

## Psalm 42-43

“Yearning for God in the Midst of Distress, Praying to God in Time of Trouble”

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**Psalm 42 – 43 (The two psalms were originally one.) The new Geneva Bible gives a title for Psalm 42: “Yearning for God in the midst of Distresses.” And for Psalm 43, it gives this title: “Praying to God in time of trouble.”**

Recently, I was talking with some Christ Church members about their experience in mountain climbing. Have you ever done mountain climbing? If you are not ready for huge challenges, don't start it! You talk about yearning for God in the midst of distresses! That conversation brought memories of one of my most distressing times on a rock climb. At first, it was a great day. The air was fresh; I was young and in tip-top shape, and I was in a climbing school in the magnificent Alps. As I watched my instructor climb an 80-foot rock cliff, it looked so easy. Then, it was my turn to climb. At first, it was easy. It was almost like climbing on a ladder. I made it half-way up, and I felt like a million dollars. My thoughts were: “Mountain climbing is thrilling!” It was a good start. But then real obstacles started to appear. All of a sudden, there were no more grips. I couldn't see where to put my foot or where to hold on with my hands. I felt less sure of myself, less great, and although the sky was still blue, it looked darker and darker. For a few seconds, I started to panic. I didn't want to look down (40 feet), nor up (40 feet to go). Then I started to do everything you shouldn't do. I glued my body against the wall, I panicked, I felt a strange urge to jump down. My stomach felt like it had turned upside down. As I was clinging to the rock, I was tiring very quickly. I was in bad shape! I experienced great distress. My thoughts at that moment were—you've got to be so stupid to do mountain climbing. But, I'm so glad that I was not alone on that wall. From the bottom, my instructor saw what was happening. He could see what I couldn't see with my eyes, because in my fear I had glued myself to the wall. Step by step, he talked to me, guided me, and reassured me. Finally, I started to relax my trembling body; the look of terror on my face began to disappear, and my sweaty hands began to grip the rocks and pull the rest of my body up. I made it to the top! What relief! What joy!

In a way, mountain climbing is similar to the experience of the Christian walk! Some have it easier than others, but some face very difficult times. Some people will say: “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life” --but it doesn't mean it is going to be a smooth journey.

A few weeks ago, right before we flew to France, we were in a missions' conference in Birmingham, Alabama. I saw a missionary friend that I had not seen for 10 years. He has been laboring among Mexicans in the midst of great trials. He is himself recovering from cancer. Three weeks before the missions' conference, his 19-year-old daughter was instantly killed in a car accident. His oldest son is schizophrenic, and his second son has holes in his lungs. For this dear brother who loves and trusts God, the journey is not smooth! However, we must remember that we are not alone on this journey-- because Christ our King has climbed the wall of trials for us and paid the price of our many falls, He is securing us to the end, He gave us the Holy Spirit to talk to us, to guide us, to comfort us, to reassure us, and to take us all the way home. That's what Jesus said in John 14:26, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all the things that I said to you.” And Jesus said to us: “I am with you always!”—all the way!

As we face trials and difficulties in our Christian walk, we Christians tend to do what I was doing on that rock wall high in the Alps, when I forgot that my instructor was there to guide me step by step. We get glued to the wall of our adversities, and find it difficult to hear the voice of our Comforter, God the Holy

Spirit; we get overwhelmed by our circumstances, and we get depressed and discouraged. One of the greatest kings in the Bible was King David. In our text, he is not climbing a cliff wall, but he is running for his life. And he is in a very depressed condition. The text tells us this about David in the midst of his trials: He cries out day and night, he is overcome with fear, and God seems far away to King David. But David wrote this psalm with the purpose of teaching the Church. He wrote to teach each of us today in our times of yearning for closeness to God while we are in the midst of great distresses.

