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Psalm 42

"Hope for the Downcast"

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Life has its share of trials and tribulations. From time to time every person goes through seasons of discouragement, and it could be that you find yourself in such a season today. The psalmist wrote about being "downcast" and feeling like God had "forgotten" him, but he still held on to hope and he said that despite his circumstances, he would praise the Lord. The psalm writer shared some practical advice about how he got through his season of despair, which Pastor Gary will explain in a teaching he has entitled, "Hope for the Downcast."

Historical Background

1. Bible scholars aren't sure why the five "books" of psalms were created.
 - a. Book 1 - Psalm 1 through 41
 - b. Book 2 - Psalm 42 through 72
 - c. Book 3 - Psalm 73 through 89
 - d. Book 4 - Psalm 90 through 106
 - e. Book 5 - Psalm 107 through 150
2. The earliest manuscripts for the book of Psalms were discovered in 1947 when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in Qumran, Israel.
3. This psalm is a maskil, which means that it was written to teach others.
4. The subtitle of this psalm indicates that it was a maskil *"of the Sons of Korah."*
 - a. The KJV indicates that this is a *"maskil for the Sons of Korah."*
 - b. Bible scholars aren't sure whether it should be *"of"* or *"for."*
 - i. If it's *"for,"* then someone else wrote the psalm for them.
 - ii. If it's *"of,"* then the sons of Korah wrote the psalm.

- iii. Some Bible scholars believe David wrote the psalm for the sons of Korah.
 - c. The sons of Korah were orchestra and choral leaders in the Tabernacle at the time of King David.
 - d. There are 11 psalms attributed to the sons of Korah.
 - e. The sons of Korah were descendants of Korah, who was of the tribe of Levi, and it's this same Korah who led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron.
 - i. Korah incited Dathan and Abiram, along with 250 others, to join him, according to the account found in [Numbers 16](#).
- 5. The theme of this psalm is discouragement.
- 6. The word, "downcast," is used three times in this psalm, and once in [Psalm 43](#).¹
 - a. The word, "downcast," is only found eleven times in the Bible.
 - b. [Psalm 42:5a](#) - "Why are you downcast, O my soul?"
 - c. [Psalm 42:6](#) - "My soul is downcast within me..."
 - d. [Psalm 42:11a](#) - "Why are you downcast, O my soul?"
- 7. The Hebrew word for downcast is shakah, which means, to sink or depress, and the meaning carries the same connotation as [Psalm 23](#) regarding a sheep that is cast and not able to get up on its own.
- 8. The psalmist wrote about being discouraged to the point of feeling helpless, hopeless, overwhelmed, and completely unable to "get upright."
- 9. There are times in our lives when discouragement settles in for a season.
- 10. The psalmist described his feelings in several different ways.
 - a. "I can't stop crying"
 - i. [Psalm 42:3](#) - "My tears have been my food day and night..."
 - b. "I feel like I'm drowning"
 - i. [Psalm 42:7](#) - "...all your waves and breakers have swept over me."
 - c. "I feel like God has forgotten me"
 - i. [Psalm 42:9](#) - "I say to God my Rock, 'Why have you forgotten me?'"
 - d. "People are taunting me"
 - i. [Psalm 42:3](#) - "... men say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?' "
 - ii. [Psalm 42:10](#) - "... my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, 'Where is your God?' "

¹ [Psalm 43:5a](#) - "Why are you downcast, O my soul?"

² https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/7810781.D_Martyn_Lloyd_Jones

He Did Not Surrender To The Emotions Of Discouragement

11. Someone has said, “You’re either heading into a storm or you’re in a storm or you’re coming out of a storm.”
12. Pastor Gary said: “When you look at this [psalm] it is pretty clear... that he [had] a fighting spirit. [He didn’t] surrender to the emotion of discouragement. [He] pressed on and [he persevered]... He [determined] not to let his discouragement rule his heart or his head.”
13. **Psalm 42:5b** - *“Put your hope in God, for I will [still] praise him, my Savior and my God.”*
14. It’s as though he was saying: “This is how I feel, but I’m still going to praise God... I may not be in a good place right now, but I will still praise God.”
15. Paul and Silas praised God in their time of discouragement when they were imprisoned in Philippi.
 - a. **Acts 16:25** - *“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”*
16. **James 1:12** - *“Blessed is the man [or woman] who **perseveres under trial**, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”* (Emphasis added)
17. **Galatians 6:9** - *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we **do not give up**.”* (Emphasis added)

