

When My Soul is Cast Down – Psalm 42-43

INTRODUCTION

Turning now to God's Word, there are seasons when what we know about God does not seem to match what we feel.

We know that God is near, but he feels distant.

We know that God is faithful, but we feel forgotten.

We know that God is good, but our circumstances leave us confused.

When that gap opens between conviction and emotion, some of our deepest spiritual battles begin. We can become discouraged, lose hope, and wonder why our faith feels so fragile.

So today we are beginning a three-part series called **Fragile Faith**: the discouraged soul, the accused conscience, and the anxious mind.

The central conviction of this series is simple:

Fragile faith is not failed faith when it clings to a strong Savior.

Looking at our sermon passage for this morning, Psalms 42 and 43, we meet a believer who is spiritually thirsty, emotionally exhausted, and mocked by enemies.

He knows God is faithful, yet feels forgotten.

Still, he pours out his sorrow, remembers what is true, and speaks truth to his soul.

Although numbered separately, Psalms 42 and 43 form one unified song.

[Slide]

And a repeated refrain is what binds the two together:

“Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.”

That refrain appears three times.

Each time, the psalmist remains cast down.

His circumstances have not changed.

His feelings have not suddenly improved.

Yet each time, he turns his soul back toward God.

His sorrow changes shape, but the answer remains the same:

“Hope in God.”

And that brings us to the central message of this passage:

**When our souls are cast down, faith brings sorrow to God and keeps saying,
“Hope in God.”**

[Slide]

We will see this through three movements:

First, bring your sorrow honestly to God.

Second, remember God when the waves overwhelm you.

And third, ask God to lead you back to praise. [Slide →]

I. BRING YOUR SORROW HONESTLY TO GOD – PSALM 42:1-5

The psalm begins with one of the best-known images in the Psalms:

“As a deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God.”

Although this may sound peaceful, that is not the picture.

It is the image of a deer desperate for water, panting for streams it cannot find.

That is how the psalmist describes his longing for God.

He says in verse 2:

“My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.”

This is not a casual seeking of God. He is desperate.

He does not merely want his circumstances to improve,
his enemies silenced,
or his sorrow removed.

He needs the living God himself.

Yet, for reasons not fully explained,
he cannot come into God’s presence as he once did. So he cries out:

“When shall I come and appear before God?”

His soul is spiritually dry and thirsty.

And there is an important pastoral truth here:

Spiritual dryness does not necessarily mean spiritual indifference.
Sometimes it produces a deeper thirst for God.

A spiritually indifferent person does not thirst for God.
But for someone who has known and enjoyed God,
spiritual dryness may reveal that nothing else can satisfy the soul.

Perhaps prayer feels difficult, Scripture feels dry, and worship feels distant.

Sometimes the grief you feel over that distance
is itself evidence that your soul still longs for God.

With that longing in mind, the psalmist continues in verse 3:

“My tears have been my food
day and night,
while they say to me all the day long,
‘Where is your God?’”

We are not told the exact circumstances,
but his grief had become his constant companion,
following him from morning into night.

And rather than comforting him, others added to his pain.

Their question, “Where is your God?” is not sincere. It is an accusation:

“By the looks of your suffering, God must have abandoned you!”
That is essentially what they are saying.

And that reinforces the fear already troubling his soul.

Accusing voices may come from others,
from the unbelieving culture, or even our own minds.
But beneath them is the same accusation:

“Where is your God?”

The psalm acknowledges the pain and brings it into God’s presence.

[Slide]

This leads to verse 4, where the psalmist remembers the past:

“These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I would go with the throng
and lead them in procession to the house of God
with glad shouts and songs of praise,
a multitude keeping festival.”

In short, he remembers worshiping with the people of God.

At first, those memories deepen his grief. He remembers what he once enjoyed, making his present isolation even more painful.

This is probably something we all can relate with.

We remember life before the grief,
and the contrast between then and now leaves us asking, “What happened?”

But his memories also begin to redirect his mind.

Those around him ask, “Where is your God?”