May I remind you of who King David was? We are talking about the little shepherd who had such great faith that he dared to confront the giant Goliath all alone. With the power of God, he knocked him down with just a little rock. We are talking about the most popular soldier of all the history of the Old Testament, the leader who defeated army after army. We are talking about one of the most famous Kings in the Bible, who in the Scriptures was called a man after God's own heart. And he is running for his life? What giant bigger than Goliath could make him so fearful? The giant is the giant of depression, the giant of discouragement. What is the reason for his discouragement? His own son! Absalom is chasing him! David has been deposed from his throne, He has lost his job as king, He has lost his riches, He has lost his glory. On top of that, he has lost another of his sons, his daughter has been raped, and the nation is disintegrating because of Absalom's rebellion. King David! God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life! Yes, God loved King David! Yes, God had a wonderful plan for his life! But the ride is not smooth! Listen to David's anguish in verse 7: "Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All your waves and billows have swept over me." Here, David is describing being under a waterfall, and he is not talking about a gentle shower. He describes a powerful waterfall that exerts a pressure that paralyzes you; a pressure that pushes you down. It crushes you. David is under great pressure—the kind that produces great discouragement. In Psalm 69, he writes,

"Save me, O God! For the waters have come to my neck. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters where the floods overflow me. I am weary with my crying. My throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God."

But every time David expresses his distress and discouragement, God is there to meet him. David is not alone! The Holy Spirit is with him, speaking to him. We learn a first lesson from David about reacting in the midst of great distress: he talks to himself. In verse 5 we hear him saying: "Why are you downcast, o my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" Talking to yourself doesn't mean going through an introspection trip. An introspection trip can be sinful and self-centered. Here, David is speaking to himself.

Introspection, on the other hand, is listening to myself, to poor me. But here, David is talking to himself. When he was very young, our son Daniel used to say out loud everything he was going to do. "Daniel is going to play with Playmobiles now; Danny is going outside now; Daniel is going to eat now; Daniel is going to bed." We knew everything about Danny's daily business. When in trouble, we may not need to talk out loud to ourselves like Danny did, but we do need to speak to our soul and put things in perspective, in God's perspective. "Why are you downcast my soul?" "Why are you so disturbed within me?"

Did you know that there is a person in you who is constantly talking to you? Wherever you are, whatever you do, whether you are in bed, alone, at work, that person talks all the time, always has something to say. Theologians call that person the old nature, and it never quits talking, telling us lies. Believing those lies is sin.

As covenant members of the Church of Christ, we are regularly confronted with our sinful nature. Every Sunday near the beginning of the worship service, we are called to confess our sins. Hopefully, we have confessed our sins before coming to worship our Holy God, but if we haven't, we have a chance to do it at that time. We are sinners, and sin will not leave us until we are in heaven, so we need regular repentance and confession. Our old nature likes sin. In Christ, we have received a new nature, a new life. There is a new person who is talking to us as well. Who are we going to listen to? Our old nature speaks to us to deny God's promises. Our old nature speaks to us to give an extremely negative outlook and interpretation of events. Our

old nature speaks to us to tell us to not believe God's words. Our old nature speaks to us to make us doubt! It says: "Did God really say that? Can I really trust Him and is He really good?" It says: "Yes, everything is bad and tomorrow, it will get worse." Our old nature contradicts our new nature. In this Psalm, we see that David is fed-up with the negative thoughts from within himself.

So David says: "Be quiet!" The theologian Dr. Loyd-Jones writes,

"His soul had been depressing him, crushing him, so he stands up and says: 'Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you. Why art you cast down? What business do you have to be disquieted? Hope in God and remain in that hope.' "

This is the lesson King David wants to teach the Church about severe trials that can overwhelm us and bring spiritual depression and discouragement. Speak to yourself! Speak to your soul! Rehearse to yourself the truths of God. Remind your soul of God's infallible promises. Remind your soul that you are not alone in this spiritual battle. We are not left alone with our own self, with our old nature. It's dead! It has been crucified with Christ and does not have to have power over us. God has given us His Holy Spirit, and God is speaking louder than any other voices with the voice of His Spirit He is our instructor to take us up the mountain, one step at a time, in times of peace as well as in times of trouble. He will lead us to the right place, at the right time for the right thing. In periods of trials, many people question God! But we can look at King David in this Psalm and see that we shouldn't question God, Instead, we should put questions to ourselves. We should ask questions to our own self. "Why are you cast down my soul?"

