

# *Pursuing God*

## In Step with the Psalms

### Lesson 4: Psalm 42

#### When God Shows Up!

##### *Stay on the Path ~*

"If God is all-knowing, almighty, and everywhere present at once, then why does He seem to be missing-in-action when I need Him the most?" How many of us have asked ourselves that question at one time or another, perhaps even more than once? The composer of Psalm 42 was facing tremendous persecution from his outward enemies and discouragement and depression from his inward feelings and emotions. He seemed to be moving further away from God, which led him to write about his desperate need for Him. Working through a process of self-examination, he was prompted to choose praise over doubt, with the result being he was able to encourage his soul and renew his hope in God.

Perhaps you're facing a similar situation today, wondering where in the world God is while looking for a way out. Be careful—the enemy of your soul will try to offer you a tempting alternative detour that is perhaps an all too familiar road. When you see it, don't take it! The detour may seem shorter and easier, offering you temporary relief, but it can actually be more hazardous and dangerous than the path the Lord has marked out for you. When you follow after God, you have His promise that "a man's heart plans his way but the Lord directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). Keep your eyes focused upward and stay alert; God's way is safer than any familiar road you have traveled in the past. His path is marked with exclamation points (the principles and promises of scripture), not question marks!

##### *Did you know ~*

Lament psalms comprise the biggest portion of the Psalter—approximately one-third of the entire book. They are poems that address a specific happening or occasion. The ingredients of a lament psalm consist of an introductory cry to God of great need, a development of the crisis circumstances, the detailed prayer offered, and the confident declaration of trust in God followed by praises lifted to Him.

## Psalm 42

To the Chief Musician  
A Contemplation of the sons of Korah

- 1 As the deer pants for the water brooks,  
So my soul pants for You, O God.
- 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When shall I come and appear before God?
- 3 My tears have been my food day and night,  
While they continually say to me,  
“Where is your God?”
- 4 When I remember these things,  
I pour out my soul within me.  
For I used to go with the multitude;  
I went with them to the house of God,  
With the voice of joy and praise,  
With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.
- 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul?  
And why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him  
For the help of His countenance.
- 6 O my God, my soul is cast down within me;  
Therefore I will remember You  
from the land of the Jordan,  
And from the heights of Hermon,  
from the Hill Mizar.
- 7 Deep calls unto deep at the  
noise of Your waterfalls;  
All Your waves and billows  
have gone over me.

8 The Lord will command His lovingkindness  
in the daytime,  
And in the night His song shall be with me—  
A prayer to the God of my life.

9 I will say to God my Rock,  
“Why have You forgotten me?  
Why do I go mourning because of  
the oppression of the enemy?”

10 As with a breaking of my bones,  
My enemies reproach me,  
While they say to me all day long,  
“Where is your God?”

11 Why are you cast down, O my soul?  
And why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him,  
The help of my countenance and my God.

Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

**Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.**

**Read Psalm 42:1–11.**

### *Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions*

What is the *tone* of the psalm? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

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When facing open hostility and opposition from people around you, where/what do you turn to in order to cope? Why?

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*Put a psalm in your heart* ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 42:8**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

*The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me—a prayer to the God of my life.*

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*Learn the lessons of the psalm* ~

*Selah* (Think about):

We aren't told whether the psalmist was forced to join a group on an exile march with other Jews or possibly a worship leader who for some reason couldn't join the pilgrims going to Jerusalem to celebrate. It is apparent that, looking back and moving further away from Jerusalem, his heart was grieved thinking the felt the Lord had forgotten him.

*I. Worship is a gift that feeds the soul* ~ vv. 1–5

During a drought, the composer of the psalm saw a deer panting in its struggle to reach water and quench its thirst.

1. What did this graphic image remind him of? v. 1
  
- a. What basic life essentials come to mind in this picture? vv. 2–3

The basics of life: water (v. 2) and food (v. 3), are necessary, but without *worship* (v.4), life to the psalmist was absolutely meaningless. Day and night his tears became his bread; his weeping was as “normal” as eating had been.

