

What Do We Do When We Feel Distant from the Lord?

- a. We desperately need the LORD (vv1-2)
 - i. a deer moving from known waterholes which have dried up - finding them dry, moving to another, but literally dying of want of water
 1. Joel 1:20 – “Even the beasts of the field pant for you because the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.”
 - ii. The end of spiritual depression begins with the heart acknowledgment that my life is dependent upon knowing the One who made me, of being near to Him
 1. All the other things which my heart may desire to bring me out of such lonely desperation will not quench the thirst of a man’s soul
 - b. We desperately need to know “the living God" (v2)
 - i. what this man is longing for is the knowledge of the living God
 1. not mere knowledge of the facts, but knowledge of the person, of the God who is alive and full of life, which he finds in God's presence
 - ii. More than relief from his suffering or a change in his circumstances, He asks first and foremost for the Lord Himself
 1. Until we know this need, we will only be discouraged by the present circumstances and their inadequacy to sustain our souls
 - c. We desperately need to be *near* to the living God
 - i. "when will I be able to come and appear before him?" (v2)
 - ii. What we need is to be *near* to the Lord, to know His presence and sense His greatness
 - iii. This is the language of intimacy – nearness vs. distance, deep vs. shallow, to know and be known
 - d. How do we deal with this kind of spiritual depression, this longing for nearness to the Lord, but feeling far away and distant from Him?
1. Pour Out Your Heart to the Lord
 - a. Suffering Speaks to Your Soul
 - i. "my tears...say all the time" (v3)
 1. Our tears constantly (all the time) ask, "Where is your God?"
 - a. Tears testify to our soul’s unmet desire to be near to the Lord!
 - b. Sorrow and salvation, requiem and redemption, are incongruous
 - c. Our tears tell the story that our redemption is incomplete – that we still await its completion in the presence of the LORD
 - i. Romans 8:23 – “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”
 2. Our tears speak. Our sorrow can shout to our souls - but our tears are not trustworthy truth-tellers - they only tell partial truths, the present truths, the past truths which sometimes obscure the whole story, the whole picture of God's faithfulness - like a blurring kaleidoscope, our tears cast the Truth into a fractured cacophony of mere shapes, formless and purposeless - but there is reality behind the refraction, the reality of form and purpose and beauty and meaning *in the entire story*
 - a. Could you imagine if Cinderella ended before the ball?
 - b. Or, if Hansel and Gretel ended with their stepmother’s abandonment and the revelation of a cannibalistic witch?
 - c. The end of the story, the redemption, the conclusion, the climactic rescue and the Hero’s great travail are essential to the greatness of the story
 3. Job 6:26 – “Do you think that you can reprove words, when the speech of a despairing man is wind?”
 - ii. Tears do not clarify, they blur – and they make horrible sustenance

- b. It is OK to ask the Lord “Why?”
 - i. "I say to God, my rock" (v9)
 - 1. “rock” here is the fissure in the rock, not the rock itself - figure of security, high from danger in a nook or crag in which one can hide
 - ii. "Why do you forget me?" (v9)
 - 1. “You are my hiding place, so why do I walk in the dark oppression of an enemy?” (v9)
 - a. The poet is expressing how alone he feels, like God has forgotten him, because he is walking in the dark oppression of his enemy.
 - b. He does not feel free, or joyful, or glad. He feels afraid, and alone, and in the dark. He feels squeezed and bound up and surrounded.
 - 2. God can handle your questions and He does not discipline a child for asking a question of Him
 - a. But, are we going *to Him* with the questions, or are we only talking to ourselves?
 - iii. "in the shattering of my bones, they verbally belittle me” (v10)
 - 1. “Those against me say to me all day, ‘Where is your God?’” (v10)
 - a. Their taunts and mockery of his pain, of his suffering, and of his weaknesses crush his spirit.
 - b. He feels crushed by them.
 - c. He feels betrayed by God, I think, so he says so.
 - iv. Pray honestly about your suffering while remembering God’s goodness
 - 1. "My God, my soul is against me!" (v6)
 - a. "It is melting away" (v6)
 - i. Disintegration – the quality of becoming less whole, whereby the soul is opposed to me, feels separate, like I am my own worst enemy
 - ii. Depression feels like this, like disintegration, like two people warring within me: isolating my soul from myself
 - iii. I don’t feel whole when my soul is distant from the Lord, when it longs for the LORD but cannot feel or know His presence
- c. “As I pour out my soul...” (v4)
 - i. He both laments the present pain and remembers the joy - there is freedom to pour out our souls, it is not faithless to do so, yet we must also remember the good while we do, we must labor and fight and struggle to remember and weep, coincidentally
 - ii. God does not want pretense from His people - nor does He desire us to simply try and rejoice - He wants us to mourn with hope (Matt 5:4, "blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted") - to be honest about our longings and frustrations with sin and suffering, but not without believing the truth of God's promise to make all things new through Christ Jesus
 - iii. Christians are people who grieve more deeply than the world because we know how high the dignity and beauty of what the world is supposed to be actually looks like. We have been in the presence of the Lord and beheld His beauty, so we feel the fall from such glory more poignantly.
 - iv. Christians are also people who rejoice more deeply because we know the future glory to come, the certainty of redemption, the resurrection life of Christ Jesus and the foretaste of it through His Holy Spirit. Therefore, Christians should be the most hopeful people, even in the parched and embattled lands of the present, where things are getting worse and worse.
 - v. This duality of deepest grief over sin and suffering and the deepest joy because of redemption and resurrection is the tension of the Christian life and the tension which the sons of Korah express so eloquently here in Psalm 42 honestly, truly, really, and genuinely.

