

Thank God for the times when we know Him to be close.

Psalms 42 and 43 put into words the experience we all can have when God feels far away

This is how he describes his life:

1. vv 1,2 as spiritually dry
2. and this spiritual dryness consumes his life with sadness (v3)... even his bones ache (v10)
3. And what makes it worse is that he can remember better days (v4)
4. and what made life now particularly difficult was that he wasn't able even to go to the Temple...he was remembering all of this in "the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon – from Mount Mizar" (v6)
5. and while the Psalmist was amongst the mountains in the north all he could hear was the crash of the mountain waterfalls....which symbolised for Him a feeling of being overwhelmed by his suffering (v7)
6. and all this spiritual and mental pain is summed up in the refrain in vv5 and 11 of Ps 42 and 43:5 "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?"
7. What makes it worse still is that his enemies taunt him saying, verses 3 & 10 "all day long 'where is your God'"
8. It all adds up to feeling forgotten by God...verse 9 "I say to God my rock. 'Why have you forgotten me?'"

We will all be able to associate with some or all of these feelings.

So, how we are to cope when we find ourselves in a spiritual desert?

Three things in particular, from the Psalm itself:

1. God's absence is more apparent than real.....right in the midst of all that the Psalmist has to say about his experience of God's *absence* we hear him say "by day the Lord directs His love, at night his song is with me", whatever else the evidence might suggest, God *hasn't* abandoned the Psalmist

God is never far from us Ex 20 "Moses approached the thick darkness where God was"

And we know even more fully in the light of the gospel, that God comes into the dark places of life.....that He will never abandon His own.....that He is more committed to drawing us close again to Him, even than we are to find Him again.....that His thirst for us will always exceed our thirst for Him....that He is always the Good Shepherd searching out His sheep.....and that "nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"

We need to be alert to His presence in even the darkest times.....and pray as the Psalmist does in 43:3,4

2. Then after each of the three refrains “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?”, is the echoing refrain “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God”it sounds like the Psalmist is speaking to Himself.....and the answer to the question sounds like **a command to the will**

When we are going through difficult times we need to remind ourselves to keep trusting.....to keep looking up....to keep holding on to the promises of God....to hold tight to the things that really matter.....to look to the One who never changes...to listen to the voice of the One who loves us.....Quote John Stott “The cure for depression is neither to look in at our grief, nor back to the past, nor round at our problems, but away and up to the living God. He is our help and our God, and if we trust Him now, we shall soon have cause to praise Him again. Thus as one writer sums up, ‘faith rebukes despondency and hope triumphs over despair’”!.....

This is like finding a dock leaf alongside a nettle....the antidote is given alongside the problem....“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?” - **“Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God”**.....

3. The view held by many is that when Jesus said in Gethsemane “now my heart is troubled” and “my heart is overwhelmed with sorrow”, **He was quoting from this Psalm**.....

If that is so, it is the clearest sign we have that Jesus has entered into the depths of OUR sorrow....that He has been where we go.....and because He has been where we go and known what we know and suffered as we suffer.....as the writer to the Hebrews tells us, Jesus is a High Priest who is able to sympathise with our weaknesses and help us in our times of need.....**He understands our predicament from the inside**

Indeed, on the Cross He has been into the place of actual separation from the Father.....in order that we might never need to be in that place of abandonment...**and know that One Day** the desert will be awash with water and life....there will be no enemies to taunt us....we shall join with the multitudes in an eternal procession to the house of God....and our joy will be full...and our every longing for Him met...and every hint of gloom will be gone....and we shall see Him face to face.....

Pray God we will more often walk the mountain tops of life in Christ than find ourselves in the place this “son of Korah” found Himself.....but when we on occasions find ourselves feeling as He felt all those centuries ago.....let’s draw on all the resources of God and the gospel.....and know that He is with us on the journey....that He can be trusted, even from the depths....that Jesus can sympathise with our weaknesses having been in just the place that Psalms 42 and 43 describe...**and that One Day**, because of the separation He endured on our behalf on the cross, all our deepest yearnings will be satisfied, as our thirsty souls meet with God Himself....the fulfilment of all our longings.....

Amen