

How to Talk to Yourself

Psalm 42-43

Please turn to Psalm 42. We will look at Psalm 42 and 43 together today, because most scholars think they were originally composed as one psalm, and I think they are right. There are three reasons to view Ps 42 and 43 as one psalm.

One, the refrain ends each stanza in Ps 42 also ends 43, the identical refrain.

42:5 *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

42:11 *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

43:5 *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

Two, Psalm 43 is the only psalm in this section that does not have its own title. It seems that the psalm was divided into two after the titles were added to the psalms.

And three, there are several ancient Hebrew manuscripts that have Ps 42 and 43 together as one psalm, it is all Psalm 42. So I will treat Ps 42 and 43 together as one psalm, one psalm having three stanzas. The stanzas end with the refrain, so Ps 42 has the two stanzas, and the third stanza is Ps 43, and that's how I will speak of it today, one psalm with three stanzas.

First Surprise This psalm had three surprises for me. I will tell you the three surprises right away, and then we'll go through and see how this shows itself. First, this person wants God himself.

This son of Korah wants God, just God, not something God will do for him, not something God will fix, but God himself. ¹ *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.* ² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?* ³ *My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"*

My soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? Ps 43:3-4 - *Send me your light and your faithful care, let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.* ⁴ *Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.*

"I will go the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight, I will praise you, O God, my God." I am not used to thinking about God in this way, this pure desire just for God. The psalms do not normally speak of God this way. Usually God is attached to something else, but less of that here.

Can you separate God himself from the things you'd like him to do for you, the ways he helps you, and thirst for God without any of the rest, just God himself? It is not how I normally picture God, I've been trying it on this week, I can get there, but it is not natural for me.

First surprise is what this worshipper actually wanted: God himself, to meet God, just God, God and nothing else, to meet with God.

Second surprise – For this worshipper, meeting God and attending a worship service are one and the same thing. To meet God, and to praise God with others at God's house, those are one and the same thing.

The Psalms worshippers knew very well God was not only in the Temple. They prayed to God from their beds, they knew God's hand was on them in the depths and in the heavens and on the far side of the sea. But this worshipper wants meet God in praise with a group.

This is a psalm of the sons of Korah. Korah in the genealogies was a great-grandson of Levi, a grandson of Kohath, one of the three clans of Levi's tribe. So sons of Korah are Levites, their whole calling, for generation after generation, was the Temple and the holy things.

Kohath was the Levite clan that took care of the holy things themselves, the ark and the lampstand and the altar and so on. The sons of Korah, in the clan of Kohath, are listed in a few places as singers. 1 Chron 6:31-38; 2 Chron 20:19. We know from the psalm titles that they led music. So the sons of Korah live for the Temple and the holy things and Temple music.

This son of Korah cannot separate meeting with God from praising God at the Temple with music. When he says his soul pants for God, he thirsts for the living God, he wants unbearably to meet with God, he *means* that he wants to meet with God by praising God at the Temple.

42:4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.

43:3b-4 -- Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. [That's the Temple.]⁴ Then I will go to the altar of God [at the Temple], to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.

That's the second surprise for me, that for this son of Korah, the pure deep thirst to meet God cannot be separated from the longing for a joyful group praising God. This worshipper is not interested in a private experience of God, not all; a group worshipping at the temple, or nothing.

Third Surprise – So, how will this worshipper make it happen? His soul pants for God, he thirsts for God, to meet with the living God, his God, his joy and his delight. How will he meet God?

Here's what he'll do: he's going to wait for God. That's it: God will do it. He's going to put his hope in God, because sooner or later God will make it happen. The worshipper cannot do anything at all about this. It is out of his hands. But he's confident in God. God will do it.

The NIV says "My soul, put your hope in God," but some versions use "wait" instead of "hope."

Three times in this psalm we have these words, all three stanzas end the same way: *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, wait for God to act, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.* And that, people, is how to talk to yourself!

That is the punch line of these three stanzas, three times over exactly the same. Write it on a card and tape it to your steering wheel, or your computer screen.

Stanza One – 42:1-5. There is not really prayer, just the worshipper talking to himself.

¹ *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.*

² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

³ *My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"*

⁴ *These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.*

This worshipper cannot meet God. Wants to with all his heart, but cannot make it happen. When can I go and meet with God. It makes him weep. And the people around him don't think he has any God in his life at all.

In sorrow and longing, the worshipper remembers better days, days when he would go to God's house, days when God protected him. In those days he was part of a crowd of people praising God joyfully. He wants those good old days again, but he's cut off from God.

And then he changes. He's been talking to himself about his painful experience, but now he decides to talk to himself with his faith voice, instead.

⁵ *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?*

Put your hope in God, wait for God to act, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

He talks to himself from his faith. I don't think we can control how we feel. What we feel is what we feel, feelings themselves are neither good nor bad in God's eyes, though we like some more than others.