2. Speak TO Your Soul

a. Preach the Promises of God Louder Than Your Soul Speaks to You

“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 [in Psalm 42] 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 moment, I will speak to you.’” (D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*)

i. "Why are you melting away, O my soul?" (v5,11)

1. "cast down" comes from the word to 'melt away' or 'sink away' and has the contextual connotation of water that evaporates, or sinks down into the soil
 - a. Now the poet views his soul as melting away, dissolving, disappearing
2. The poet now begins to speak to his own soul, rather than listening to it.
 - a. The question that he asks is "why" - what is the reason that you are dissolving?
 - i. There is a marked difference between grieving loss, sorrow and frustration, and the pointedness of despair and hopelessness and 'dissolving' into nothingness.
 1. We can despair, and often our tears proclaim that God is not there, not near, not caring - and all that we feel is all that there is - which leads us to believing that nothing matters, only pain exists, only loss and suffering IS.
 - ii. The poet calls it "turmoil" or "growling within me" - the inner noise, cacophony of accusation and sorrow and pain and loss is a growling soul, disheveled, discontent, fussy
 1. This kind of nihilism must be confronted with the WHOLE truth - the pain and sorrow is real, but not the only reality, and surely not the greater and ultimate reality

ii. "Hope in God" (v5,11)

1. Hope means to “wait in expectation for”
 - a. The poet is telling his soul to wait for God, expecting Him to deliver on His promises and to fulfill His Word
 - b. Therefore, he states his reason for waiting...
2. "because I will again praise Him, savior of me personally"
 - a. The greater reality is that I will personally be rescued and delivered by the Lord
 - b. Because he will be delivered and refreshed and invigorated by the Lord’s presence, he knows that he will again praise the Lord in the assembly for his salvation
3. "The LORD appoints his *chased* daily" (v8)
 - a. God’s covenant love is seen as an emissary sent out by the LORD every day
 - b. Commanded to go forth towards its object – His beloved child – with all the promises and all the love and all the covenant blessings
 - c. The greater reality is that the LORD loves me as a son, and this suffering is training me, is instructing me, is working these light and momentary afflictions into an eternal weight of glory far beyond comparing to any other good

iii. The promises of God are *more real* than the promises of your soul

b. Remember God’s Goodness

- i. "Therefore, I remember you" (v6)
 1. "Therefore" is the result of the previous phrase, "my soul is melting"
 2. In other words, the waning soul, the desperation of the soul, is the reason that drives the poet to remember the Lord
 - a. When your present circumstances, of soul and of body, are driven hard by suffering and distance from the Lord and His promises, then seek to remember the Lord Himself
 3. "From the land of Jordan and Hermon - from the mountain of Mizar" (v6)
 - a. This is the far north, Tyre and Sidon, far away from the sanctuary of the LORD and far away from the congregation of His people
 - b. He feels alone and distant, in danger and without rest – so he seeks to remember the LORD, to know HIM, to recall the character of the one who has made promises, so that he can wait expectantly for the goodness of the presence of the LORD
 - c. Even from the distant places, he remembers the LORD for His comfort and hope
- ii. "I remember these things" (v4)
 1. the poet preaches the truth behind the cacophony of his tears - he purposefully remembers God's faithfulness in the past - he argues against his tears, against his soul's depression
- iii. "I worshipped the LORD in gladness!" (v4)
 1. We do well to purposely remember the former joys, the glory which has been revealed to us, and the community's festive praises of the Lord together
 2. It is the point of the enemy to isolate the spiritual downtrodden
 - a. He works to minimize our participation in the lives of one another through sorrow, shame, guilt, and suffering
 - b. As we remember the Gospel truths *in the context of the community of the Church*, it guards our hearts from becoming isolated and vulnerable to despair
 3. Fight to keep meeting with one another, especially when you are spiritually joyless and struggling to be near to the Lord
 - a. **HEBREWS 10:19-25**
- iv. This also shows that the root of our distant feeling from the Lord is a problem of forgetfulness, of my soul's ignorance of the whole truth
 1. We forget the character of the Lord and the works of the Lord
 - a. "He who does not have these qualities present is so nearsighted that he is blind, *having forgotten* his cleansing from former sins" (2 Peter 1:9)
 - b. "Have you forgotten the encouragement to you as sons...?" (Hebrews 12:5)
 2. Our moods and behaviors are largely the results of what we are functionally believing to be ultimately true
 - a. If I believe that God is distant and far off, I will feel it and behave like it
 - b. If I believe that my friends' opinions of me is what gives my life meaning and rest, then I will feel every sharp comment deeply and it will undo me and ruin my day, and I will act accordingly
 - c. But if I believe that the LORD is near to me, that He has not forgotten me, that He is taking me somewhere glorious, then sharp comments by friends and suffering at the hands of my enemies will not undo me, but drive me to remember Him as my hope and rest for my soul
 - d. It will integrate my experiences of grief with the hope of a future