Five years ago, our young church-plant in Lyon, France was in high gear. I had invited a good friend with whom I had gone to seminary many years before to join our work to be my assistant pastor. We had walked to seminary together day after day, talking the whole time. I heard some of the important truths of the Reformed faith from him. And then years later, we were working together. One day, during a church outing, after a long day of fun, I was preparing to close our time together with devotion on the "Christian life", compared by the Apostle Paul to a race. Just before the devotion, as an illustration and a visual aid for my talk, I suggested a short 100-meter race. Four young people, my friend, and I decided to do the race. My friend ran 50 meters, and suddenly collapsed. We were far from medical help, out in hiking country. Nothing that we could do helped. An evacuation helicopter arrived after what seemed like forever, but my friend never woke up! He left behind a wife and three daughters. A lady who was present on the outing started almost yelling at me in the midst of the trauma as David lay on the ground, telling me it was my fault that he had collapsed. For months, I felt so guilty! I was crushed by the weight of my thoughts and my questions. We had a lot of young Christians in the church, and they couldn't understand why God let this happen. Some left the church over this tragedy. Some blamed me for the tragedy. For months, I asked why? Why him and not me? Why such a trial in a baby church-plant? Why? Why? Why?

Until one summer night. I took a walk alone under a clear, dark sky. As I looked up, I saw stars everywhere! And there, in the still night, I heard the most powerful sermon I had ever heard in my life. The words of God speaking to Job filled my mind. We hear what Job heard in verse

40:9 "**Do you** have an arm like God?"

41:1 "**Can you** pull in the leviathan with a fishhook? Tie the Leviathan's tongue with a rope?"

41:2 "**Can you** put a cord through the leviathan's nose? Pierce a leviathan's jaw with a hook?"

41:5 "**Can you** make a pet of the Leviathan like a bird? " Put the leviathan on a leash for your girls?"

41:7 "**Can you** fill the Leviathan's hide with harpoons?"

40:8 "**Would you** discredit God's justice? Condemn God to justify yourself?"

41:11 "**Who** Has a claim against God?"

42:3 "**Who** can obscure God's counsel without knowledge?"

41:13 "**Who** can strip off the leviathan's outer coat?"

41:14 “**Who** dares open the doors of the leviathan’s mouth ringed about with fearsome teeth?”

After the Creator’s first grand monologue about nature, I did like Job. I became silent. I heard God’s words all through chapter 39 of Job, “Where were you, created man, when I made the universe?” “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?” God illustrates man’s place before the Creator by talking about a giant sea monster. Just as man cannot subdue and control the powerful sea creature, the leviathan, so mortals cannot catch and tame God for their own purposes. As I heard God’s words to Job in my heart, in a deeper way I knew that God was the all-powerful Creator, that I was the Creature, and that my only right response was the peaceful silence of trust in the Sovereign Master of the Universe who is the Savior of my soul.

