

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Psalm 42-43 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the psalm. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

PSALM 42:1-11; 43:1-5 ESV

1 To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah. As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" 4 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. 5 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. 6 My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. 7 Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. 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. 9 I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" 10 As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" 11 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. 1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! 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? 3 Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! 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. 5 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.

STRUCTURE

- I. **Lament: When shall I appear? (42:1-5)**
 - a. Complaint:
 - i. Thirsty soul deprived of water (42:1-2)
 - ii. The day-and-night tears of the Psalmist (42:3a)
 - iii. Enemies mock, where is God (42:3b)
 - b. Remembrance: Joy and gladness in God's house (42:4)
 - c. Refrain: Don't be downcast / hope in God (42:5)
- II. **Turning point: Suffering, Sovereignty, and Yahweh's Steadfast Love (43:6-11)**
 - a. Remembrance: provision in the Promised Land (42:6)
 - b. Complaint:
 - i. Weary soul drowned by water (42:7)
 - ii. CENTER: The day-and-night love of Yahweh (42:8)
 - iii. Enemies mock / where is God (42:9-10)
 - c. Refrain: Don't be downcast / hope in God (42:11)
- III. **Answer: Then shall I appear (43:1-5)**
 - a. Petition: Vindication against enemies (43:1).
 - b. Complaint: Enemies mock / where is God (43:2)
 - c. Petition: Bring me back to God's house (43:3)
 - d. Answer: Joy and gladness in God's house (43:4)
 - e. Refrain: Don't be downcast / hope in God (43:5)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

Five books comprise the Psalter, and Psalm 42-43—originally a single song—introduce Book II. The five books of the Psalter match the five first books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch, providing Israel with a worshipful response to the covenant laid out by Moses. Each of the five books of the Psalter contains unique characteristics. The most remarkable shift from Book 1 to 2 is that God's covenant name—Yahweh—appears 272 times in Book 1 but only 15 times in Book 2. In Book 2, the most common divine label is "God" (appearing 207 times). Each rare occurrence of "Yahweh" in Book 2 is therefore significant. In Psalm 42, for instance, the One we worship is called "God" twenty-two times, but only once is He addressed as "Yahweh." It occurs in verse 8, which provides the solution to the Psalmist's plight and the thematic center of the song.

It might seem strange that Psalms 42-43 once formed a single song, but the refrain of 42:5, 11, and 43:5 makes this fact unmistakable. Other parallels also reinforce this conclusion (42:3, 9-10 and 43:2; 42:4 and 43:4). The reason for the separation of these psalms is unknown, but it probably related in some way to the pragmatism of Israel's liturgy.

The psalm easily divides into three stanzas, each one separated by the refrain: "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" (42:5, 11; 43:5). The broad flow between these stanzas is obvious:

- Lament: When shall I appear before God? (42:1-5)
- Turning point: suffering, sovereignty, and Yahweh's steadfast love (43:6-11)
- Answer: Then I shall appear before God (43:1-5)

This structure helps us visualize the growing confidence in God as the Psalmist moves from complaint to confident petition and answer. The turning point comes in the second stanza, specifically in verse 8, the only mention of God's covenant name. The verse celebrates Yahweh's covenant love amidst the suffering He has sovereignly permitted.

Some might consider my label "turning point" a bit strong. After all, immediately after the alleged turning point, the Psalmist repeats the complaint of verse 3. Furthermore, the Psalm concludes with another inner pep-talk, as though the issue has not been resolved, either inwardly or outwardly.

But I stand by this label, "turning point." When a battle turns, it is not immediately won. So it is with the Psalmist. The battle rages on even beyond the close of the song. But it does not finish where it began. On the contrary, the third stanza inverts the first, concluding on a hopeful note. The Psalm begins by asking, "When shall I appear before God?" (42:2); it ends by answering, "Then I will go to the altar of God" (43:4). It begins by remembering "glad shouts and songs of praise" in God's house (42:4); it ends with "God my exceeding joy... I will praise you" (43:4). In the first half of the song, the Psalmist twice remembers his good times with God (42:4, 6); in the second half of the song, he instead prophesies the good times to come (43:4). The final refrain thus communicates that while the outward turmoil has not yet been resolved, the inner battle nearly has. He still must preach to himself, but the final line—"I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God"—resonates resoundingly.