And his memories answer:

God had met with him before.

God had been faithful in the past.

And the God who was faithful then had not changed.

His memories are painful, but they become an act of faith.

In the face of present hardship, he remembers who God has always been.

And he says:

“These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul.”

This is the essence of biblical lament.

Biblical lament is not merely letting sorrow out. It is bringing sorrow before God.

The psalmist reaches into his memories in order to reach toward God.

[Slide]

Then, in verse 5, he stops describing his soul and begins addressing it:

“Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.”

The psalmist does not condemn himself for feeling discouraged.

He does not say, “A true believer would never feel this way.”

Instead, he examines his soul honestly before God.

He challenges the conclusions his emotions are drawing.

He does not silence his sorrow,
but neither does he allow sorrow to override the truth about God.

Then he gives his soul one clear command:

“Hope in God.”

Not in yourself.

Not in changing circumstances.

Hope in God.

Biblical hope is not vague optimism.

It is patiently and expectantly waiting for God to act.

That is why he says: “For I shall again praise him.”

He still feels sorrowful, but he believes God has not abandoned him.
And he trusts that praise will return.

Some may hear that and say, “He’s just in denial...”

But hope only looks like denial when we focus on the circumstances
and lose sight of the God who stands beyond them.

So when your soul is cast down, bring your sorrow honestly to God.

Faith does not require you to pretend that everything is fine.

Throughout Scripture, and most clearly in Jesus Christ,
God has revealed himself as compassionate, merciful, and steadfast in love.

Bring him your tears, questions, disappointments, and longings.
Pour out your soul before him. Then speak truth to your soul: “Hope in God.”

But the psalmist’s struggle is not over.

As the waves begin to overwhelm him, he deliberately remembers God.
That leads us to our second point. [Slide →]

II. REMEMBER GOD WHEN THE WAVES OVERWHELM YOU – PSALM 42:6-11

Verse 6 begins:

“My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.”

That is a bold statement.

He does not say:

“My soul is cast down; therefore I give up.”

Nor:

“My soul is cast down; therefore God must have given up on me.”

Instead:

“My soul is cast down; therefore I remember you.”

This place of discouragement becomes the setting for deliberate remembrance.

Though far from Jerusalem and the place where he once worshiped,
he knows he is not beyond God’s reach.

And that is an important reminder for us.

When discouraged, we often dwell on our failures, what others have said,
what has been lost, and how long the hardship has lasted.

But the psalmist shows us a better way:

“My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you.”

He channels his discouragement toward deliberate remembrance of God.

But, that does not mean his pain disappears.

Verse 7 intensifies the picture:

“Deep calls to deep
at the roar of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your waves
have gone over me.”

At first, the psalmist was thirsty.
Now he feels as though he is drowning.

One wave follows another.
Before he can recover from one burden, another crashes over him.

That is what prolonged discouragement can feel like.

It may be a series of hardships or one hardship that affects every area of life.

One wave breaks, and before you can catch your breath, another comes.

Yet even here, the psalmist does not allow sorrow
to erase what he knows about God.

He calls them:

“Your waterfalls.”
“Your breakers.”
“Your waves.”

He may not understand why the waves continue,
but he knows that his suffering is not beyond God’s authority.

The waves may be over him, but they are not over God.

Scripture does not explain every storm,
but it assures us that God has not lost control or abandoned his people.

The waves may shake us, but they cannot carry us beyond his presence.

[Slide]

And in the middle of those waves, the psalmist declares in verse 8:

“By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.”

Earlier, his tears were with him day and night.

Now he reminds himself that God’s steadfast love is also with him.

His sorrow remains, but it is not the only reality.

The Lord commands His steadfast love toward him.

Even while the waves continue,
God’s steadfast love remains active on behalf of His people.

The psalmist’s feelings may be unstable, but God’s character is not.

The circumstances are relentless, but God’s love is steadfast.

That is where faith finds an anchor.

Then, in verses 9 and 10, the psalmist brings this tension directly to God:

“I say to God, my rock:
‘Why have you forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning
because of the oppression of the enemy?’”

