

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 Psalm 42 and 43 as originally one psalm.

One, the same refrain ends each stanza in Psalm 42 and also ends 43.

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.*

These three refrains tie the two psalms together.

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, several ancient Hebrew manuscripts have Psalm 42 and 43 together as one psalm. So I will treat Psalm 42 and 43 together as one psalm having 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. <sup>1</sup> *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.* <sup>2</sup> *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?* <sup>3</sup> *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? Psalm 43:3–4 - *Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.* <sup>4</sup> *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." This is not common for me, this pure desire just for God. The psalms don't normally speak of God this way. Usually God is attached to something else that we want, but not 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? My soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God. I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight.

On the one hand, this psalmist has a longing for God that I don't have. I trust God, need him, praise him, serve him. But panting for God, my joy and delight – I am not there yet. On the other hand, God gives this psalm to us all. The God of this psalm invites us to have this kind of desire for him. First surprise is what this worshipper wants: God himself, he longs for God.

## Second surprise

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

*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. 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.*

Israelites knew very well that 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 to meet God in congregational praise.

The title says this is a psalm of the sons of Korah. Korah 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, and 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 Chronicles as singers. (1 Chronicles 6:31–38; 2 Chronicles 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.

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; he wants a group worshiping at the temple.

### 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 this happen?

He will wait for God to do 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 make this happen. It is out of his hands. But he's confident in God. God will do it. Some versions say "wait" instead of "hope," but here it amounts to the same thing.

Three times we have these words: *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! Now let's go through the psalm.

### First Stanza: The Drought – 42:1-5

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> *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 meeting God like that.

And then something changes. He's been talking to himself with his pain voice, but now he decides to talk to himself with his faith voice.

<sup>5</sup> *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 what we tell 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. Talk 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, and I will yet praise him.” Tell yourself what God will do in your future.

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

### **Second Stanza: The Depths – 42:6–11**

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

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

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

<sup>9</sup> *I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?”*

<sup>10</sup> *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. He’s in northern Israel, a long way from Jerusalem, and maybe 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, they don’t matter.

What matters is that he is discouraged, and that his troubles are God’s fault. Verse 7: “I’m stuck under *your* waterfalls. All *your* waves and breakers, God, have swept over me.” Verse 9: “I say to God my Rock, ‘Why have *you* forgotten me?’” God has not forgotten him, but sometimes he feels like it, and worshippers talk like this to God. God invites it.

When a child of God has a trouble that stays, or goes through tragedy, it becomes two troubles. First is the trouble itself, the illness or tragedy or whatever. The second trouble is God. Why is God doing this? Why does God not rescue me? Those are good questions. God expects us to ask him those questions. That’s why we have many lament psalms. These psalms *don’t* say, “it is probably my fault.” Psalm 42–43 never says that either. God has done it, we don’t know why.

Verse 8 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, Yahweh, in the three stanzas. V8 seems like a short burst of confidence and faith inserted into the middle.

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 he has a pain voice and also a faith voice. The refrain is his faith voice. He calls himself to faith.

<sup>11</sup> *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.*

His faith voice uses the same words every time. This child of God had something ready for dark days. He knew what to tell himself. He's probably used this before. 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. Find an encouraging line or two of Scripture that work for you, from Psalms or elsewhere, and say it to yourself. You could begin with this very refrain.

### **Third Stanza: The Prayer – 43:1–5**

This third stanza is mostly prayer, and is more confident. This may be why they used the third stanza on its own, as an independent psalm: because it is prayer in a way that Psalm 42 is not.

*Psalm 43:1 - Vindicate me, my God, and plead my cause against an unfaithful nation.  
Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wicked.*

<sup>2</sup> *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. Perhaps that's 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 more positive than previous stanzas: He imagines going to God's dwelling to praise God there, and asks for that.

<sup>3</sup> *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.*  
<sup>4</sup> *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 voice, talking to himself.

<sup>5</sup> *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.*

The pain voice and the faith voice, together, are given to us 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. Let's 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 will go away. When we talk to ourselves, let's assume that we go back and forth between different voices.

This psalm tells us 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." This worshipper cannot praise God at this time. Perhaps praise is not an option for you either right now. You 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. We will yet praise him. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, our God, our joy and our delight, we long for you. We thirst for you. Send out your light and your truth, your light and your faithful care. May they lead us, and bring us to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. We know that we will yet praise you. You will act, and we will be filled with joy and relief, and we will praise you with all our might. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.