



Knowing God | Psalm 42  
Fighting for Hope  
1.14.2017

### **Happy MLK Weekend**

Happy MLK Weekend! This weekend we remember & celebrate Dr. King's legacy of pursuing a society where men and women of all colors would treat one another with equal respect. Where we would be neighbors and brothers together. He was applying the "neighbor love" commandment of Jesus to the situation in front of him. and as we remember him we must seek to apply that same love to all people. God says everyone is created in the image of God. And in that we are equally deserving of respect regardless of which nation you come from. We have, by God's grace, brothers and sisters here at Mercy who've immigrated from other nations. We have dreamers and friends of dreamers. And as followers of Christ we must emphatically reject any statement by anyone, even a sitting president, that communicates anything less than full dignity and respect for people of all nations. I'm not trying to be political in any way with that. We do not put political agendas in the pulpit. neighbor love just has applications. And sometimes silence communicates endorsement and on a weekend where we are honoring a man for not remaining silent, how could we. God loves all peoples and so do we. Heaven is going to be a big let down for people who do not

love the nations. So we celebrate God's love for all peoples with one voice together this weekend.

### **Introduction**

We are in a series at Mercy Church we've called Knowing God. And we are walking through the Psalms because the psalms are this rich collection of prayerful songs where the authors put their relationship with God out there on paper for us to see. And in seeing it we can begin to know and walk with God too.

Today we are going to talk about spiritual despair. What do we do when we can't seem to see God anywhere. We are going to read a Psalm that puts words to that feeling When our world around us seems to be falling apart AND inside we are self-destructing and just can't seem to stop spiraling. The more we try to put on that smile the further we sink away from it being real.

All of us are touched by this in some way. Maybe you personally have had that time where you've felt hopeless and life kind of lost its color. If you've been in community group here I'm sure you've seen others go through times of despair. And let me say I'm intentionally not using the term depression today BECAUSE while depression fits in what we are talking about, spiritual despair takes more forms than that as you'll see. Depression and Anxiety are just two points on a spectrum of ways we experience spiritual despair.

I think we all agree we don't WANT despair. We want to walk in joy & hope yet sometimes we find ourselves so far from it. So our aim today:

## **How do we climb out of despair and walk with God in hope and joy?**

That's the fight David expresses as he prays to God in Psalm 42. If you have your bible, go ahead and turn it there. And as you turn there, let me acknowledge I want to come into this topic with a great sense of humility because I believe these are very choppy waters we are wading into today. But as I've said many times here, we are not playing games or going through some ritual here. We believe Jesus gives new life. And that new life...it is one where he says we cast our burdens on him and he is strong enough to take them and we can live in HOPE and Joy. Hope for the future and hope for the present. Hope that brings life to our souls that will lift us out of the pit of despair.

And some of you came in here hanging on by a thread and God has hope for you today. And this gospel message has real power for real life. Now this Psalm doesn't end tied off in a nice little bow of dancing with angels. It's a fight. And I think the beauty of the Psalm is God showing us you can have hope without having everything figured out.

That's why we go into the bible every week. And why we want you reading God's word every day. Because there is REAL HOPE for Real life here. Ok lets go. I'm going to walk you through this Psalm and explain it then come back through it with a FIGHT PLAN.

[1] 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?

Ok verse 1. Let's make sure we understand that image rightly. Cause this is one of those that gets turned into a tranquil image on a coffee cup. Right you got this deer leaning its head by the stream. And there's grass and a butterfly and clouds and happiness...all cross stitched on a throw pillow on grandma's couch. Listen...a deer panting for water is not a pretty site. It's not by a stream. It's staggering in desperation not finding anything to drink. THIRST AINT PRETTY. You get dehydrated you lose all energy, hallucinate and if you don't get something to drink you die! Spiritual Thirst is just as ugly & desperate. Listen to his description in 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?"

I almost don't want to explain this metaphor. Just want to let the image sink in on us because for some of you, this puts words to where you are right now. See David isn't just talking about a bad day. He's talking about that darkness that consumes your soul so much that you forget to eat. You cry until you are out of tears. The things around you seem to compound the darkness within you. His enemies, his critics...they are mocking him. Where is your God that you talk about? See his present circumstance is mocking his past faith. Look at verse 4:

[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.