He Remembered The Good Things

18. **Psalm 42:4** - *“These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.”*
19. The remembrance of gathering with God’s people in God’s house was a blessing.
20. The negative aspect of the writer’s remembrance is that it was the case that he *“used to go... to the house of God.”*

21. Pastor Gary said: “There is something transformational when God’s people get together in God’s house, and study God’s Word, and worship the King of the universe. There is just something that naturally happens to your soul and in mine to bring us out of despair and discouragement... It does the heart wonder and it does the heart good... [If] you are local and watching [church services] online, you need to get to church, because there is no substitute [for] being among God’s people in God’s house worshipping God on his holy throne! Isolation breeds desolation. The more isolated you are, the more desperate you become. Fight through that, and don’t isolate yourself. Get to church... because it does something transformational in the heart of every person when we come into God’s house and spend time worshipping together.”
22. **Hebrews 10:25** - *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day [the return of the Lord] approaching.”*
23. The Bible teaches us about the fact that the closer we come to the return of Christ, the worse things will be in our world, which means we need the community and fellowship of Believers!
24. The writer not only remembered the house of God; he remembered God too.
 - a. **Psalms 42:6** - *“... I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon- from Mount Mizar.”*
 - i. Mount Hermon is the tallest mountain in Israel.
 - ii. Mount Mizar is a small hill in the vicinity of Mount Hermon.
 - b. The psalmist was pointing out that he remembered God in the good times and the bad, as well as the high points and low points in his life.

He Talked To Himself

25. The psalmist’s faith reasoned with his fears - out loud.
26. **Psalms 42:5a** - *“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?”*
27. “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 moment, I will speak to you.” – Martin Lloyd Jones ²

28. Pastor Gary said: “We spend too much time listening to the nagging things that are reminding us of how bad our life is or was, or [how bad] the world is or was, instead of reminding ourselves about the truth of who God is and the strength that we find in him.”
29. In [Philippians 4:13](#), Paul reminded himself of what we need to remind ourselves of, and that is that we find our strength in God.
30. It is through Christ, and Christ alone, that we have the ability to stand, even when the situations we face are dark and depressing.
31. [Philippians 4:13](#) – *“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*

He Talked To God

32. [Psalm 42:7](#) – *“Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.”*
 - a. This verse is a visual, poetic description of despair.
 - b. When the snow on Mount Hermon melts in the spring, the water rushes like a torrent!
33. Pastor Gary said: “The psalmist [used] imagery to say, ‘I feel like I’m drowning, buried deep under my misery, but [in] the depth of my despair, God goes deeper still.’ ”
34. [Psalm 42:9a](#) – *“I say to God my Rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me?’ ”*
35. The writer wasn’t afraid to tell God that he felt like he had been forgotten, because God’s big enough to handle
36. [Hebrews 13:5](#) – *“... God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ ”*
37. Even when the writer felt discouraged and forgotten, he recognized that God was his Rock.

² https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/7810781.D_Martyn_Lloyd_Jones

He Thirsted For God

38. [Psalm 42:1-2](#) - *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”*
39. Pastor Gary said: “Notice what he [didn’t] thirst for. [He] didn’t thirst for [his] problems to go away... [He] didn’t thirst for God to deal with his enemies... [He didn’t] thirst for a quick [resolution] to all of [the things going on in his life]... He [thirsted] for God. There is nothing quite as healing for [our] discouragement than getting into the presence of God, [and] finding the comfort and the help and the peace in the very presence of God.”

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Psalm 42](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about seasons of discouragement.
4. How is discouragement different from depression?
5. Read and discuss the different ways the psalm writer describes his feelings. (See #10 above)
6. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s comment about perseverance. (See #12 above)
7. What is the difference between perseverance in a biblical sense and a philosophy of “I’m going to pull myself up by my bootstraps”?
8. How have you, like Paul and Silas, praised the Lord in seasons of discouragement, etc.? (See #15 above)
9. Read and discuss [James 1:12](#) and [Galatians 6:9](#).
10. What are some of the ways you intentionally remember the good things of God?

11. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about the life-changing aspects of being "in church." (See #21 above)
12. How would you describe your understanding of the importance of being with God's people in God's house?
13. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when attending church services was moved down the list or removed from their list of priorities.
14. Read and discuss [Hebrews 10:25](#).
15. Read and discuss the Martin Lloyd Jones quote Pastor Gary shared. (See #27 above)
16. How have you been encouraged when you remember the promise of God found in [Hebrews 13:5](#)? (See #35 above)
17. Spend time talking about the psalmist's thirst for God, rather than "thirsting" after other things. (See #38 and #39 above)
18. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).