (51—65, 68—70). What's the point? The promise of the Messianic King comes through other prophets besides David, making it more certain. They relate Israel's experience as well: as the king goes, so go the people.

There is a distinct order to the psalms in Book 2 that helps us track the trajectory of these psalms: crisis, comfort, confession, confidence, peoples, patience, Christ.

*Crisis.* Psalms 42—44 describe the crisis that sets the stage for Book 2. God seems to have forgotten his people and his King.

As a deer pants for flowing streams,  
 so pants my soul for you, O God.  
 My soul thirsts for God,  
 for the living God.  
 When shall I come and appear before God?  
 My tears have been my food  
 day and night,  
 while they say to me all the day long,  
 "Where is your God?" (Psalm 42:1–3)

*Comfort.* Psalms 45—48 are psalms of comfort in response to this crisis. God has not forgotten his people. Psalm 45 is a wedding song—God’s King is committed to his people like a husband to his bride. Psalms 46—48 promise that God is with his people like a king who defends his own city. Zion is the city of God, and he surrounds his people with walls of salvation.

*Confession.* This leads to confession. Psalms 49—53 are five deeply moving psalms of confession. All of us have sinned; we’ve disobeyed God and deserve death. None of us can ransom our own lives or pay for our own sins. Our only hope is humbly to confess our sins to God and ask him to give us a clean heart and ransom our souls from death.

*Confidence.* After confession, Book 2 moves to confidence in Psalms 54—63. David cries out to God, and he is sure that God will rescue him. Psalm 54:4 sets the tone: “Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life.” Remember that David was a prophet, and his confidence points forward to Christ’s confidence that God would save him and destroy his enemies.

*Peoples.* When God saves his king, it means blessings for the world. Psalms 64—68 is a series of missions psalms. The king we met in Psalm 2 trusted God when he was rejected and attacked by his enemies. By rescuing him, God brought salvation to all humanity. For instance:

Shout for joy to God, all the earth;  
 sing the glory of his name;  
 give to him glorious praise!  
 Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!  
 So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.  
 All the earth worships you  
 and sings praises to you;  
 they sing praises to your name.” (Psalm 66:1–4)

*Patience.* But this worldwide worship would not come immediately. One of the themes that runs through Psalms 69—71 is patience. “My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God” (69:3). “Make haste, O God, to deliver me!”

(70:1). “O my God, make haste to help me!” (71:12). Christ waited patiently for God to save him. If we follow Christ, we need to be patient too.

*Christ.* The last psalm in Book 2 is a royal psalm that asks God to bless the king with righteousness, justice, wealth, strength, and eternal life. Psalm 72 was written of Solomon but points to a greater King. In fact, Psalm 72 goes beyond anything that any earthly king of Israel could hope for. It looks forward to a “universal and eternal kingdom of peace and justice free from oppression and violence.”<sup>20</sup> Aspects of this king’s reign merge with the reign of God himself. The psalm refers to a greater King, our Lord Jesus Christ. Our hope is centered on him. All God’s blessings come to us through him.

Psalm 72 ends with an important comment: “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended” (v. 20). A better translation might be, “David’s prayers are complete or perfected.” According to Robert Cole, “The previous description [of the Messianic kingdom in Psalm 72] represented the perfection, culmination and fullest outworking of the promise to David.”<sup>21</sup> David’s hopes in Books 1 and 2 of the Psalms are complete. There are quite a few more psalms of David still to come, and they are placed at strategic locations. Books 1 and 2 appear to have been assembled and arranged during the monarchy to present a specific picture of Christ, the Son of David.

### *Book 3 (Psalms 73—89)*

In Book 3 the wheels fall off the wagon. The messianic kingdom of justice and peace promised in Psalm 72 has not appeared. Just the opposite! In Psalm 73 there is no justice, and the wicked prosper. Worse, there is no longer a king on the throne. Jerusalem has been destroyed, and the temple has been burned. “Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins; the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary!” (Psalm 74:3).

Since this describes the destruction of the temple, Book 3 must have been compiled after Israel was taken in exile to Babylon. Many of the psalms in Book 3 are from an earlier time—psalms of David, Ethan, and Asaph.<sup>22</sup> They were arranged into this book to help Israel trust in God through the pain of the exile.<sup>23</sup>

Book 3 asks some of the toughest questions in all the Psalms. What is God doing? How could he allow this? How long will this last? Is there hope?

Psalm 78 recounts Israel’s sinful history that led to the exile. The Law of Moses, though passed down from one generation to the next, could not change the human heart. Succeeding generations were as stubbornly sinful as their fathers. Israel’s hope rests on David and the king who will rule on his throne.