- b. Adding to his torment and the sense that God had abandoned him was the hostility of individuals causing him to doubt his belief. How does the psalmist refer to these men and with what question did they repeatedly taunt him? v. 3b, 9–10

2. This consistent mocking cause the psalmist such sorrow that he could not eat. His present circumstances were causing him to look back and remember what once was. What did he fondly remember? v. 4

### *Touchpoint ~*

Hunger and thirst are often depicted in scripture as the longing for fellowship with God and the satisfaction and fulfillment it brings. Look up the following verses and jot down how they relate to your understanding of what is being conveyed in Psalm 42.

- Psalm 36:8

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- Psalm 63:1

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- Matthew 5:6

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- John 4:10–14

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The psalmist poured out his soul to God in prayer (v.4) but then immediately admonished himself. Through a time of self-examination he allowed God's spirit to minister to him.

3. As He continued to struggle with his perspective, with what words did he begin to "feed" his own soul? vv. 5, 11

These verses convey the "ups and downs" the believer goes through as we struggle with our circumstances and our perspective. Here we have the reminder that we cannot always control our circumstances, but we *can* and *must* control our perspective and the way we handle what comes our way. 2 Corinthians 10:4–5 (AMP) says, *For the weapons of our warfare are not physical (weapons of flesh and blood), but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds, [inasmuch as we] refute arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the (true) knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ.* It is only maintaining a steadfast focus on God and feeding our minds on His Word that brings about the inner change we need to rise to the occasion.

### *Pause & ponder ~*

The word *help* in the phrase "help of my countenance" (v.5) can also be translated "health." When you by faith look into the face of God and realize His countenance shining upon you, it results in spiritual health. Take a look at Numbers 6:22–26 and note your blessings. It is like absorbing a warm dose of vitamin D from the "Son-shine!" Who do you resemble afterward? (v.27)

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Personal: Are *you* in a place today where you struggle to maintain the right perspective? Are your "enemies" taunting you to doubt that God is on the throne of your life and in control? Would you acknowledge that fact in the space below and then receive that warm dose of God's countenance shining down on you? Please record your results.

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## *II. Praise allows a change of heart & a chance to grow ~ vv. 6–11*

Though his soul was downcast, the psalmist recalls the times of worshiping the Lord while in Jerusalem writing, “I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, and from the heights of Hermon, from the Hill Mizar” (v. 6). He once occupied a place of ministry and usefulness by serving God in the temple, but now he can only remember those times from a distance.

Once again we can hear the disheartenment of his soul as he is overtaken by waves of distress: *deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me* (v.7 NIV). Tossed back and forth between words depicting his ordeal, he comes to a moment when he is able to recognize the Lord in it all.

1. With what overriding truth does he comfort his soul? v. 8

a. How does he refer to God as he continues his prayer? v. 9

The psalmist asks, “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” He recognizes God as his “Rock”—a stable fortress in time of need—but that He was not immediately coming to help! He had reached the point of great distress, so much so that he was in “mourning” because of the oppression and it had begun to affect him physically.

b. With what does he liken the pain he is experiencing? v. 10

The phrase “breaking of my bones” literally means “murder in my bones!” His persecutors had brought about an agony in his soul that was also manifested physically in his body. The repeated blows of his enemies were breaking him down bit by bit.

In verse 11, he repeats the earlier stanza of verse 5, asking: *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?* He answers these questions himself: *Put your hope in God!* The word *hope* means to put your trust in God and await His perfect timing to meet your need. It means: **Holding On** with **Patient Expectation!**

We can learn from the psalmist’s example: while waiting for God to come to our aid, in the meantime we should begin to praise Him—for who He is, what He’s done in the past, and what He has promised for our future good. What are some of the things you can think of to praise Him for today? That translates into *your growth for His glory!*

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## *Pause & ponder ~*

Hebrews 6:18–19 says that we flee to God for refuge to lay hold of the hope that is set before us. *This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us—even Jesus.* As you ponder the truth of these words, remember that your soul is not anchored downward to earth but upward to heaven—where the full realization of your hope yet awaits you! Please record your thoughts.

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## *Live the psalm ~*

How can you apply a portion of Psalm 42 to your life this week?

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## *Pray the psalm ~*

Your “self-talk”—your constant mental conversation throughout the day—has a lot to do with maintaining the right perspective. Worship will keep you centered on God. Select the verses of Psalm 42 that speak to your heart and pray them back to the Lord.

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## Notes



