

The Drowning Song (Psalm 42)

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[0 : 01] Psalm 42, I'll give you a moment to find that. This is God's Word. 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? My tears have been my food day and night. While men say to me all day long, where is your God?

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. 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.

My soul is downcast within me. Therefore, I will remember you. From the land of Jordan, the heights of Hermon, from Mount Mizzah.

[1 : 11] Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day, the Lord directs His love.

At night, His song is with me. A prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?

My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, Where is your God? 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. Will you pray with me? Father, for anyone here especially who has come to church with souls weary and tired, Would you speak to us through your word today?

And Father, help each of us to know what it's like to pour out our sorrows to God. To call on your saving help. And to just be pondering and preaching to ourselves your loyal love, especially through Jesus.

[2 : 29] Father, I pray these things in Christ's precious name. Amen. So no one told you life was going to be this way. Your job's a joke.

You're broke. Your love life's DOA. Familiar words, right? These are the first lines of the theme song from that hit sitcom Friends. It's still going on Netflix, I've been told, or in some countries. So yeah, the Rembrandts, I'll Be There For You. Famous song, right? Famous song. Quite upbeat when you hear it, okay? It's a theme song and then you see the friends gathering around the fountain. There's lots of good feels when you hear that song.

But what does a Friends theme song sound like in a minor key? Okay? To solve this question, YouTuber Chase Hofelder, he has this thing where he records all kinds of songs in a minor key. So like whether it's the Titanic theme song or Taylor Swift, whatever. He just tries it out in a minor key and sees what happens. And so I'm going to play a little excerpt and you can see what the Friends song sounds like.

[3 : 28] Okay. All right. We'll stop it there. Man, doesn't that grab you, right? So sad. So sad. So different. Okay. That's the power of changing into a minor key, isn't it? Right?

So that's what Chase Hofelder does, right? What does singing to God, though? What does worship look like, sound like in a minor key? What does worship sound like?

When you feel weak? When you feel broken, hurt, betrayed, disappointed? Okay. Thank God, then, for a psalm like Psalm 42.

When I first started attending church as kind of an awkward, uncertain 16-year-old, on repeat was this worship song that we just sang, right? As the deer, right? By the way, it was written in 1984, so it's older than me.

And look, if you only looked at the first verse as we sing it, right, it certainly paints a cute, fluffy picture, doesn't it? Right? It's the sort of stuff that you put on greeting cards. Or should it, actually?

[4 : 27] Because I wonder, as I read the psalm, I wondered if you noticed where the lyrics go after that. I wonder if Psalm 42, verse 1, should look more like the next slide.

A little bit in disaster, in distress. Okay? Because notice when I read the psalm, okay, after verse 1, the deer disappears, right? This is not the deer song. Okay?

What is the running theme? What's the running theme? Have a look in Psalm 42. Actually, it's water. Okay? Verse 2. My soul thirsts for God. You see that? For the living God.

Or verse 3. My tears have been my food. Verse 3. My tears have been my food day and night. Or maybe verse 4. I pour out my life.

These things I remember. As I pour out my soul, my life. And then even when you go down to verse 7, you start hearing about waterfalls and waves and breakers. Psalm 42 is not a happy Disney song.

[5 : 27] Psalm 42 is a song for when you feel like you are drowning. When you lost your appetite from crying so much. Now, this is the one to put on your summer playlist if you've been bullied.

Okay? That's cool. If you've been mocked by your co-workers for being a Christian. If you feel far and distant from God. If you feel like he's not even listening to you. So what does worshipping God in a minor key look like?

That's what we're going to look at through with Psalm 42. Let's find out. Just as an aside, some of your Bibles, you might notice actually Book 2. Like just a little inscription.

Book 2 at the top of your Bibles. Anyone have that in their Bibles? Book 2? A few of you? Yeah?

Okay. That's because, as we heard in that earlier video a few weeks back, there's 150 Psalms.