God answers Israel's questions in Psalms 81 and 82, but they would not listen to God's voice and did not maintain justice.

As Book 3 continues, Christ takes up the anguished questions of the people; he becomes their representative. God's people also expand to include the Gentile nations, even Israel's historic enemies (86:9; 87:4–6). At the beginning of Book 3, the people are suffering under God's anger (74:1); by the end of the book, the Son of David now bears God's anger (88:7) and calls out to him from the grave.

Psalm 89 presents the great crisis of the whole book of Psalms, the central hinge of the book. The first two-thirds of Psalm 89 celebrates God's covenant with David:

You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one;  
I have sworn to David my servant:  
'I will establish your offspring forever,  
and build your throne for all generations.'" (vv. 3, 4)

And again,

My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,  
and my covenant will stand firm for him.  
I will establish his offspring forever  
and his throne as the days of the heavens. (vv. 28, 29)

Then the psalmist dares to tell God he broke his word!

But now you have cast off and rejected;  
you are full of wrath against your anointed.  
You have renounced the covenant with your servant;  
you have defiled his crown in the dust. (vv. 38, 39)

How could this be? Will God honor the Davidic covenant? Will the kingdom of Psalm 72 be established? This is the central crisis of the book of Psalms.

#### *Book 4 (Psalms 90—106)*

Book 4 is an answer to this crisis. In Psalm 90, Moses prays for the people and teaches them to trust God. In Psalm 91, Christ takes refuge in God and is rewarded with long life and deliverance.

Psalms 93–100 focus on God's power and authority—"the LORD reigns" (93:1). His reign, his kingdom, will bring joy and justice to all the earth, as Psalm 72 promised.

God is not done with David. He makes a comeback in Psalms 101—103. The Messiah is still coming! Psalms 104—106 are great hymns of God’s faithfulness in creation and in his covenant in spite of our sin.

*Book 5 (Psalms 106—150)*

Book 5 was compiled after the exile when God brought Israel back home. We know this from the opening lines of Psalm 107: “Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south” (vv. 2, 3).

Significantly, God’s redeemed people are not identified as Israel in Psalm 107. Rather, humanity experiences the Lord’s saving works, “the children of man” (v. 8).

Hope in the Davidic covenant returns again with Christ’s confidence, anguish, and exaltation in Psalms 108—110. We can expect a King greater than David. “The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool” (Psalm 110:1).

The Son of David was far more glorious and wonderful than Israel had imagined. Christ would not be merely a human king—he would sit on God’s throne in Heaven. How this could be would remain a mystery until the incarnation when Jesus was born.

This king is devoted to God’s Word. In Psalm 1 he meditates on God’s Word day and night. We see his commitment to Scripture even more clearly in Psalm 119. In the Songs of Ascent he leads his people home to Heaven; he ascends “the hill of the LORD” (Psalm 24:3 cf. 15:1), and he leads his people heavenward. The Psalms end with an earsplitting crescendo of praise in Psalms 146—150.



# 1

## When God Feels Far Away

PSALMS 42, 43

MARTIN LUTHER WAS KNOWN for his bouts of discouragement and depression. The German word he used for these spiritual trials is *anfechtungen*. These were his dark nights of the soul.

But God gave Luther a no-nonsense wife in Katherine Von Bora. Once he locked himself in his study for three days straight. But Katie noticed that the hinges were on the outside of the door, so she took the door out of the door-frame. As the story goes, Luther said to her, “Why did you do that? I wasn’t hurting anybody.”

Later, Luther endured another period of spiritual depression that lasted for several days. Katie came into his study (evidently the door was not locked this time) dressed in black, and she started hanging black cloth in the room. “Who died?” Luther asked. Katie was ready for him. “Well, from the way you are acting, I thought God had died,” she said. He had to smile, and the sunlight of faith began to clear away the gloom and darkness in his heart again.

These dark nights of the soul are not unusual among God’s people, even strong leaders. The prophet Elijah was so depressed that he asked God to take his life (1 Kings 19:4). The Apostle Paul told the Christians in Corinth about his own emotional struggle: “For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death” (2 Corinthians 1:8, 9).

The psalmist describes this same emotional condition in Psalms 42 and 43. “My tears have been my food day and night” (42:3), and “My soul is cast down within me” (42:6). Many believers have wrestled with these feelings. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’s classic book *Spiritual Depression* takes Psalm 42 as its starting point.<sup>1</sup>

You may need to reflect on these two psalms because you’re dealing with spiritual depression. I understand. My wife can tell you that I often deal with bouts of “ministry blues” that sometimes drift into deep discouragement. The message of these two psalms is for us today.