As for the internal structure of each stanza, it is more difficult to trace a pattern. The song feels back-and-forth, with miserable verses beside triumphant ones (i.e., 42:7-8). While this can be frustrating to the interpreter, it is true to experience. The battle of our soul is never one of total victory or defeat. One moment we're up, and the next, we are down.

Despite the back-and-forth, we can nevertheless discern something of a pattern. The main complaints of Stanzas 1 and 2 look similar:

- The thirsty soul deprived of water (42:1-2) parallels the weary soul drowned by water (42:7).
- The day-and-night tears of the Psalmist (42:3a) parallel the day-and-night love of Yahweh (42:8)
- The enemies that mock (42:3b) parallel the enemies that mock (42:9-10).

The structure of these complaints spotlights the contrast between the day-and-night tears of the Psalmist and the day-and-night love of Yahweh. As constant as the suffering has been, God's love has been more constant. It is grounded in His covenant. Verse 8 highlights Israel's covenant not only by God's covenant name (Yahweh) but also by His "steadfast love" (Heb. *hesed*), which means covenant love.

Overall, the Psalm communicates that our key to victory is the assurance that God's covenant love is even more constant than our pain. Since this assurance is so unnatural to us, we must find it like the Psalmist: (1) By complaining to God, (2) By remembering God's goodness, (3) By preaching to ourselves, (4) By praying, (5) By repeating this process. The more we do these things, the more our souls will feel settled by the unnatural—but supernatural—assurance that God's covenant love is more constant than our pain. The latter will one day dissipate (43:4), but the former never will (42:8).

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah. As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

—"To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah":

- Headers like this provided musical instructions for Israel's worship leaders. As such, they remind us that the Psalms were not written in prose. They are poetry; they were sung; they were set to music. Israel's hymnbook included sad songs like this, which scholars have categorized as *lament*. We need sad songs. Laments not only show us how to bring our sadness to God; they directly carry our sorrow to God so we might experience the inner victory that anticipates outward triumph.
- "Sons of Korah": If they derived from Korah's rebellion (Num. 16), this would constitute a redemption. They whose ancestors rebelled against Moses "branched off" from their family tree, taking their descendants in a new, holy direction. But, of course, this is conjecture. We don't know who the "sons of Korah" were, save that eleven psalms are attributed to them (Ps. 42-49; 84-85; 87-88).
- "A Maskil": nobody knows what this is, but scholars typically link the word to "teaching" or "wisdom." Thirteen psalms bear the label "maskil."

—"As a deer pants... so pants my soul for You... My soul thirsts for God":

- He thirsts not just for God to make his life circumstantially better, but for God to satisfy his soul. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness..." (Matt. 5).
 - When we read the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-12), which teach us to hunger and thirst for righteousness, we think of the thirst in 42:1-2 as being a good thing. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who... thirst..."
 - But 42:5a seems to argue the opposite, associating thirst for God with a downcast soul. 5b offers us a fuller picture, however. The danger of the thirst in 42:1-2 lies in its hopelessness, a hopelessness that the Psalmist quickly rebukes in himself in 42:5b.
 - The Scriptures commend that we hunger and thirst for God (and His righteousness), but with the hope that we shall be filled (cf. Matt. 5).
 - Therefore, the thirst of the Psalmist is indeed a good thing. We should all thirst after God and His righteousness. But we must not allow our thirsty desperation to shepherd us into despondency. The rest of the Psalm reflects an expectation of being filled. It also reflects the painful battle from despondency into hope and joy.
- Nevertheless, a circumstance does attend his panting after God. See verse 3.

