

---

**“Thirsting for God in a Spiritual Drought”**

**Psalm 42**

**Pastor Timothy Song**

**September 27, 2020**

**(Psalm 42)**

<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.

<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.

<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?”

<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.

Good afternoon, Church. Let's get right into it today. Please open your Bibles to Psalm 42. As you're doing that, I've been in a season of reading through the Psalms. When the pandemic hit and all of a sudden, we were in lockdown and staying at home, as the days and weeks went by, something felt off. I couldn't explain it at the time, but I was reading through the Bible plan. I tried to keep my times of prayer. I still had work to do and yet, something didn't feel right and so, one day, I just decided that I'd pause on the Bible Reading plan and go through the psalms.

John Piper wrote that "Psalms are songs. They are poems. They are written to awaken and express and shape the emotional life of God's people. Poetry and singing exist because God made us with emotions, not just thoughts. Our emotions are massively important". I think that's what I was sensing at the time: a lack of emotion. Everything just seemed bland and dry. Well, I pray that as we look at Psalm 42 today, God would speak to our hearts and our souls. Please follow along as I read.

**[read Psalm 42]**

And this is the word of God. When we look at physical health and growth, it depends on both training and treatment. We need the discipline to work out regularly and control our diets to have the best chance of becoming healthy and strong. But there are also times when we get injured or sick and need treatment and help. That's why no matter how healthy you may be, there are times we need medicine or go to the hospital. That is the same with our spiritual health and growth.

I want to focus on three main points from today's text. First, there is a condition addressed by the psalmist. Second, there are symptoms and factors of this condition. And third, there are ways to treat this condition. So, let's begin with the first point. The condition.

**POINT #1: THE CONDITION ADDRESSED IS SPIRITUAL DROUGHT**

Let's look at the first two verses: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" Have you ever seen a deer panting for water? It's not that they are unintelligent creatures that don't know when they need to drink water. A deer knows when and where they can find water. But imagine that a deer is being chased by a hunter or a predator wanting to kill it. It's been running non-stop. After all that running, it arrives at a stream of water. But to its horror, there is no water. Just imagine how that deer would feel. It's desperate for water. So desperate that it's a matter of life and death.

Just as that deer pants desperately for water, the psalmist's soul pants and longs for God. But there is no water to be found. Even as the psalmist's soul is panting for the living God, he cannot find Him. He asks, "When can I go and meet with God?" In other words, where can he go and see the face of God. It seems that God is absent, and His presence is unknown. The condition is spiritual drought. Now, something to note: Spiritual drought is NOT that you don't believe in God, but it's that you cannot taste, see, hear, or feel Him. You've lost your senses of God. Other ways of describing this spiritual drought are spiritual dryness, depression, darkness, discouragement, or deadness.

That sounds awful but listen very carefully here. Every Christian will go through this. If you haven't yet, you will. If you have gone through this, you will again. Think of the first time you went through a spiritual dry season after becoming a Christian. You're going from such a high of knowing Christ and believing in Him. But then, when that all settles and you're discovering this new life and journey, you realize that you're starting from square one. You need to build a foundation of knowledge and understanding. And you realize that you've entered a season where you didn't know how to navigate. What happens when the feelings and emotions calm down? How do you handle everything?

Every Christian will go through this. Doesn't matter if you're a new Christian or have been a Christian for many years. We will go through these dry seasons. But why does this happen? Usually, spiritual drought is caused by sin. Take King David for example. Psalm 51 is one of many psalms that focuses on confession of sin. Psalm 51 begins with David saying, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love; according to Your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." He continues with this plea:

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." – Psalm 51:10-12.

Sin, when not dealt with, can trigger spiritual drought. But when we look into the heart of this psalmist and this psalm, there is no confession of sin or repentance. Spiritual drought can happen, and it doesn't always mean it's because of sin (although we should really ask the Lord to reveal if there's any unconfessed sins). But this is not the case here. I think of the story of Job and the response of his friends. We know that calamity came to Job and he lost everything. His children were killed, he was infected with diseases and health issues. And his friends come to him with the assumption that all the trials and hardships have come upon Job because of sin. But that wasn't true.