3. Get Outside and Look Around!

- a. Not only do we meditate on the promises of God, of His covenant love revealed in His Word, but we also look and listen to the Scriptures of Nature
- b. "Deep calls loudly to deep - the sound of your waterspouts" (v7)
 - i. Nature reveals the reality and glory of God wherever you may be
 - 1. Tumbling waterfalls speak from the depths, from the chaotic turmoil and turbidity of the whitewater, they make the sounds which proclaim the greatness and the nearness of the Creator
- c. "All your billows and waves cross over me" (v7)
 - i. Usually one "crosses over" the rivers and streams, but here the waters are crossing over him
 - 1. They cross the boundary of him, reaching between soul's division of thought and emotion to overwhelm him with the steadfast love of God
 - ii. The sound of the waters remind his soul of God's covenant love
- d. Nature preaches to your soul when your soul is struggling to comprehend the goodness and capability of God, too!
 - i. Psalm 19
 - ii. Getting outside and beholding the wonders of God's creation has a way of reminding our souls of the majesty and grandeur of God and of His provision for our humble souls
 - 1. "If he clothes the lilies like that, what does He care for His image-bearers?"
 - 2. "Not even a tiny little sparrow falls without his knowledge, and you are worth more than many sparrows!"

4. Sing Loudly!

- a. "maskil" comes from the word for "wisdom" or "understanding" (heading of the psalm)
 - i. These *songs* are meant to instruct and reveal
 - ii. Singing is soulful instruction
- b. "The sons of Korah"
 - i. historically: 5 'sons of Korah' were among David's 30 'mighty men', who could shoot a bow and sling a stone with either hand (1 Chr 12:6)
 - ii. David then establishes the sons of Korah as doorkeepers in the sanctuary of the LORD (1 Chr 9:19)
 - iii. These sons of Korah end up overseeing the singing and sacred music as well (2 Chr 20:19), and one of them, Asaph (1 Chr 15:17); , is known as writing a number of psalms (50,73,75-83)
 - iv. Thus, this psalm was meant for corporate worship - a song of spiritual thirst, of spiritual depression, of spiritual struggle was meant to instruct us in wisdom and understanding.
 - 1. 40% of the Psalms are laments - believers in God are not always supposed to "be on" and the Bible is not "pragmatic", it is "realistic"
 - 2. The Scriptures are full of poems and prayers and laments because we are not merely rational beings, but emotional beings as well - we not only exist in the objective reality of the world as it is (which is true), but we also experience this objective world in the limitations of our subjective understandings, our hearts do not see clearly, do not value fully, do not comprehend the totality of truth well - thus we need "wisdom poems" to remind us when our hearts and souls fail...which they will
- c. "Your covenant love's song is with me at night - a prayer to the God of my life"
 - i. "I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD forever" (Ps 89:1)
 - ii. The song of the LORD's covenant love, His faithfulness to keep His promise and do good to those whom He has chosen for Himself, becomes a prayer to the poet
 - 1. How does a song of God's covenant love become a prayer?
 - a. When one takes the promises and asks for them to be fulfilled!

- b. “I, through the abundance of your covenant love, will enter your house.” (Ps 5:7) becomes,
 - i. “Please let me, through the abundance of your covenant love, enter your house and behold you!”
- c. “I will rejoice and be glad because of your covenant love, for you have seen my affliction and have known the distress of my soul.” (Ps 31:7) becomes
 - i. “Help me rejoice and be glad because of your covenant love! Help me know and understand you who see me and know me!”
- iii. This is what Communion is for, too: to remember the whole truth that He is all that we need and that He is near

Those who belong to Christ Jesus are destined to know the LORD, so put your hope in God, not in the change in your circumstances. The Lord is maturing us, creating for Himself a people who are zealous for Him, who crave Him, who have been weaned off of desperation for security, weaned off of desperation for money, weaned off of desperation for comfort, and who instead are desperate for the presence of the living God. And we have this great and precious promise so that we might hope in Him when our souls are downcast and our tears are the only food that we can eat:

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” (Heb. 12:22-24)