3 My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"

—The Psalmist's daily portion has not been bread that sustains but tears that drain. By metaphorically depicting his tears as food, he intimates that God has apportioned him the pain that caused his tears. This attribution of suffering to God's sovereignty becomes stronger as the Psalm progresses.

—"day and night" is a merism that means "all the time." The verse finds its balancing parallel in 42:8, where God meets him day and night, even in his pain—*especially* in his pain. Day and night, tears have been the Psalmist's food (rather than God's presence). But day and night, ironically, God has been with him. See comments there.

—"while they say to me all the day long, 'Where is your God?'"

- The Psalmist pants because of God's apparent absence; his enemies mock him for that same absence. The "absence" of God tests our character. Does it drive us to pant after God or to mock/accuse God?
- This question parallels 42:10, where the same question rattles him. As the song progresses, the Psalmist finds his situation unimproved. By the end, the only identifiable change occurs not in his circumstances but in his soul. The good news is that the inward battle matters more than any other—and he wins it. He also shows us how to win it.

- The inward battle results from an outward predicament; it is not an isolated affliction of the soul. Our inner and outer lives are in many ways bound. Enemies drive this Psalmist to tearful panting after God's presence.

4 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.

—Verses 4 and 6, which occur on either side of the refrain in verse 5, parallel one another with the theme of remembrance. In verse 4, he remembers joy in the house of God; in verse 6, he remembers past victories in God.

—We can only win the present battle if we remember former triumphs. Israel learned this in the wilderness, quickly forgetting how God rescued her from Pharaoh's armies. Unfortunately, our natural tendency is to remember our bad experiences and forget the good ones. Winning the battle requires us to invert that.

—Remembering the good times—and more specifically, God's provision in those good times—can be a tool for winning the spiritual battle. But if we're not careful, it can lead us down a dark path. Ecclesiastes 7:10 warns us, "Do not say, 'The former days were better than these,' for it is not from wisdom that you ask this." If dwelling on the good ole days makes us despise the day in which we live, we will not win the battle for our souls. Fortunately, the Psalmist remembers God's past goodness in a way that ensures triumph. We see this in the way verse 4 leads into verse 5, where he boldly speaks victory over himself.

—One way to discern whether we are "remembering the good ole days" in a holy way or an unholy way is by whether we do so intentionally. If our mind drifts toward past pleasures, it tends toward discontentment; if we intentionally fix our mind upon God's former goodness—as the Psalmist does here—it lifts our minds from present struggles.

—"as I pour out my soul":

- I am reminded of Hannah, who poured her soul out to God over the bitterness of her barren womb (1 Sam. 1).
- I am also reminded of Jesus, who "prayed with loud cries and tears" in the Garden of Gethsemane (Heb. 5).
- Prayer should not just look like reading a prayer list to God. We should not talk to God with emotional detachment. Instead, like a vessel spilling its contents, we should spill our hearts out before God. A healthy prayer life is one accompanied at times by tears, at times by volume, at times by bubbling joy, and at times by complaint. Sometimes, we will not even have words—only sighs and groans (Ps. 5). God's people must learn to pray with hearts that gush.
- This can be hard for me sometimes. I am a disciplined person who prays over my prayer list and adheres to my routine. It feels strange to "schedule" a time of pouring out my heart to God. Psalms like this remind me that prayer must be as unscheduled as it is scheduled. It exhorts me to maintain the relationship amidst the routine. And it encourages me to be in touch with my emotions. Every human has them. If I feel stress or anger or worry or fear or hatred or condemnation—any emotion, positive or negative—this should trigger me to pour my heart out to God. The temptation when we feel strong emotions is to react strongly or to numb the pain with food, drink, glances at cell phones, and various "lusts of the flesh." Ask yourself: how can I respond to the trigger of strong emotions by pouring my heart out to God first?