At first, this may sound like he has spiraled back into complaint.

But he is doing exactly what we saw in the first movement:
He is bringing his sorrow honestly to God.

He feels forgotten and oppressed.

He continues to hear the taunt, “Where is your God?”

Yet he directs all of it to the God he calls:

“My rock.”

And so here we see the paradox of faith in sorrow:

God feels distant enough for the psalmist to feel deserted,
yet remains near enough for him to cry out to in prayer.

Even the question, “Why have you forgotten me?” is still a prayer.

He does not choose between what he knows and what he feels.

He holds both before God.

He feels forgotten, yet he knows God is his Rock.

And that is important for us.

We can experience emotional turmoil,
bring God our questions,
and grieve deeply *while still persevering in faith*.

Fragile faith does not hide the struggle. It brings it into the Lord’s presence.

[Slide]

Then, in verse 11, the refrain returns:

“Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.”

The fact that the refrain repeats tells us something important.

The battle was not settled the first time.

This is not a truth we hear once and leave behind.
It is a truth we must continue growing into.

My daughter Violet has heard many times that vegetables are good for her,
but broccoli continues to be a struggle for her,
so that is a truth she must continue growing into.

In the same way, some truths—including “Hope in God”—
must be learned repeatedly over a lifetime.

Life will bring repeated sorrow, so faith must repeatedly remember God.

We return to His faithfulness.

We speak truth to our downcast souls.

And with patient expectation, we continue to hope in Him.

And the repeated struggle does not mean that faith has failed.
It means that faith is being exercised to return again to God.

So when the waves overwhelm you,
remember who God is,
how he has been faithful,
and that his steadfast love has not changed.

Do not allow the size of the waves
to make you forget the greatness of the God who rules over them.

You may feel overwhelmed, but you are not beyond his reach.

You may have questions, but you can still bring them to your Rock.

And when your soul remains cast down, return again to the truth:

“Hope in God; for I shall again praise him.”

So, the psalmist has brought his sorrow to God
and remembered God in the waves.

But now he needs God to act and lead him.

That leads us to our third and final point. [Slide →]

III. ASK GOD TO LEAD YOU BACK TO PRAISE – PSALM 43:1-5

Psalm 43 begins:

“Vindicate me, O God,
and defend my cause against an ungodly people,
from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me!”

The psalmist now does more than describe his pain.

He asks God to act:

Vindicate me.
Defend me.
Deliver me.

This too is an act of faith.

Hope means patiently waiting for God while expecting him to act.

Sorrow can make our prayers vague, perhaps because we fear disappointment.
But the psalmist asks specifically:

Defend me. Deliver me. Lead me. Bring me back.

Then he says in verse 2:

“For you are the God in whom I take refuge;
why have you rejected me?
Why do I go about mourning
because of the oppression of the enemy?”

Once again, faith and sorrow appear together.

He calls God his refuge, yet honestly admits that he feels rejected.

He does not understand what God is doing, but he does not run away.

He continues taking refuge in God while struggling to feel secure.

Fragile faith may tremble, but it keeps turning toward God.

[Slide]

Then, in verse 3, he prays:

“Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!”

The psalmist knows that he cannot find his own way out of the darkness.
He needs God to lead him.

At the beginning of the psalm, his soul reached out for God:

“My soul pants for you.”

Now he asks God to reach toward him:

“Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me.”

His hope does not rest in willpower.
It rests in the grace of the God who guides him.

The same is true for us.

When your strength feels small, God is able to lead.
When your mind feels clouded, God is able to send light.
When your emotions feel unreliable, God’s truth remains sure.

Feelings are real, but they are not always reliable guides.

So the psalmist asks God’s truth to lead him where his emotions cannot.

He wants to be led back to God’s holy hill, God’s dwelling,
and the gathered worship of God’s people.

This too is a great example to us,
because discouragement often tempts us to withdraw
from prayer, Scripture, other believers, and worship.

But the psalmist prays in the opposite direction:

“God, lead me back.”