We do not know how to navigate through seasons of drought. We may panic like a panting deer desperate for water. But then, after some time, even that panic disappears and before you know it, you've been in a longer season of drought than you had hoped. The condition is spiritual drought. But now, let's look at the symptoms and factors.

## **POINT #2: THE SYMPTOMS AND FACTORS OF SPIRITUAL DROUGHT**

There are three main factors we can see that is connected to spiritual drought. Before we get into these factors, I want to be clear that these symptoms are NOT always present every time we go through spiritual drought, but it is possible, and we see it in today's text. Ok so, the first factor is a lack of community. Look with me to verse 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."

The psalmist looks back in the past as he remembers what it was like to go into the house of God and worship Him with brothers and sisters together as a community. He remembers singing shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. The festive throng was a celebration and feast. They would gather and worship God and have fellowship with one another in God's presence. This was the joy of God's people. This psalm says at the beginning that it is a maskil of the Sons of Korah.

A maskil is a musical term for a kind of song and the sons of Korah were Levites who led the community in worship. They were worship leaders. So, in verse 4, the NASB translation writes this worship leader remembers pouring out his soul. He used to “go along with the throng (fancy word for crowd) and lead them in procession to the house of God”.

This is what he remembers. This is where he used to be. But where is he now? Skip to verse 6: “O my God, my soul is in despair within me; therefore, I remember You from the land of the Jordan and the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.” We don’t know what happened to the psalmist, but we see here that he went from being in the house of God with God’s people to being outside the boundaries of Israel, north by the Jordan. An important thing we need to observe here is that he is isolated from community and is in a place he doesn’t want to be.

Let’s pause here for a moment. How does community impact our spiritual health and growth? As I’ve been reaching out to people in our church and other family and friends, many have struggled, or is struggling, spiritually. I’m in the same boat. People have described that they’re in a dry season and I don’t think that’s a coincidence. When the pandemic hit and we were in lockdown, all of a sudden, we were not able to meet together. And why is that significant? It prevented us from doing the most important thing we are commanded to do as the church: to worship God. What the psalmist remembers is what we do in corporate worship! We gather to sing praises to God, to sing truths of God’s nature and character and rejoice in what He has done for us. We gather to hear the Word of God preached and taught. We are strengthened by the power of His Word and in our fellowship with one another.

All of that was taken away just like that. And what did we end up doing? Staying at home, adjusting to working or studying from home, taking care of the kids, and Netflix. I’m ashamed to give you the list of shows and movies I watched on Netflix the first month of the lockdown. But in all of that, what we were deprived of was community. And that’s a major factor in our spiritual health. How about other factors? And let me quickly address the final two factors. The second factor is that our physical state matters.

Let’s go to the first part of verse 3: “My tears have been my food day and night...” As the psalmist is going through this spiritual drought, his physical health has taken a hit. He’s in such despair that he can’t eat. His tears are his “food”. And it’s not just during the day. But also, throughout the night. Which means he’s awake at night and lacking sleep. You won’t be able to deal with your spiritual drought without taking care of your physical needs. Symptoms can be a loss of appetite, a lack of sleep, and other physical factors.

The third factor is similar. Just as our physical state matters, our emotional state matters as well. If we continue in verse 3, it says, “...while people say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’” Jump to Verse 10: “My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’” Here we see interactions with people he calls “foes” and other translations say “adversaries”. Now, these foes are different from other enemies that psalmist like David mention where they are being hunted down to be killed. The worst thing these people are doing is mocking the psalmist by questioning where God is. I’m reminded once again of Job’s friends. Circumstances can deceive us into thinking that God is not with us. And with our Western, consumeristic mindset, we are constantly evaluating our situations and tend to start listening to the voices around us more than waiting on and seeking God.

Emotional distress also causes doubt. Again, spiritual drought is not about unbelief. But that doesn't mean doubt can creep in. That's why we see the psalmist crying out, "I say to God my Rock, 'Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?'" When you're stuck in these seasons long enough, we resonate with what he's saying, don't we? We start to question God because we don't know what else to do. It's not that we doubt that God is real. But, we wonder why He's not helping us or we can't visibly see God at work. This can also lead to issues with our mental health and depression. How many of us have experienced moments of despair and suffering? Perhaps some of us are in the midst of such hardships. But one thing that is certain is that community, our physical and emotional health are all factors to our spiritual health. Ok, so those were the symptoms and factors. Let's finally look at some ways to deal with spiritual drought.