—"how I would go with the throng and lead them... house of God... glad shouts... keeping festival":

- The author of this Psalm appears to be a worship leader who misses leading God's people in song.
- This provides greater clarity about the nature of the panting after God. The Psalmist has been deprived of corporate worship, probably by the taunting enemies. He is away from the temple, longing to worship in God's house again.
- We felt something similar during COVID. A longing to worship together. Even churches that remained open throughout did not have their whole congregation.
- "keeping festival" speaks of the three major feasts for which Israel made a pilgrimage. Our closest cultural equivalent would be Thanksgiving and Christmas, where people travel to see family, give thanks, and worship Jesus. The Psalmist remembers these festive moments, a stark contrast to his present darkness.
- The Psalm begins with a longing for God's presence in His holy temple, for joyful worship with a festive throng (42:1-4); it ends with a prayer for the same (43:3-4). When our desperate longings are transformed into confident prayers, we find answers—"Then I will go to the altar of God..." (43:4).

5 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 6 and my God.

—This forms the refrain, which appears in 42:5, 11, and 43:5. It also divides the passage into three distinct stanzas.

—The refrain portrays the Psalmist preaching to himself—"O my soul"—a wise battle tactic. Like David "strengthened himself in the LORD", so does the Psalmist.

—It is important to pray and worship with words that we direct towards God, but we won't sustain this vertical relationship without also directing words towards our own souls. This explains why "O my soul" is common in the Psalms:

- [Psa 62:5 ESV] 5 For God alone, **O my soul**, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.
- [Psa 103:1, 3, 22 ESV] 1 Of David. Bless the LORD, **O my soul**, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ... 3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ... 22 Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, **O my soul**!
- [Psa 104:1, 35 ESV] 1 Bless the LORD, **O my soul**! O LORD my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, ... 35 Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more! Bless the LORD, **O my soul**! Praise the LORD!
- [Psa 116:7 ESV] 7 Return, **O my soul**, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
- [Psa 146:1 ESV] 1 Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, **O my soul**!

—In the above verses, the Psalmist commands his soul to wait on God, bless God, praise God, and return to God. What does your soul need to hear from you today?

—The "soul" refers to the inmost being, what we would naturally call the soul or the heart. The Bible uses the word "soul" in a variety of ways.

—The question has shifted from "When...?" (42:2) to "Where...?" (42:3) to "Why...?". Every battle of the soul centers on questions, not answers. If we had all the answers, there would be no battle. It's the cloud of confusion that wearies us.

—"Hope in God for I shall again praise him":

- This does not suggest that the Psalmist only praises God when times are good. On the contrary, this Psalm provides a prime example that he worships God despite the pain.
- Instead, the Psalmist conveys confidence that he will praise God *in response to victory*. In other words, he speaks of a certain kind of praise. He expects to praise God on the other side of this trial—not just during it.
- It is vital that the worshiper believes God not only for a blessed hereafter but for a blessed *here-and-now*; not only for eternal life but for earthly life.
- "Hope" in the Bible is different from twenty-first-century English. We say, "I hope I win the lottery." They said, "We have this hope as an anchor for our soul" (Heb. 6), and "Abraham, in hope against hope, believed" (Rom. 4), and "we have received new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead" (1 Pet. 1). In short, biblical hope is not a shot-in-the-dark, pie-in-the-sky halfcourt shot; it is a joy-filled, faith-filled, soul-grounding assurance that all will be well. Our future is good because God is in it.
- Since it is well with our future, it is well with our soul.

—"My salvation and my God":

- God is the One who offers salvation. He does it so reliably that we can call Him "My salvation." This is a *metonymy*. That is, the Psalmist substitutes the effect of trusting in God (salvation) for God Himself to ascribe Him with praise for the salvation He brings. "My God" and "my salvation" are one.
- God wants all of us to relate to Him closely enough and long enough that we can use the personal pronoun "My" to speak of Him. Like the Psalmist, may we all be able to address Him genuinely as "My salvation" and "My God."

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

—No sooner does he ask why his soul is cast down (42:5) than he announces that his soul is cast down. Preaching to yourself works, but it is not magical. The Psalmist seems to buoy his hope for a microsecond, only to descend back into the depths.