They're divided into five books. That's how the editors kind of arranged five different playlists, as it were. Okay? And they picked Psalm 42 to start a new section, to start Book 2. If you actually look up a verse before Psalm 41, 13, you actually see there's like a little bit of a benediction, right?

[6 : 32] Amen and amen. So that kind of signals Book 1's over. Okay? Book 2 is beginning. And this detail, I think, is important because while in Book 1, you have a lot of kind of King David songs, right?

These are songs from like a king, trying to go about life, trying to be faithful. Book 2 introduces a new group of songwriters. Okay? The sons of Korah. And maybe they were Korah's actual descendants in the Old Testament.

Or perhaps they were just some musos with a cool band name. Whoever they are, it's no longer King David. Okay? It's no longer a royalty figure singing. It's now ordinary people.

So here's a song, Psalm 42, for ordinary people to sing. For you and me. I feel like in this book, the songs seem a bit more universal.

The choruses, they spill over and resonate more with our daily lives. Something I've had to learn recently. I've been at PCV now a couple of months since August.

[7 : 32] One thing I've had to learn pretty quickly, especially when serving on the worship team, is there's actually secret hand signals. I don't know. I don't want to give it away. So they know where they're going, right?

There could be verses, right? One, two, three verses. Could be a chorus. And it's a C behind your back. Or maybe a bridge. I think it looks like this. Look, I want us to look at Psalm 42 with these in mind.

Because actually, I think in Psalm 42, there's three verses that make up most of the song. You see verse 1 from 1 to 4. You see the next verse from kind of 6 to 7.

And then you see another verse again from 9 to 10. If you're the kind of highlight-y type person, feel free to highlight those. I think those are the verses of Psalm 42. Because what happens is that you get this repeated refrain or chorus.

And you see Psalm 5, sorry, verse 5 and verse 11. They sound pretty similar to each other, don't they, in your Bibles? And those are the choruses. And then there's kind of a random verse 8.

[8 : 36] I don't know where it fits. And so we'll just call that the bridge, okay, of the song. They kind of stand on its own. And so we'll call it the bridge. And so we could look at Psalm 42 this way.

Okay?

We could look at it this way. There's three verses that invite us to pour out our sorrows before God. Okay? Verses 1 to 4, 6 to 7, 9 to 10. And then there's two choruses in Psalm 42.

They invite us to profess His saving help. And then finally, we're going to look at how the bridge, okay, verse 8, invites us to ponder God's loyal love.

Verse 8. So we'll look at the verses of Psalm 42, the choruses of Psalm 42, and then finally the bridge as well in turn. Does that sound like, does that make sense for everyone? Yep?

Okay. We'll look at these three parts in turn, and then we're going to draw some lessons from the drowning song. So the first thing I want to share, the verses of Psalm 42, they invite us to pour out our sorrows to God.

[9 : 36] They invite us to pour out our sorrows to God. Some of you who have gotten to know me a little bit better may have noticed that I'm not really an extrovert, but I don't mind being around people.

So I'm kind of in between, right? I heard someone describe themselves as a loud introvert. I don't even know if that makes sense. It's a fancy way of saying, yeah, I like hanging out with people, but I'm like in-ear kind of wireless headphones.

I need to go back and recharge for a bit afterwards, and then we can make some more noise. And yet one of the things I found hard about lockdown, right, last year, is that we could not meet with people.

Okay? We couldn't meet with church family, with relatives. And notice how the psalmist here feels similar in verse 4, right, as he pours out his troubles before God.

I think Psalm 4, you really see how he misses community. I used to go with a multitude, leading the procession to the house of God with shouts of joy and thanksgiving.

[10 : 36] He's far away from all that. The writer of Psalm 42 right now describes himself. It's kind of like how one writer in the UK described watching us enjoy the America's Cup while they were sitting in lockdown.

Okay? There's so much FOMO there, right? It's so sad. The sons of Korah tell it like it is in the verses, don't they? Okay? These are words that have no filter.