### **POINT #3: THE CURE AND TREATMENT OF SPIRITUAL DROUGHT**

I want to focus on three things we can do in times of spiritual drought. The first is to pour out your soul. Verse 9 reads, "Why have you forgotten me?" The psalmist may not have fully understood what was going on and why God seemed distant or like a parched water brook. But when it seemed like God was hiding or it felt like God had forgotten him, he was honest and pursued God. It's ok to go to God and ask "Why?". It is because we do not understand. The worst thing you can do is ignore and avoid Him when you are in seasons of dryness. But that is exactly what we do, isn't it? The toughest thing to do is remain consistent with our spiritual disciplines – our Bible reading and prayer – when we are feeling this drought. We say, "I don't feel God" or "Scripture is not speaking to me". It is hard to set aside the time to pray when we do not sense that God is near or listening. However, this is when we must be even more disciplined and determined to hear God speak to us!

When our soul is panting for the living God, our greatest desire and most urgent need must be for God to satisfy and quench our thirst. Going back to the working out analogy: no matter how hard you work out; you cannot continue without water. Your body needs to be replenished. That's the same with our spiritual growth. We absolutely need to be disciplined in our "exercising and nutrition". The Word and prayer are at the heart of our spiritual disciplines. However, ultimately, we need the Living Water to satisfy our thirst and our panting souls and that is why when it FEELS like God has forgotten you, you go to Him and ask why. Because I think we try to fix and sustain things on our own, but we need God to provide us with His living water.

If nothing else, talk to God about how you feel like how He seems silent and distant. Tell Him how much you're in despair. Tell Him how people around you are mocking you saying, "Where is your God?" and that, at times, you wonder that yourself. At the heart of this psalm, it is a thirst for God to intervene and for God to be seen. We must pour out of souls, the very essence of our being, to God. That's the first way we must deal with our spiritual drought. The second thing we must do is to remember God's sovereign love.

Follow along with me in verse 8: "By day the LORD directs His love, at night His song is with me – a prayer to the God of my life". We already looked at how the psalmist remembers what it's like to be in the house of God, worshipping with his community and shouting joyful praise. In spiritual drought, we must affirm God's love for us. And that's counter-intuitive to what we probably do. We are good at sulking and feeling like God doesn't love us anymore. But that's farthest from the truth.

One of the best ways I find affirmation of God's love is through hymns and songs. Paul instructs the Christians in Ephesus to "be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:19-20). The last two Sundays were the first time I couldn't sing during our worship service. Usually I'll be leading praise so I'm always singing. But, wow. It makes such a difference not being able to sing! Last week, I did a lot of driving. My parents are in London and I really enjoy that drive down the 401 W because for 2 hours in the car, I can sing hymns and praise songs! I arrive in London and my throat is sore from singing. But it's amazing to affirm God's love through these songs; to be reminded again and again of how great His love is for me and for you. My throat may have been sore, but it was worth it because I felt energized by truth.

Think about it, this psalm is a song! That's why singing is such a vital part of our spiritual journey. Just think of the songs we sung today. That beautiful contemporary hymn, "In Christ Alone" speaks of Christ's amazing love for us that led Him to the cross to die for our sins so that we have life and freedom and victory. And that it is only in Christ alone that we have been rescued, redeemed, and restored. Yes, it's such a challenge not being able to sing aloud together. But truth is truth and we can worship and love our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength! Let us always be reminded of God's sovereign love for us.

Finally, the last thing we must do is to preach to our hearts. As we read Psalm 42, there is a verse that is repeated twice. Did you catch that? The psalmist repeats himself. Actually, we don't have time to look at Psalm 43, but many manuscripts have Psalm 42 and 43 as one psalm. It's a continuation of psalm 42. And at the end of 43, we see the same words spoken. It's like a chorus of a song. Look at verses 5 and 11. It reads, "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God."