—I find this to be true to experience. Like Jesus' three temptations came in waves, so does the battle for our soul. We survive a wave, find a moment of reprieve, and suddenly another breaker overwhelms us. Victory requires us to keep swimming through all the waves, not just one of them.

—"therefore" the Psalmist returns to his former strategy: to "remember" God's goodness. In this case, it is "from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar."

- "the land of Jordan": represents God's fulfilled promises to Israel. Of that land, the Promised Land, Joshua said at the end of his life, *"Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed"* (Josh. 23:14). Amen! The land of Jordan represents not only fulfilled promises of God, but also His bounty, for it is *"a land flowing with milk and honey."* Further, it symbolizes God's unlikely blessing, for in the same speech Joshua said, *"One of you routs a thousand because the LORD your God fights for you, just as He promised"* (23:10).
- "Hermon... Mount Mizar": Hermon is where Israel defeated Og king of Bashan, one of their first opponents (Deut. 3:8). Og was a giant (3:11), and Bashan was considered "Canaanite hell" (See Reversing Hermon by Michael Heiser, pg. 93). Here was my commentary on "Bashan" in the Study Guide for Ps. 22:
 - *There is a supernatural component to this. Bashan borders Mount Hermon, which in the biblical worldview, is the place where celestial beings transgressed their nature and abode and somehow slept with human women, creating the Nephilim, who were giants (Gen. 6:1-4). This is why Bashan is so commonly associated with the "Rephaim," (Gen. 14:5), who were considered giants ("rephaim" is translated as "giants" in 1 Chron. 20:4). Bashan is also the dominion of "Og," who was one of the giants/Rephaim (Num. 21:32-35; Deut. 3:8-14; Josh. 12:4). Finally, it is also related to "Gog," whom I consider to be a satanically energized Antichrist figure (Ezek. 38:18; Rev. 20:8).*
 - *Heiser, commenting on the association of Bashan with Ashtaroth and Edei, under the dominion of king Og (In, Unseen Realm): "These terms—Ashtaroth, Edrei, and Bashan—were theologically loaded terms for an Israelite, and even for their neighbors who worshiped other gods." He goes on to describe the region of Bashan as "the place of the serpent" (due to linguistic connections with ancient near eastern texts), and then: "In effect, Bashan was considered the location of (to borrow a New Testament phrase) 'the gates of hell.'"*
 - *Heiser, again (In Reversing Hermon): "For the Canaanites of Ugarit, the Bashan region, or part of it, clearly represented 'hell', the celestial and infernal abode of their deified dead kings."*
 - For our purposes in Psalm 42, the Psalmist recollects God's victory in seizing the Promised Land from the Canaanites and their gods. In other words, he remembers both the natural and supernatural triumph of Israel in fulfillment of the promises of God.
- Mount Mizar is not known, but it appears to be in the heights of Hermon.

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

—After exercising all his mental and spiritual faculties to preach to his soul (5) and remember God's victory (6), the Psalmist descends even lower. Is this not true to experience? Most of our victories involve temporary defeats.

—"your waterfalls... your breakers... your waves":

- The Psalmist longed for streams of living water (1) only to be swept away by flash floods (7).
- In verse 3, the Psalmist complains of enemies, but here he assigns blame to God. This accords with the Hebrew view, where events associated with living in a fallen world ultimately point back to the One who allowed them. For instance, the Sabeans and Chaldeans strike down Job's servants (Job 1:15, 17), and natural disasters destroy his property and kill his children (1:16, 18-9), yet Job says "the LORD gave and the LORD has taken away" (1:20). The inspired author says Job "did not sin or charge God with wrong" (1:21).
- So are these the waterfalls, breakers, and waves, the enemies who taunt Job? Yes, sort of. Are they God? Yes, sort of. Does God support evil? Not at all. Instead, God oversees a world in which He permits evil and chaos for a time, until He makes every wrong thing right. In the meantime, it is not inappropriate to describe our trials as "your waterfalls... your breakers... your waves."

