

# THE LOOKOUT

OCTOBER 2022

## Unit: Psalms (Part 1)

## Theme: Rooted

**Overview:** “Texts have tunes,” preacher and professor Fred Craddock said. That is especially true of Psalms, the hymnbook of the Bible. Most biblical psalms were sung or prayed. They are poetic in genre and speak to every human emotion. Psalms (the book) consists of five sections—Psalms 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; and 107–150—which makes it similar to the five books of the Pentateuch and the five discourses of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel. The main imagery of the book of Psalms coincides with a Middle Eastern agrarian culture, and the main characteristic of Psalms is parallelism (rhetorical pattern of likeness). In October, students will learn how righteousness, reality, repentance, reason, and worship are “rooted” in God.

## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Tab indicates the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF OCTOBER 9, 2022

**LESSON AIM:** **Put your hope in God's reality when life appears to deny his care for you.**

**UNIT:** Psalms (Part 1)

**THEME:** Rooted

**LESSON TEXT:** Psalms 42–43

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Psalm 63; 1 Peter 5:6-7; 1 Samuel 1:1-20

## ROOTED IN REALITY

BY MARK SCOTT

A line from the hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” says, “We should never be discouraged.” Really? Is that reality in a fallen world? Discouragement comes from several fronts. The sons of Korah evidently knew that and sang about it. Psalms 42 and 43 are combined as a single psalm in many Hebrew manuscripts. The refrain that admits the reality of discouragement and yet hope in God unites the psalms (42:5, 11; 43:5). This is a *maskil*, a kind of musical notation or liturgical term.

**How the Psalmist Felt**

While our emotions can lie to us, they can also be very real. “Feelings” and the Psalms are inextricably linked. The psalmist behind these two psalms admitted several feelings. He felt a longing for God (42:1-2). This longing or spiritual thirst was as strong as the deer panting for water. The psalmist also admitted his tears (42:3). They flowed so strongly that they were his source of nourishment. But these tears may have been caused by mockers (“Where is your God?”) and enemies (42:3, 9). This reality caused the psalmist to feel rejected by God himself (43:2).

In addition to these things, the psalmist admitted physical suffering (“My bones suffer mortal agony”—evidently some kind of deadly wound, 42:10). The psalmist felt forgotten (“Why have you forgotten me?” 42:9). All of this caused the psalmist to feel downcast (to bow low or bow down). He was *disturbed* (to roar or clamor). This was real. But hope in God also was (and is) real. So, the psalmist reminded himself to put his hope in God. Praising God is good therapy for overcoming discouragement.

**What the Psalmist Remembered***Psalm 42*

In times of deep discouragement, we must draw upon the worship of God and the love of God. The psalmist longed to *meet with God*. He wanted to be in Jerusalem near the tabernacle (or temple) to worship God *among the festive throng*. He longed to *go to the house of God* and experience *joy and praise*. The psalmist seems to have been in the Jordan Valley near Galilee. *Mount Mizar* is in the northernmost part of Israel (this is the Mount Hermon region). The psalmist compared his troubles to

the region’s waterfalls (“all your waves and breakers have swept over me”). The idiom *deep calls to deep* describes the longing in his soul.

The psalmist reminded himself of the love of God. In fact, he mentioned that special Hebrew word *chesed* in verse 8. This is God’s loyal or covenantal love, or his loving-kindness. In his despair, the psalmist reminded himself of the love of God by day and God’s song in his life by night. There is much spiritual therapy going on in these psalms. We must admit reality. Things hurt in a fallen world. God’s hand (presence) is not as evident in the world as it was in Genesis 1–2 and as it will be in that new Eden (heaven on steroids) in Revelation 21–22. But this veil between the glories of heaven and the discouragement of earth gets thinner as we remember God and praise God.

**What the Psalmist Wanted***Psalm 43*

Psalm 43 helps flesh out the dilemma of Psalm 42. If Psalm 42 admits the reality of our pain, then Psalm 43 admits the reality of our victory over that pain with help from God. As he sang his song of despair, the psalmist wanted four things. Starting out, he wanted vindication from God. This means he wanted God to judge on his behalf or plead his case. The unfaithful nations had come at him with their criticisms and mockeries. He wanted God to contend or strive for him. As part of this vindication, the psalmist also wanted God to *rescue* him. This request meant he wanted to be delivered or helped to escape from *those who are deceitful and wicked*.