### The Heading

Let's notice a few things by way of introduction. There are a few reasons to read Psalms 42 and 43 as one psalm. First, the two psalms share several phrases. The most obvious is the refrain that is repeated four times (42:5, 6a, 11; 43:5):

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.

Notice that Psalm 43 does not have a heading or superscription, which is unusual in this part of the Psalms. This supports the idea that Psalm 43 was originally the last section of Psalm 42. A number of ancient manuscripts do indeed have these as one psalm.<sup>2</sup> They fit together, and it seems best to look at them together.

Then notice the heading on Psalm 42: "To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah." A maskil is often considered to be a teaching psalm.<sup>3</sup> This maskil is not didactic like a theology lesson; it teaches by telling the story of a man who is struggling with his emotions. Just like today, worship music was a teaching ministry. God did not make us with thoughts only; he created us with feelings and emotions. This song teaches our hearts and our heads.

This is the first time that we have seen a psalm attributed to someone other than David in the Psalter. Almost all the psalms in Book 1 are attributed to him. But Psalms 42—49 are from the sons of Korah.

Who were the sons of Korah? This group of men was a clan of Levites who served as singers and musicians in the temple.<sup>4</sup> When we look at their backstory, their presence in the Psalms is a beautiful sign of God's grace.

In Numbers 16 a Levite named Korah spoke out against Moses and stirred up 250 leading men with him. This rebellion was one of the most serious attacks on Moses's leadership during their time in the wilderness, and God's judgment was severe: the earth opened up to swallow Korah and bury him alive, along with his tents and family.

Yet there was hope even in the middle of that judgment. Numbers 26:11 tells us, "But the sons of Korah did not die." What happened? Apparently some of Korah's sons were not standing with their father when the earth swallowed him. Moses had warned the people to separate themselves from Korah's tent to avoid God's judgment. Evidently some of Korah's sons believed God's warning and backed away from his tent.<sup>5</sup>

What faith and what courage! Not only was Korah a dynamic, trusted leader in Israel—he was their father! Yet they believed God’s warning and separated from him.

Attacking and slandering leadership is often a generational sin. It can easily travel through families, passing from mother to daughter and father to son. Children pick up a critical spirit as they listen to their parents while driving home from church or sitting at the dinner table. But the sons of Korah did not follow their father in his sin. They honored God, and God honored them. Eleven psalms are from the sons of Korah.

### Who Is This Depressed Man?

Who is this man wrestling with his emotions in Psalms 42, 43? Whose voice is this?

Psalm 42 picks up where Psalm 41 left off<sup>6</sup>—it is the voice of a man who calls out to God as his enemies taunt him. They want him to die, and they’re sure that God won’t help him.<sup>7</sup> But even as death takes him, he trusts God with his very life.

David was a prophet.<sup>8</sup> In Psalm 41 he spoke about his great son, the Son of David, and we hear that same voice in Psalms 42, 43 through the sons of Korah. Their trouble and suffering match perfectly the experience of the Davidic king who is introduced in Psalm 2 and who faces opposition all the way through Book 1.<sup>9</sup>

We are hearing the voice of Christ—the sons of Korah sang about him. He is the man who wrestled with such dark emotions. In fact, Christ used the words of these two psalms in the garden of Gethsemane as he prayed and sweat drops of blood in his emotional agony prior to the cross. When he said to his disciples, “Now is my soul troubled” (John 12:27), he echoed the chorus that is repeated three times in these psalms: “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” (Psalm 42:5).<sup>10</sup>

Our Savior was fully human, like we are, with real emotions just like ours. Christ was “made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:17, 18). He wrestled with questions and despair like we do. And since he endured and held on to his hope in God, he can help you and me endure and fight for hope. You have a Savior who understands and can help you in your time of need, your *anfechtung*, your dark night of the soul.

This psalm is a song with three verses, each verse ending with the chorus that is repeated in 42:5, 11 and 43:5. In each verse he describes his anguish and

fighters to hold on to his faith. I think the best way for us to unpack this psalm is to get an overview of his anguish and dark emotions. Then I want to show you seven things he does to hold on to his faith and deal with the darkness.

### His Anguish

What is he going through? If you have wrestled with spiritual depression yourself, you know that words are not enough. The psalmist paints vivid word pictures so we can feel what he is feeling.

### *Parched*

His soul is parched with thirst because he feels like he is far from God.