- At first, it feels offensive to imagine that God is sovereign over suffering. The doctrine has an acquired taste.
- Spurgeon: *"There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that sovereignty overrules them, and that sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought to more earnestly contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation – the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands – the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that throne...for it is God upon the Throne whom we trust."*
- Spurgeon (again): *"The sovereignty of God is a sweet pillow that you can lay your head at night. It is a beautiful truth not only that God is in control over all, but is also working everything out — the good and the bad — for your good, and his glory. This sweet doctrine is medicine for the soul that you can take in any season of life."*

—"Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls":

- Some understand this to address the conversation between the deepest part of our soul and God. But the context does not support this.
- Contextually, this calling is not the sound of prayer from the Psalmist's soul but the "roar of your waterfalls", which correspond to "your breakers" and "waves" that "have gone over me." In other words, the Psalmist is drowning in the chaotic flood of suffering that God has sovereignly allowed. He can't even attempt a prayer, for he is drowning, and the "roar" of hardship drowns out every effort to call out to God. The "deep" correlates to the primordial waters of chaos and evil in Genesis 1:2.
- The "waterfalls" come from above, which supports the point of the verse, that these trials ultimately find their source in heaven. The Psalmist is complaining, "I can't escape your sovereign chastisements!"

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.

—Drowning in misery, the Psalmist bobs his head up for a fresh gasp of air. So far, he has only fixated on past and future blessings. For the first time, he focuses on blessings in the present.

—The one who "day and night" consumed tears as his daily portion now portrays a God who, day and night, gives him reason to sing.

—"By day the LORD commands his steadfast love":

- The name "God" appears twenty-two times in this Psalm; Yahweh occurs only here. This is God's covenant name, and it correlates to God's covenant ("steadfast") love. Because the Psalmist is in covenant with God, he does not need to fear the taunts of his enemy. Even the suffering God sovereignly allows falls under the umbrella of His covenant love.
- Yahweh is sovereign over not just suffering but over the succor we enjoy in it.
- The God who sends His breakers over us also directs His love to us.
- The word "commands" (ESV) or "directs" (NIV) is used elsewhere to describe the way God commanded the creation to stand firm (Ps. 33:9). As firmly as God commanded creation into existence, He will command His love toward us!!
- The word "command" communicates unalterable firmness. This is the nature of God's love. It is as unmoving as God's eternal word.
- Since this is His "steadfast love" (Heb. *hesed*), we should understand this as His "covenant love." Sometimes translations render it as "lovingkindness" (NKJV) or "faithful love" (CSB). This is not just His love, but His covenantal commitment to never cease loving us. Like a perfect husband, He loves us perfectly.

—"at night his song is with me":

- Is this literally God's song? Or is it our song about Him?
 - If it is literally "His song" it speaks of the way He rejoices over us with singing (Zeph. 3:17).
 - If it is figuratively "His song" then it is a metonymy. "His song" would mean "the song that He inspires me to sing about His goodness."
- The latter part of verse 8 seems to clarify the right interpretation: "a prayer to the God of my life." The focus is on the Psalmist's communication. God inspires him to sing and pray, for God is everything to him. He has staked it all on God.

- "at night" not only contrasts "by day" to communicate "all the time"; it also conveys God's presence in the "night seasons" when He feels most distant. "Where is your God", his enemies taunt; He never left, the Psalmist responds.
- NLT: "through each night I sing His songs, praying to God who gives me life."

9 I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" 10 As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"

—"I say to God, my rock": there seems to be growing confidence as the Psalmist pours out his heart, remembers God's faithfulness, preaches to himself, and experiences God's covenant love.