The psalmist is preaching truth to himself here! Preaching is not just the pastor's job. Sure, the pastor must preach and teach to help people understand the text and wonderful truths that come from God's Word. But we must preach these truths to our hearts constantly.

Martin Lloyd-Jones talked about Spiritual Depression and the difference between listening to yourself vs. talking to yourself. Listen to what he has to say:

Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. now this man's treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, "Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you." (Spiritual Depression, 20-21).

Is this not why the Psalms are so wonderful? We are talking to ourselves through the word of God. All of Scripture is filled with these beautiful truths and promises! Think of Romans 8:31-35. If I were to talk to myself through these verses, I'd say, "Listen, self. If God is for you, who can be against you? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for you, how will He not also with Him graciously give you all things? Who shall bring any charge

against you as God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for you. Who shall separate you from the love of Christ?

Preach to your heart. And what is it that we're preaching? HOPE. When we are in spiritual drought, do you know what keeps us in that drought? A lack of hope. OR, we have placed our hope in something other than God. I find that it's in these seasons that we must do an inventory of hope. Ask yourself this question: "Where does my hope lie in? When circumstances discourage me, when it feels like nothing is going my way, when I'm still reading my Bible and praying and there's nothing, where am I placing my hope in?"

Notice that the psalmist places his hope in God. Amidst his drought, he's telling himself to put his hope in God. And no matter what his circumstance may be, he will still praise God who is His Saviour and His God. In Hebrew, another way of saying "Put your hope in God" is to "Wait for God". Hoping in something is to wait in anticipation for that to become reality. And when we hope in God, we are waiting for God. Perhaps in our spiritual drought, we've lost the reality of God but as we place our hope in Him, we are waiting for God to, once again, reveal Himself to us. We don't know when God will. But we hope and wait for Him.

We have to be careful where we place our hope, especially in times of hardship and trials. Look at our current state right now with COVID. Where are you placing your hope in? Are we hoping in scientists to find a vaccine? Are you hoping in doctors and frontline workers to take care of you if you get sick and to get us through this pandemic? It is good to be hopeful for those things but, the psalmist has not forgotten in God his Saviour, the one who has saved him. You see, [Gospel Presentation here].

I enjoy the NASB translation of verses 5 and 11 because it reads in verse 5, "Hope in God, for I shall AGAIN praise Him for the help of His presence" and verse 11, "Hope in God, for I shall YET praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God". Now, what does that big word "countenance" mean? Our countenance simply defined is "the air; look; aspect; appearance of the face". It's directly related to the expression on our faces. How is the health of your countenance? In other words, how is God the source of your hope and praise? Troubles and trials will afflict us. This is a guarantee. And it's not about putting on a fake smile on your face. But as Christians, knowing that we are saved, sometimes our lives don't reflect what we believe. There is no joy. No laughter. No smiling. And maybe you don't need to laugh or smile all the time. I mean, this psalm is a cry of desperation. But the cure of spiritual drought is to place our hope in God. And as we pant and long for God, He will satisfy our thirst and bring us out of our drought. But continue in this longing and hope. Read, study and apply His Word. The more we do this, the more we learn and grow in Christ. And as we're growing in this process, we are being filled with the Spirit which allows us to bear the fruit of the Spirit, and in turn helps us with our countenance; the appearance of our faces. Hope in God. Wait for Him.

One last thought on this. Doing these three things DOES NOT guarantee that you will find God right away. But never give up and wait for God to quench your thirst for Him. He will lift you out of your spiritual drought. You will find Him and see His face once again.

---

## CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with this. I read something Timothy Keller mentioned about Psalm 42. Now, it's easy to resonate with the psalmist and feel the way he felt, but try reading this psalm and hear the One who really said, "I thirst", that He's "dying of thirst". Jesus Christ really experienced the absence of God. He was really forgotten and forsaken by God. When Jesus came to be our atoning sacrifice and die on the cross for our sins, God turned His face away from Him so that we may see His face once again and forever. He was forsaken so that we would not be. He was forgotten so that God will never forget us and never give up on us. Therefore, actively thirst for God in times of spiritual drought. Preach to your heart, "I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God!". As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I go and meet with God? Now. Right now. God is with us because of what Jesus Christ did for us. Why don't we respond by praying this prayer...

Let's pray.