As a deer pants for flowing streams,  
so pants my soul for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.  
When shall I come and appear before God? (42:1, 2)

When our family was on vacation in Utah, we learned how important water is. We each had water bottles as we hiked, and we had two backpacks for water too—the kind with the hose that comes over your shoulder. Utah is a hot, dry land. Your sweat evaporates right away, so you might not realize that you are becoming dehydrated. Without water, you could literally die in the back canyons.

That is the sort of thirst the psalmist is describing. His soul is parched for God. He feels like God is far away, and he is about to drop from spiritual dehydration. The psalmist could not live without God any more than a man in the desert can live without a canteen.

Some people have trouble understanding this kind of spiritual thirst because they have never had a drink of living water. They don't know God. If you think that being a Christian only means being a good, moral person, then this thirst may not make sense to you. You might say to yourself, "Just do the right things. Why are you talking about being thirsty for God?" If this describes you, then you don't know God. You might know about God, but you don't know him.

Real Christians know God and love God. He is beautiful and precious to them. They have tasted and seen "that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8). They have come to Jesus for living water, and he satisfies their thirsty souls (John 4:10, 14).

Other people do not understand this thirst because they only want the good things God gives. They are thirsty for God to give them health, money, a spouse, a better job, a better car, a better home. They are thirsty for blessings, but they are not thirsty for God. So this psalm seems over the top to them.

Charles Malik, founder of the Philosophy Department at American University in Beirut and the Lebanese ambassador to the United States, gave this testimony at the dedication of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College:

I speak to you as a Christian. Jesus Christ is my Lord and God and Saviour and Song day and night. I can live without food, without drink, without sleep, without air, but I cannot live without Jesus. Without him I would have perished long ago. . . . I live in and on the Bible for long hours every day. The Bible is the source of every good thought and impulse I have. In the Bible God himself, the Creator of everything from nothing, speaks to me and to the world directly, about himself, about ourselves, and about his will for the course of events and for the consummation of history. And believe me, not a day passes without my crying from the bottom of my heart, "Come, Lord Jesus."<sup>11</sup>

Do you know what this kind of thirst is like? Do you feel your need for God like a man in the desert needs water?

If you do, be encouraged. This thirst to feel God's presence is a sign of life. Dead men aren't thirsty. If you are thirsty for God, then you are spiritually alive. If you are struggling with spiritual depression and you long for God like this, you are actually in a good place. The man or woman who is not thirsty for God is in mortal danger.

### *Forgotten by God*

Not only did the psalmist feel like God was far away; he felt like God had forgotten him. "My soul is cast down within me," he says (42:6). Trouble rolled over him like waves of the sea. And he asked God, "Why have you forgotten me?" (v. 9).

Have you ever felt like God was busy somewhere else and forgot you? It's a terrible feeling to wrestle with. You might say to yourself, "I'm not a high priority for him. He doesn't have time for me. He skipped right over me and forgot me."

### *Rejected by God*

But it gets worse. It's one thing to be forgotten—it's another thing to be rejected. He says in 43:2, "For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me?" If God simply forgot me, then he will help me when



he remembers. But if he remembers me and has consciously rejected me, then I am really alone and abandoned.

The screws get tighter, and the darkness grows deeper as we walk through this psalm. At first, it was “I thirst for God” (42:1, 2); then “God has forgotten me” (42:9); and finally, “God has turned his back on me” (43:2). This was Christ’s experience as he lived obediently for God. It is often our experience as we serve God too.

### *Dealing with the Darkness*

You may face these feelings, but don’t give in to discouragement. Fight to hold on to your faith. Discouragement may rise like a threatening tide and settle in your heart like a dank fog. You need to hold on to what you know is true.

As a human being like us, our Lord held on to his faith, and since he suffered like this, he can help you when discouragement tests your soul (Hebrews 2:18). Here are seven ways the psalmist fights to hope in God in Psalm 42, 43.

### *Remember*

First, he remembers. “These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival” (42:4). And again: “My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar” (v. 6).

V. Raymond Edman, the president of Wheaton College in the 1950s, used to say, “Don’t doubt in the dark what you have seen in the light.” Remember what is real when you can’t see it anymore. Remember the joy of worship with God’s people. Remember who God is whether you are standing below sea level in the valley of the Jordan or standing at 9,000 feet on Mount Hermon just forty miles away.

If you have kids, you know that sometimes they don’t do something you’ve asked them to do. When that happened in our family, one of our kids used to say, “I have a good forgetter.” We all have good forgetters, especially when we are discouraged. Remember. “Don’t doubt in the dark what you have seen in the light.”