The psalmist also wanted *light* (probably referring to understanding or insight into life) and *faithful care* (probably referring to the truthfulness of God’s Word). He knew God was his *stronghold* (fortified place), which is why he also wanted to worship. When we enter God’s sanctuary (Psalm 73:17), we begin to see our way through our distorted views and discouragements. The psalmist wanted to go to God’s *holy mountain* and to the *altar of God* (references to Jerusalem and the temple). He wanted the privilege of praise, expressing his *joy and delight* with *the lyre*, a musical instrument. There are troubles in this world. But more importantly, there is hope in God. ■

## SURVIVING A SPIRITUAL DROUGHT

BY DAVID FAUST

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God” (Psalm 42:1). Picture a thirsty deer—exhausted, parched, huffing and puffing, literally dying for water. Does that describe the way you pant for God?

Have you ever gone through a spiritual dry spell when you feel restless and dissatisfied? You are not merely thirsting for money, sex, entertainment, or companionship. You are longing for God. Even those who love God deeply go through spiritual droughts now and then.

### Signs of a Thirsty Soul

In dry times, *others provide little help*. Friends are too busy with their own problems to reach out, and mockers ask, “Where is your God?” (Psalm 42:3).

During a spiritual drought, *you may lose the joy of worship*. The psalmist “used to go to the house of God . . . with shouts of joy and praise” (v. 4). In the past you urged your family and friends, “Come on, let’s go to church.” But in dry times your enthusiasm wanes, and worship seems stale and lifeless.

In such times, *God seems distant*. The psalmist asks God, “Why have you forgotten me?” (v. 9).

### Survival Strategies

What will be your survival strategy when you face a spiritual drought? How can you hydrate a dried-up soul? Psalm 42 offers help.

**1. Be self-aware.** When you are dry, ask why! The psalm writer conducts a spiritual interrogation, putting his soul under a spotlight and asking, “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?” (v. 5). It’s good to ask, *What’s going on in my soul? Is a particular habit, sin, or discouragement dragging me down?*

**2. Choose to be faithful while your emotions catch up.** C. S. Lewis said *faith* is “the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your

changing moods.” The psalmist tells himself, “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (v. 5). Tenacious faith insists, “I’m down, but I’m not done. I’m struggling, but I’ll keep serving. I’m famished, but I’m not finished. I’m tired, but I won’t quit. I will yet praise him!” When dry times come, don’t cheat on your spouse, blow up at your boss, give up on God, or walk out on your church. Decide to be faithful.

**3. Enroll in God’s school of hard knocks.** “Deep calls to deep” (v. 7). Something deep within God calls to something deep within us. We learn shallow lessons in easy times, deeper lessons in hard times. In God’s curriculum, hardship is a required course. In God’s classroom, some lessons must be learned the hard way. Winston Churchill said, “Mountaintops inspire leaders, but valleys mature them.”

You will be a better lifeguard if you know how it feels to be swamped by waves.

Psalm 42:7 compares a believer’s troubles to waterfalls, waves, and breakers. Hardships often come in waves, one after another—like a waterfall pouring down. At the beginning of Psalm 42, the psalmist says he’s thirsty. God answers with so much water it’s hard to take it all in.

Psalm 42 ends by repeating the self-talk found in verse 5: “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (v. 11). Dry times will come on this side of Heaven, but the Lord extends a gracious invitation: “Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life” (Revelation 22:17).

**Personal Challenge:** Talk with a trusted friend or a Christian counselor about the current status of your soul, using questions like these: What is the level of my spiritual thirst? What is my attitude about the Lord and his church? Am I physically exhausted and need some rest? Have I been too busy and need a break? Have I been too isolated and need to spend time with others who will build me up? Where can I find resources to refresh my soul? ■

## DISCOVERY

### BY MICAH ODOR

1. How do you tend to listen to music? Radio, CDs, streaming services?
2. Think about the music you've listened to this week, and ignore musical styles or genres for a moment. What types of emotions are typically expressed in the music you hear?

We're going to treat today's passage as one continuous text. Ask one person to read aloud **Psalms 42–43** (or split the reading between two people). Then, as a group, quickly restate the highlights of the passage.

3. Imagine seeing this song in a hymnal or on a screen. What is the chorus? What are the verses?
4. What are some of the most powerful lines that express positive emotion?
  - What are the most powerful lines that express negative emotion?
5. What does the singer want?
6. In his "Application" for this week's lesson, David Faust said, "Choose to be faithful while your emotions catch up." What's one area of life where you are waiting (or need to wait) for your emotions to catch up??
7. What do you learn about God from this passage?
8. What do you learn about humanity?
9. This week, how will you obey what you've studied in Scripture?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Psalm 51**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■