When trials bring distress, discouragement, and depression, our place is not to question God, but to ask ourselves the question: “Why are you downcast, o my soul? Why so disturbed within me?” Because of who our God is, there is no valid reason. This leads us to the second thing we can learn from David in his distresses. In verse 5, David again talks to himself, and gives himself some excellent advice. He says to himself: “Put your hope in God.” Not in yourself and your abilities and your planning! Not in good circumstances! Not in psychology! Not in self-help books. Not in doctors, Not in politics! Not in government! Not in family values. Not in a good husband or a good wife. Not in stable small-town life. Our hope is in God, and in God only! The living God! I’m reading a book right now by one of France’s cabinet members, Nicolas Sarkozy. He is the Minister of the Interior, and potentially the next French President. The book is about the State and religion. What comes out in every chapter of the book is this: government cannot give people hope. People need religion, because only religion can give people hope. To hear such a thing is unprecedented in pagan, godless France. However, Nicolas Sarkozy has not understood yet that it is not religion that can give hope, but Christ, and Christ only. Christian Hope is not “positive thinking”. Positive thinking might work for a short time, but it eventually will leave you more empty than before you started trying to have positive thoughts, because it is man-centered. Positive-thinking people trust in their own ability to turn good into bad by their own attitudes. They say that you can turn anything bad into something good, if you just take things the right way. But our hope is centered in God Himself, a living God who is in control of everything and who will not let us down. One of the attributes of God, one of the things at the core of the essence of Who He is, is his immutability. Do you know what that means? The God, who says that He will keep His Covenant with us, will never change! This is an everlasting Covenant! The God who declares that He has loved me before the foundation of the world, will always love me. The God of the Bible will always be pure and holy. He will always be just, He will never change His way of salvation to redeem us. He will never require anything from us, except for what Christ has already done for us. God won’t change His mind about His Kingdom being established on earth as it is in heaven. He promised to be with us always, and He is keeping that promise to this day. He promised to take care of our needs, and He has kept that promise to this day. He has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church, and He is keeping and will keep that promise as well This is why we can put our hope in God.

In periods of trouble, the Apostle Paul tells us what he heard from God. “My grace is sufficient.” In periods of distress, King David says to himself: “Put your hope in God!” He says to the church this morning: “Put your hope in God!” Everything else that you put your hope in can fail, but God cannot and will not ever fail. Brothers and sisters, we need faith to be saved. But we need the same faith to walk and climb our wall of trials. So we must not listen to our old nature. Instead, we must listen to the Holy Spirit. We must speak God’s truths to ourselves and trust in them. Dr. Loyd Jones writes, “The ultimate cause of all spiritual depression is unbelief.” When David wrote this Psalm, he was still in the midst of incredible trials. He didn’t see the end of it all with his eyes. Faith does believe what you can’t see. If you can see it, it’s not faith anymore; it’s sight! And we walk by faith and not by sight!

Two weeks ago, we were at a missions' conference in Alabama. We heard a man speak whose name I won't give, an Iranian whose parents sent him to a boarding school in Portugal to keep him from being sent to serve in the army during the Iran-Iraq war. In God's providence, the school he ended up in was run by Christian missionaries. He started reading the Bible to find out about the Jesus that the Koran had talked about. He came to faith in Christ at that school, and is now working to reach Muslims with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He told us that Muslims are hungry for God, and since 9/11 have been coming to Christ in unprecedented numbers. He read us a quote from a man who was a missionary to Iran before the Shah was overthrown. This man said, "I have worked for 40 years in Iran; I have not planted one seed; I have only removed rocks." Imagine the depression and discouragement this man would have had if he had not had faith in a sovereign Lord. He watered the soil and others are reaping. Our Iranian friend who was speaking said that more people have come to Christ in the Muslim world since 9/11 than in the last 100 years combined. As we are called to do, this missionary who only removed rocks was called to walk by faith and not by sight.

There is a third thing taking place here in this Psalm of distresses. First, we saw that David is under great pressure and is tempted to give up to the pressure of trials. Instead, he speaks to his soul, he reminds his soul to listen to God's promises and not to listen to his old nature. Second, we saw that David puts his hope in God, and that requires faith, living faith. Thirdly, he put that living faith in action, and this is how he does it. David says in verse 5: "For I will yet praise Him, My Savior and my God." Verse 8: "By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life." Faith in action is praising God, worshipping God. Have you ever praised God when things go wrong in your lives?

Typically, we praise God, we sing-- when we are happy and typically-- we are happy when things go well.