See David is in hiding while his son hunts him trying to kill him so he can be king. David feels alone. You see where he wants to be? Procession to the house of God...shouts and songs of praise...a multitude celebrating together: He wants to be in church! Because there in church his soul was refreshed and encouraged. Out of all the things he could want when in this desperate persecuted situation...what does he want? He wants church. Why? Because the multitude of voices praising God together lifted up his soul. What your eyes see and your ears hear goes to your soul.

Listen: some of ya'll are entirely too casual about worship. Some. Not all of you cause there are plenty of you who pour yourselves out every Sunday and you lead me closer to the Lord in how you worship. But some of you are far too casual. I'm not talking to you if you aren't a Christian. I don't expect you to worship a God you don't believe in. But Christian, I need to caution you against being casual with something God deems so holy. Something that should be, like it was to David, so valuable to you. David thirsted, longed, for worship with God's people. Listen if gathering together isn't that valuable to you, you probably don't understand what is happening here. God has always chosen to dwell among his people and to use his people as his means of encouraging one another with his promises and his love. Which means you, Christian, are called by God to give that encouragement and receive that

encouragement. That's what we do here. So when you are only here twice a month and say 'ill catch the podcast' you are starving your soul. And you are depriving the rest of us of the encouragement God has for us through you. This isn't a show you attend you know. It's a collective worship session for the people to encourage and be encouraged. Every song you sing here...that's a sermon to everyone who can hear you.

Do you long for worship with the people of God like David? Do you hunger & thirst to meet God among his people? Listen start taking some small steps. Fight to get in here every week, on time, drink your coffee before hand...and come ready to worship. You have 65 minutes... sometimes a few more. Come ready to pour yourself out and ready to receive what God has for you. Don't just watch. Worship! I care about this because a casual heart towards worship almost always reveals a casual heart towards God himself. I love you church. and I love worshipping with you. and if this offends you, you are the one that needed to hear it.

David, now detached from God's people and on his own in despair, goes on to show us the internal fight for hope he's going through:

[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.

If you are a Christian then I imagine this resonates with you in some way. Why am I depressed? Why am I so down? Then he preaches to himself: Hope in God. He's taking what he knows

to be true...that God is his salvation and that one day he will sing songs of praise again like he used to...he believes that God will save him... and he's using this truth as a weapon against the darkness that is setting in on his heart and mind. He keeps going:

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

He's far away from home. In Jordan under attack. And his soul is cast down. So his "therefore" is to remember God. Then he drops verse 7

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

We are going to come back to this in a few minutes as we lay out a fight plan for hoping in God. But what I want you to see right here: David calls out to God from the depths of his suffering. The Deep. The image of breakers and waves just crashing over him. About to drown him...which by the way he says God these are YOUR waves...That deep pain calls...and a deep love answers that call. That's verse 8:

[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?"

He's hurting. The song within him is not a pleasant peaceful one. But it is filled with faith. His prayer is the prayer to "the God of my life." He says 'why have you forgotten me?' but he says it to God my rock. Not all songs of praise have to be happy.

I've told ya'll the story before but I feel like it fits here. In 1871 Horatio G. Spafford, a 43 year old businessman, suffered complete financial disaster in the Great Chicago fire. Right before the fire he and his wife had lost their son to scarlet fever. Filled with grief they decided to go away on vacation in England. Horatio sent his wife and four daughters ahead. Horatio was to follow in just a few days.

On its way to England, the ship that carried his family was struck by an iron sailing vessel and sank within 12 minutes. 226 lives were lost in the tragedy, including Horatio's four daughters.

Horatio booked passage on the next ship and asked the captain to notify him when they reached the point where his 4 daughters had drowned. He stood out on deck looking, for a while, at that mighty ocean, then returned to his cabin and penned these lyrics:

*When peace like a river attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say  
It is well, it is well, with my soul!*

Listen this song is not happy. He's got a song that he is clinging onto when the sea billows roll over to dead bodies of his 4 little girls he's not HAPPY. He's lost everything and internally you know he is fighting. He's asking with David WHY HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN ME? You must have forgotten me. But then the very next thought:

[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.

It's a repeat of verse 5. That's how this ends. The Psalm ends with him still in the battle and pointing his head and his heart towards victory. Towards hope. He's not there yet. But he knows the Lord is faithful and he will one day again praise God. One day his downcast head will be lifted back up and until then, he knows God is not waiting on him, God is with him.