### *Don’t Listen to Lies*

Second, the psalmist doesn’t listen to lies. Satan lied to Eve in the garden to turn her against God. The psalmist’s enemies lied to him too. “Where is your God?” (v. 3), they mockingly asked. This is a question, so it might not

seem like a lie at first sight. But the answer they are expecting is that God is nowhere—he doesn’t care for you and is not going to help you. This leading question is meant to deceive.

You might hear lies from other people who come alongside you when you are down. But you will hear softer, sweeter lies than this—your own heart is deceitful and will tell you deadly lies. *This is never going to end. Your life is not worth living. It’s no use. There is no hope. You’ll give in sooner or later, so just do it now.* Don’t listen.

### *Don’t Savor Your Sadness*

Third, the psalmist doesn’t savor his sadness. If I’m honest, sometimes I like feeling discouraged. It is a perverse reaction, to feel sorry for myself and enjoy my self-pity, but it happens.

I think it is significant, then, that the psalmist says, “My soul is cast down within me; *therefore* I remember you” (v. 5). He chooses to remember God precisely because his soul is cast down. He doesn’t give in to despair. Rather, when he feels his soul falling, that is the moment he sets his mind on God.

### *Hold On to God’s Sovereignty*

Fourth, hold on to God’s sovereignty. The temptation is to think that God is not in control. Some people want to protect God and let him off the hook for some hard thing that happened. They deny God’s complete control of their lives and the entire universe. They think that life will be brighter if God is not sovereign.

The psalmist doesn’t think that way. “Deep calls to deep at the roar of *your* waterfalls; all *your* breakers and *your* waves have gone over me” (v. 7). “In other words,” explains John Piper, “all his crashing and tumultuous and oppressing and discouraging circumstances are the waves of God. He never loses this grip on the great truths about God. They are the ballast in his little boat of faith. They keep him from capsizing in the tumult of his emotions.”<sup>12</sup>

If God is not in control, then there actually is no hope, and there is only despair. But God is sovereign; not a single atom is out of place in all the universe. Not one maverick molecule is outside his control. So we know that he works all things together for our good and his glory, even the shadows he paints on the canvas and the dark threads he weaves in our lives.

### *Believe the Word*

Fifth, the psalmist believes God’s word. You can see that in the way he depends on God’s promises. He says in 42:8, “By day the LORD commands his

steadfast love.” This echoes the covenant that God made with David. Speaking of Christ, God said in 2 Samuel 7:15, “My steadfast love will not depart from him.” He counts on this promise being true.

He depends on God’s promise again in Psalm 43:3: “Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill.” This echoes the promise of Psalm 2:6 when God said, “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” This was his destiny—he is the King God set over all the peoples of the world. He knew God would keep this promise. He believed God’s word.

When you are at midnight in the dark night of your soul, you need God’s word too. You need to treasure every promise. Often when I feel discouraged and spiritually dry, I realize that I haven’t been in the Word. I sit down in my room and begin to read the Bible, and often within half an hour the darkness begins to lift. The clouds don’t always lift that quickly. It may take weeks. But hold on to the Word and believe it.

### *Pray!*

Sixth, the psalmist prays. This may be obvious, but throughout this whole psalm, he is speaking to God. This psalm is a prayer. God encourages us to bring our weary hearts to him. “[Cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Notice that this psalm is an honest prayer. Its composer asks God, “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” (Psalm 42:9.) And again, “You are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” (43:2).

These are not polite questions. The psalmist doesn’t say, “I know that you are near even when I don’t feel you. I know that you are working all things together for good.” These things are true, but that is not how he felt. It felt like God had forgotten him and rejected him, and he prays what he is honestly feeling. Take it to the Lord in prayer.

### *Preach to Yourself*

Finally, the psalmist preaches to himself.

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. (42:11; 43:5)

“As though he were two men,” Spurgeon said, “the psalmist talks to himself.”<sup>13</sup> We need to speak truth to ourselves. Here is Lloyd-Jones:

Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man’s treatment was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, “Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you.”<sup>14</sup>

You need to preach the gospel to yourself. You need to tell yourself to hope in God. How? You can talk to yourself through many of the songs we love, such as “10,000 Reasons,” by Matt Redman:

Sing like never before, O my soul.  
I’ll worship Your holy name.<sup>15</sup>

Or you can take the words of Romans 8 as a guide.

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? (vv. 31–35 paraphrased)<sup>16</sup>

Or you can memorize the words of Psalms 42 and 43.

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.

These words were true for Christ, and they are true for everyone who belongs to him. If you walk with God for any length of time, you will face spiritual discouragement. You need to hope in God.