But happiness can be experienced anywhere, even in prison. Paul is in prison because of the Gospel. He has chains on his feet. What does he do? He sings! If he had listened to himself, he could have said:

"Oh God, what are you doing? Look at me! I'm your evangelist. I deserve better than this. And I'm having a physical problem that really bothers me. And God, this place stinks. I'm cold! I'm hungry! I'm tired! Haven't I had enough difficulties?" Paul was not a super-man. He was not a super-Christian. He was simply a faithful man and a man full of faith! He put his faith in action. King David puts his faith in action.

As he does it by turning his thoughts towards the worship of God. His thoughts go to the church, the Assembly of God's people gathered to worship God. Look at verse 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."

What we experience here in Christ Church Moscow is very powerful. You all know how to worship and how to feast! When you yearn for God in the midst of distresses, think of our worship services, as David thought of how he used to worship with God's people. Think of our Psalm singing. Think of the communion of the saints. Think of partaking of the Lord's Supper together. Think of singing the Doxology together. This is the Body of Christ! We are saved by Christ and therefore united with Him. By the work of the Spirit, we are one body with Christ. When we come together as a Church, and celebrate the Lord's Supper in corporate worship, with the promise of Christ's presence in our midst, we can only be strengthened and renewed in our souls. This is faith in action! "Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him." We praise God in corporate worship in the Church, and our downcast souls are lifted up. But we must remember that our biblical theology tells us that the reality of the present is a foretaste of the future, more perfect worship. Reformed theology talks about the "already, but the not yet of the Kingdom of God." The present reality of corporate worship is precious. On earth, we are already at home in the Church, the body of Christ. But our truest worship and our real home are "not yet."

Years ago, a missionary to China was coming back to the United States, after many years of faithful but hard service to his King Jesus. On the same boat was Franklin Roosevelt who was coming back from a

safari hunting trip. At the port, a huge crowd acclaimed him, but nobody was there to acclaim this missionary and his wife. The missionary got very upset inside. "It's not right," he said to his wife. "See this man (talking about Franklin Roosevelt); he went to China to kill elephants, and he is acclaimed when he comes home; we gave our lives, our health, our money to serve Christ in China, and when we come home, no one is waiting for us, no one is acclaiming us." His wife replied softly: "Honey, we are not home yet!" Home is to be in the precious presence of the Lord. From this Psalm, we learn that King David couldn't see anything that would change his terrible situation and circumstances, but:

- In faith, he spoke to himself and refused to listen to the lies of his old nature.
- In faith, he put his hope in God's guaranteed promises,
- In faith he praised God, thinking of the fellowship of the saints.

And he went from sorrow and depression to joy and celebration. The joy and the celebration are real already, but the best is yet to come.

Let me close with a prayer from "The Valley of Vision", a book of Puritan Prayers and Devotions.  
Heaven Desired O my Lord,

May I arrive where means of grace cease and I need no more to fast, pray, weep, watch, be tempted, attend preaching and sacrament; where nothing defiles, where is no grief, sorrow, sin, death, separation, tears, pale face, languid body, aching joints, feeble infancy, decrepit age, peccant humours, pining sickness, griping fears, consuming cares; where is personal completeness; where the more perfect the sight, the more beautiful the object, the more perfect the appetite, the sweeter the food, the more musical the ear the more pleasant the melody, the more complete the soul the more happy its joys, where is full knowledge of thee.

Here I am an ant, and as I view a nest of ants so dost thou view me and my fellow-creatures; But as an ant knows not me, my nature, my thoughts, so here I cannot know thee clearly. But there I shall be near thee, dwell with my family, stand in thy presence chamber, be an heir of thy kingdom, as the spouse of Christ, as a member of his body, one with him who is with thee, and exercise all my powers of body and soul in the enjoyment of thee. As praise in the mouth of thy saints is comely, so teach me to exercise this divine gift, when I pray, read, hear, see, and do, in the presence of people and of my enemies, as I hope to praise thee eternally hereafter. Amen.



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