Now let me walk back through this to show you A Fight Plan for Hoping in God when darkness sets in:

I believe this will give some handles to the great hope & joy God has for you. TODAY you need to go home and start putting these steps in motion.

**1. Be honest with God** – There is a rawness to Psalm 42 that may set some of you free. You need to be real with God. Maybe you need to get a journal out and finally just cry out to God: God, where are you? I feel like you have forgotten me. Write it down. Why do you feel that way? What is happening externally and what is happening internally? God is not afraid

of your pain or doubt. Let the Deep Call out. This is what verses 1-6 really are. The deep suffering in David's soul calling out.

## **2. Listen to God**

Deep Calls to Deep. & Deep answers deep. The greatest most essential most life giving doctrine of the Christian faith is: God Loves You. He loves you! And his love...it meets you in your deep darkness. There are two types of darkness of the soul and I want to show you how God's deep love answers your deep cry.

First is Sin – Which isn't the main point of this Psalm so I will be quick here. Sin has consequences. All sin is equal in terms of what it does to your relationship with God. You sin and you fall short of God's glory. But while all sin is equal, all sins do not have equal consequences here on earth. Sometimes our sin mows a particularly dark path of destruction. Maybe you've hurt some people really badly. Maybe you've messed up your family in ways you aren't sure they will ever recover from. I don't know what your story is but your guilt, your self-destructive darkness...its deep right now. You need to hear the apostle Paul's words to you.

[15] The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Why is he the foremost? Because prior to becoming a Christian he was hunting and killing them! He literally had the blood of Christians on his hands. That is DEEP SIN. Paul is

saying this because he's been there in the guilty seat. And maybe you are there. And so he says

[16] But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

\* He's saying the reason God saved him...is so he could be an example for you. That you, when you think your sin has cast you too far away from God, that you are in outer darkness...no his forgiveness is available to you still. He's a patient God who says if you will repent of that sin, as horrible as it is...he can save you just like he saved Paul. And I'm praying some of you who've built walls up around that nasty darkness of your sin...I'm praying you will let the light of Christ in today. Do not delay! Your sin is deep...And FINALLY YOU CAN CONFESS IT. IN ALL ITS UGLINESS...and the DEEPER MERCY OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS WILL ANSWER YOUR CALL! HIS LOVE IS DEEPER THAN YOUR SIN! Then you can say with Paul:

[17] To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:15–17

The deeps of God's mercy made Paul worship. IF YOU WILL CONFESS YOUR SIN & RECEIVE HIS MERCY you can find yourself free from it. And you can worship your God like Paul does here.

Now let me talk to you who are in the deep darkness of **suffering**. I want to talk to you whose darkness of the soul

cripples you. There may be a temptation to wish you could just avoid this trial. That you could avoid any trial and live a restful easy life. Yet it is here in your deep suffering that you are offered deep promises from God.

One of my favorite preachers from church history to read is Charles Spurgeon. But he suffered from Depression most of his career. Psalm 42 was particularly important for him because of that battle. Here's what he said about the deep trials of life:

Great deeps of trial bring with them great deeps of promise! For you much afflicted ones, there are words, great and mighty, which are not meant for other saints of easier experience. You shall drink from deep golden goblets reserved for those giants who can drink great potions of wormwood... Trials are mighty enlargers of the soul!

Yes, feel the loneliness of life! Here is a dreadful deep for you to sail on, and a tempestuous deep much to be feared, for your little boat may easily be wrecked. But don't forget that there is *another* deep, whose remembrance will remove from you the bitterness of your present sorrow—there is love in heaven towards you which will never grow cold—immortal and unchanging love!

To my brothers and sisters suffering, listen now. To those who are denying the suffering because you are scared of the pain...let your deep call out so you can hear the deep response. Your deep suffering has a deep answer. And today I want you to fix your heart on it. I know the despair can be so great you don't eat, you don't get out of bed. Maybe you are

listening to this on your phone because you are curled up in a corner and a friend that loves you sent you this message. Hear this hope in your soul: God Loves You. He still loves you. He is sitting right there with you. He sees your darkness and your tears and as he sits right there with you he says Give this darkness to me. I can take it. I can free you from it.

[28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

John 15.9 he says abide not in the darkness of your soul but in his love. Luke 15 Jesus says his love is like a father's arms wrapping around his broken child saying I LOVE YOU! AND I WILL RESTORE YOU! Don't worry about fixing yourself, Just come to me and I'll take care of you!