But we can control how we talk to ourselves. And this worshipper decides to talk to himself from his faith. My soul, he says to himself, you are more discouraged than you need to be. Instead, put your hope in God, wait for God to act. I know for sure that I will yet praise him.

So I say to you, here, don't just decide to trust in God. Speak to yourself. "Why, Ed, are you so discouraged? You don't need to be so distressed. Put your hope in God, Ed, wait for God to deal with this, count on God, act as if you had faith, Ed. Because I will yet praise God. He is my Saviour and my God." When you talk to yourself, talk about God in your future.

If you talk to yourself like this, you will unfortunately find that the positive thinking does not last long, soon we're back in dark part of our mind. And that just what happened to this worshipper.

Stanza Two 42:6-11 Again, not really a prayer, though he reports what he prays.

⁶ *My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.*

⁷ *Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers have swept over me.*

⁸ *By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.*

⁹ *I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"*

¹⁰ *My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"*

The Jordan River begins in northern Israel, flowing down Mount Hermon. In a heavy rain there could be waterfalls there. It seems that's why this son of Korah cannot go to the house of God.

He's in northern Israel, a long way from Jerusalem, and because of enemies he's stuck there, he may not go to the house of God to meet with God. In the third stanza he speaks of a faithless nation, and enemies. We don't know the details, and the details do not matter.

What matters is that he is discouraged, and that his troubles are God's fault. All your waves and breakers, God, have swept over me (v7). I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me?" (v9). God has not forgotten him, but sometimes he feels like it, and worshippers say this to God.

V8 comes out of nowhere, and does not really fit in the stanza. V8 is in the exact center of the three stanzas, and it is the only use of God's name (LORD) in the three stanzas. V8 seems to me like a short burst of confidence and faith inserted into the middle of the three stanzas.

Overall, the second stanza is as dark as the first, maybe worse. But it ends with the same refrain. His experience voice is dark, but he has also a faith voice. He's talking to himself all the way through, but inside himself he has an experience voice and also a faith voice. The refrain is his faith voice. He can't control how he feels, but he can control what he says to himself.

¹¹ *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

Same refrain every time. When this worshipper describes his experience, it sounds similar in each stanza, but he does not use the same words. But his faith voice uses exactly the same words every time. Which sounds like: This worshipper has something ready for dark days.

Deep despair is not the time to decide what your faith voice will say. This worshipper has something ready to use, used it before, so that in his despair he can remember what he's written down or memorized. He uses the same words again to turn his mind to God. How to talk to yourself includes having something ready to say to yourself.

Stanza Three 43:1-5 This third stanza is mostly prayer, and is overall more confident. This may be why they began to use the third stanza on its own, as an independent psalm: because it is prayer in a way that Psalm 42 is not prayer.

Ps 43:1 - Vindicate me, my God, and plead my cause against an unfaithful nation.

Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wicked.

² *You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me?*

Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?

There is more here about the bad people around the worshipper. Unfaithful nation, the deceitful and wicked, oppressed by the enemy. We assume this is why this son of Korah cannot go to the house of God and meet with God. Some kind of enemy oppression stops him.

Verses 3-4 are less hopeless than what's in previous stanzas, more positive: He wants to go to God's dwelling, to the altar, to praise God there.

³ *Send me your light and your faithful care, let them lead me;*

let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.

⁴ *Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight.*

I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.

And again, the refrain that comes from the worshipper's faith.

⁵ *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?*

Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

This worshipper has a dark experience voice, and a faith voice, and he uses them both. Both, together, are given to us here so we can worship God.

We can use our dark experience voice when we talk to ourselves, but not by itself. We can tell ourselves how miserable we are, but as children of God that cannot be the only thing we tell ourselves. We have to make a habit of also using our faith voice when we talk to ourselves.

In this psalm, the worshipper goes back and forth three times. This psalm is not saying that if we use our faith voice to talk to ourselves, the miserable experience voice will go away.

When we talk to ourselves, let's assume that we go back and forth between different voices. The psalm is saying that the dark experience is not the only reality in a dark time.

There is also a God who is real in the dark time, and we're his children in the dark time, and he's completely reliable and trustworthy, just not in a hurry the way we are!

So we use the faith voice, and we say words to ourselves that lead us to faith. "We will put our hope in God, we will wait for God to act." Don't let the miserable voice silence the faith voice.

"I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God." I want to say, "if you had faith you'd praise God now, you would not wait for it." But this son of Korah can only really praise God at the house of God, with the festive throng. He can't praise just because he has faith.

Perhaps praise is not an option for you. You just cannot praise. But we still have a faith voice, and we can still put our hope in God, use our faith voice to speak to ourselves, and live one day at a time as those waiting for our God to act. Amen.