—"Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

- Despite God being his rock, he still feels like God has forgotten him. This is how we lament. We don't *lament* by casting God aside. At the exact moment we complain to Him, we cling to Him. Every lament contains some element of praise and clinging to God.
- There is a world of difference between complaining about God and complaining to Him. Complaining about God condemns Him to justify ourselves—like Job (Job 40:8). The Israelites died in the wilderness for grumbling against God.
- Complaining to God—even if it is a complaint about His perceived inaction—lays open our hearts before the only One who can comfort them.
- Lament Psalms, by their very structure, show us how to complain to God properly. First, we complain. We don't pretend all is well when it is not. God would rather hear from the "real me" than the "me" I think I should be. Second, we petition. We ask God to do something about our problem. This petition might be intermixed with some affirmation—almost like a pep-talk for the soul—that God is not as absent as He seems. Finally, we praise. We praise Him for His past interventions; we praise Him in faith for future intervention.
- The Psalmist originally asked why God had forgotten him in verse 3, but the pain of their taunt intensifies here. This time they are called "adversaries," and their mocking compares to a "deadly wound in my bones."
- The intensification from verses 3 to 10 shows that perseverance requires us to conquer more than one wave, and the latter waves are sometimes the strongest.
- The Psalmist tries to remember God's faithfulness; the Psalmist feels forgotten by God.

11 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 repetition of the refrain reminds us that winning the battle is not about developing new tactics but employing the same ones repeatedly.

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

—Psalm 43 begins with the first official petition, and it's for vindication from enemies.

—We learn more about the enemies now. Not only do they taunt the Psalmist; they are also "deceitful" and "unjust."

—It is not vain to pray for vindication. Such a petition is not merely a request for others to think better of us. Even more, it is a request for truth to triumph.

—Why does the Psalmist not petition God for anything until now? It reflects growing confidence (see comments on 43:3-4). Sometimes we can't even get our heads above water to petition God for anything. In these moments, the best we can do is gripe to God, remember His faithfulness, and preach to ourselves. Gradually, we find the strength to pray and pray boldly for total reversal.

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?

—"refuge": metaphor, meaning God protects those who trust in Him.

—Notice again the way he laments. Previously, he said, "I say to God my rock, 'Why have you forgotten me?'" Now he says, "For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me?" In both cases, he affirms God's faithfulness even as he complains of God's apparent unfaithfulness. This is how we complain to God. We scream and ugly-cry that His recent treatment of us does not reflect what we know to be true about Him. We cling and complain to Him simultaneously.

—Practically, rather than saying, “You’ve abandoned me, so I’m giving up on You!” we say, “God! I know You’re faithful because I’ve seen it in my life! But it looks like You’ve abandoned me! Why? When will it stop?! O God, help!”

—The “mourning” (43:2) reminds us of the “tears” (42:1).

—“Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy” is a repeat of 42:10. The question being unresolved, he asks it again. This time, however, the tone shifts in a way that it did not before. See 43:3-4.

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

—This petition parallels the cry for vindication (43:1). The request for “light and... truth” is a request for God to illuminate the deceptive practice of his enemies as well as his own righteousness in the matter.

—The request for vindication (and light and truth) ultimately aims to answer his original desire, which was to be back in the temple with God’s people. Consider the parallels between 42:4 and 43:4:

- “how I used to go” vs. “Then will I go”
- “to the house of God” vs. “to your holy hill and to your dwelling... to the altar of God” (all these speak of worshiping God in the temple)
- “glad shouts and songs of praise” vs. “God my exceeding joy... I will praise you”

—What the Psalmist intends by this contrast—a contrast between complaint of a negative present and assurance of a positive future—is the increase in faith of the worshiper from the beginning to the end of the Psalm. We can follow his path to get there and learn how to win the battle that rages within our own soul.

5 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.

—There is a hint of victory in that the Psalm ends with the refrain. It ends on the positive note that he will again praise his Savior and God. The way he ends it each time makes this positive note climactic. In the verses leading up to it, you can feel the wrestling in his soul until he finally speaks hope over himself.

—Nevertheless, the Psalm does not end with actualized triumph. Triumph is anticipated by the victory of hope in the soul. It is the same with our souls. I am reminded of Proverbs 18:14: “A man’s spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?” In other words, we can endure physical torment if our spirit maintains hope. Psalms 42-43 show us how to prevail inwardly so we can also triumph outwardly.