So when your soul is cast down, ask God to lead you by his light and truth.

Do not wait until you feel better
before moving toward his Word, prayer, fellowship, and worship.

These are means of grace through which God ministers to his people.

The psalmist knows this, so he looks forward with patient expectation
in verse 4:

“Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy,
and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.”

He longs to return to the altar, but even the altar is not his ultimate joy.

God is.

He calls God: “My exceeding joy.”

And this too is a bold statement, because he does not feel joyful in this moment,
but he does *know* where his deepest joy is found.

His hope is not merely to return to a place or resume a routine.

His hope is to return to God.

And notice that his praise remains future:

“Then I will go.”
“I will praise you.”

He has not arrived yet.

But he hopes in God and trusts him to lead him there.

He does not pretend that his joy has returned.

But he does believe praise *will* return because God remains his God.

And again, this is important to keep in mind when our souls are cast down...

Faith does not demand:

“I must feel better now.”

Faith says:

“God is *still* my exceeding joy, *regardless* of how I feel,
and I believe I shall praise him again.”

[Slide]

That leads us to the refrain one final time:

“Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.”

His circumstances have not changed.

His enemies remain,
his questions are unanswered,
and his emotional turmoil has not fully lifted.

The psalm ends with the battle still underway.

And yet, that is one of the most helpful features of this passage.

We do not always end the day with every question answered or feeling victorious.

But we can end the day by repeating what remains true:

“Hope in God.”

The victory is *not* that the psalmist is no longer cast down.

The victory is that his sorrow has *not silenced his faith*.

He is still speaking to God, seeking God, asking God to lead him, and calling him:

“My salvation and my God.”

Hope is not pretending that the darkness is gone.

Hope is patiently and expectantly trusting that God will have the final word.

[Slide →]

CONCLUSION [Blank Slide]

There is much more to uncover in Psalms 42 and 43,
but the central message is clear:

When your soul is cast down,
bring your sorrow to God and keep saying, “Hope in God.”

Life in this fallen world is hard.

Christians have the blessed assurance of glory to come.
But until that day, we are called to follow Christ through every season—

when we are panting for water on a dry and weary path,
and when the waves are crashing over us
faster than we can catch our breath.

In those seasons, remember the psalmist.
He remains thirsty, tearful, taunted, and overwhelmed.
At the end, his soul is still cast down.

Yet fragile faith is not failed faith when it clings to a strong Savior.

He brings his sorrow to God,
he remembers God in the waves,
he asks God to lead him,
and through every cycle says:

“Hope in God.”

Now, that sounds simple, but simple does not mean easy.

Some of you have lived through the same struggle day after day.

You watch others move forward
while your own story seems to have stopped.

You have grown so accustomed to surviving that hope feels distant.

And you wonder whether anyone truly understands.

But God knows the condition of your soul better than you do.

So bring your sorrow honestly to him.

You may not feel able to share your tears with others,
but you never need to hide them from God.

And remember what remains true.

Circumstances change and emotions rise and fall,
but God's character remains the same.

He is still the God of your life, your Rock, and your refuge.
His steadfast love for you in Christ will never end.

And if all of this still feels abstract, look to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus knew thirst.

Jesus knew tears.

Jesus knew rejection and mockery.

On the cross, He willingly bore the judgment our sins deserved.

Jesus entered the darkness more deeply than we ever will.

But through His death and resurrection,
Jesus guarantees that darkness will not have the final word.

Suffering will not have the final word.

Death will not have the final word.

Jesus Christ is risen.

And because Christ is risen, every believer can say with confidence:

"I shall again praise him."

You may not know when the darkness will lift,
how God will answer,
or when joy will return.

But your feelings do not have the final word.
Your circumstances do not have the final word.

Jesus Christ has the final word.

So your feelings may be fragile.
Your strength may be small.
Your faith may feel weak.

But your Savior is strong.

Therefore, when your soul is cast down:

Bring your sorrow honestly to God.

Remember God when the waves overwhelm you.

Ask God to lead you back to praise.

And continue speaking truth to your soul:

“Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.”