One of the reasons despair is so hard to break free of is because we are so hesitant, so reluctant to trust anything enough to Hope in it. But David says to his soul "Hope in God." I don't know what has broken your trust, what has left you in the pit of despair but today is a new day and you need to put your hope in the one who will never let you go. Hope in God.

In fact that leads right to the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the fight plan:

### **3. Preach the gospel to yourself**

Let me explain what I mean. The most influential person on your life, is you. You listen to you more than you listen to anyone else. We are always interpreting the events and situations around us and quietly creating a story out of it about who we are and what it all means for us. We are our

greatest influence. And sometimes our own voice, still affected by the reality of sin like everything else, can be very dangerous to listen to. Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones wrote on spiritual depression and said it this way:

"The main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this, that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self." Martin Lloyd Jones

Look at the debate David is having with himself. One minute he's saying "Have you forgotten me God?" And then David interrupts his own line of thinking. And this isn't multiple personality disorder. This is us getting to watch David come to his senses right before our eyes. He says "[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. "

David STOPS LISTENING TO HIMSELF AND STARTS PREACHING TO HIMSELF! And that is what we have to do when facing despair. You are your biggest influence on your life. This is the great art, Lloyd Jones says, of breaking out of spiritual despair. It is preaching to ourselves instead of listening to ourselves. When the thought comes in "It's never going to get better." The reply needs to be "SELF...HOPE IN GOD!" God came & died for me to set me free from Sin and I know in my despair I can come back to his promises for me:

- I'm in despair over my sin - **2 Corinthians 5.17** – If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. So I'm gonna stop listening to myself say "I'll never get past this" and I'm gonna start preaching to myself "I'm a new man! A

new woman! GOD has declared me free from this sin. So SHUT UP SELF. I'm choosing God's words not yours."

- I'm in that place where I feel like God has forgotten me and I'm scared. **Hebrews 13.5** – He will never leave me or forsake me. The lord is my helper whom shall I fear?
- I'm ALL OUT OF HOPE with no reason to get out of bed. **Revelation 21.4** – one day he will wipe away every tear. No more crying. No more pain. And my hope in that day gives me joy in this day. SO I'm going to stop listening to myself and start listening to God.
- God has forgotten me & there is no hope. WITH DAVID YOU ARE GOING TO SAY **Romans 8** – What shall separate me from the love of Christ? Neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers, nor height....NOR DEPTH. I CANNOT SPIRAL DOWNWARD TO A PLACE WHERE GOD'S LOVE CAN'T GO. DEPTH WILL NOT SEPARATE ME FROM HIS LOVE!! NOTHING CAN SEPARATE ME FROM THE LOVE OF GOD!!! Is your suffering deep? Look across, not up. Just look across even look down. Cause God's love is there. Grab onto the deep love of God for you!

Stop listening to your flesh, to your old self and start preaching the gospel to yourself. God loves you, he died for you, he's never letting you go, he's given you a church to thrive in, and one day he's going to make all things new!

Shut up & preach to yourself

#### 4. Get a sparring partner

the heart is deceitful. And even though we know all these promises sometimes we just can't seem to preach to ourselves. And we need someone to take God's promises and punch us in our thick head with them. A sparring partner trains you. I always think of Rocky & Apollo Creed. You need someone who will see a weakness or a blindspot and call it out. And that's gonna hurt! they may even say you need to take a step to see a professional counselor so that you can get the help you need. And you gotta be open to that And that may hurt. But better that short term pain than the devil destroying you! The devil will make his home in that weakness and destroy you through it.

I'm intentional with this language because too much Christian community is nice. Now we should honor God by being kind to each other but listen, the bible says we are in a war against a really strong enemy. I don't need my sparring partner to be nice. I need him to preach to me. I did it this week. I was going through this despair thing and called my sparring partner. I've got 2-3 in my community group. And just said listen I need you to preach to me for a minute cause I'm feeling like \_\_\_\_\_ is hopeless. And he went right to some lies I was believing and then reminded me of God's faithfulness and God's promises. And here's what I felt: **I felt dumb & encouraged.** That's how you know you have a good sparring partner in the gospel. You feel like "why was I doubting God, how silly" and you feel loved like "God is faithful and loves me and is going to be with me. I have hope."



Be honest with God. Then listen to him. Then PREACH the gospel to yourself. And get a sparring partner to help you out.