Verse 2, I'm so thirsty for the living God. Verse 3, I've cried so much that I don't even feel like eating. This is an invitation to pour out our sorrows before God.

Right? Even if people around me are celebrating, enjoying life, this psalmist feels like he is in a far country right now. Verse 6, where it says, my soul is downcast within me.

It's an interesting word. In Hebrew, it's quite a rare word. But some translators think it means kind of bowed down, like, you know, you're kind of in a fetal position in bed. You can't even get out of bed.

Another possible meaning, I think this is more likely, is that it means something like to melt away.

[11 : 44] More water imagery, right? Sometimes you talk to God and you feel like you are ice melting. I wonder if that's something you can relate with. Certainly, it's a song that many people, many of God's people could relate with.

Whether they were 6th century Jews living in exile, far from their spiritual home. Whether they were early Christians persecuted by Romans, they could sing Psalm 42. Whether you're a member of PCBC in January 2021, missing overseas family.

Grieving, being single. Feeling broken or betrayed by a hurt relationship that you can't fix. So, do you feel abandoned? Do you feel abandoned?

Then, Psalm 42 is for you. Have a look at verse 9, right? I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?

Or do you have pain in your bones? Are you struggling with physical illness? Sing verse 10. My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me.

[12 : 52] It's an invitation to pour out your sorrows before God. These are words that give us permission to say it's okay to not be okay before our Heavenly Father. To be drenched in sadness.

Right? And I mean, I think a clear application, right? If Psalm 42 is full of these kinds of words, then there is no shame if you are here and you struggle to feel joy.

God invites you to bring your clinical depression, your anxiety, your doubts and questions to Him. He invites you to tell Him unfiltered.

Because remember, Jesus said this, right? I came not for those who are well, who are mentally whole. I came for those who are sick. I think sometimes in church we feel like it's only right to put on our happy face, right?

We think that coming to church is like coming to an art gallery. And we can all put on our cocktail dresses and our suits and we all look good in front of each other. No. Church is a hospital. We come in bandaged and broken.

[13:59] We need to be able to be honest when we come to church. It's okay not to be okay. I think another clear application, if we see that Psalm 42 is inviting us to be sorrowful, let's then make sure we leave space when we worship together for lament as well as praise.

It's so good that Venus invited us to pray for all the political turmoil around the world. It's much easier, right, to ignore and say that doesn't exist. What about the turmoil in our lives?

We should pray for that too. We should lament. We might need to resist a family culture where only happiness is acceptable in public. Maybe we need to sing more songs, worship songs in a minor key.

Who knows? I mean, did you know that out of 150 Psalms, about 42 of them are laments. They kind of have this kind of tone, kind of downbeat, I'm sorrowful, God, help me out.

42 out of 150, that's about one in three songs, right? Are one in three of our songs helping us to lament before God. I think it's good to sing a wide range of songs because in life we experience both joy and sorrow.

[15:13] Gladness and grief. Hope and helplessness. We need to sing, oh come all you faithful. But sometimes we also need to sing, man, I'm so unfaithful. I'm so unfaithful.

So, Psalm 42 says, come and pour out your sorrows before God. That's the first thing we see. And if the verses of this Psalm say, pour out your sorrows, then our second point is this.

The choruses of Psalm 42 invite us to profess, cry out his saving help. Have a read of verse 5 again. Why are you downcast, oh my soul?

Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour. I wonder if, friends, you've ever felt so stressed or cut up inside that you started talking to yourself.

Some of you have planned a wedding. I wonder if kind of in that space, in that week leading up to a wedding, you were just, there was just so much going through your mind, right? On the 6th of February, 2010, about 10.50am, just about 15 minutes before Cheryl was due to arrive at our wedding day, a billion things were going through in my head.

[16:26] Were all the guests here? Are we running on time? Was it too hot? How was the Bride Party doing? And then a voice in my head started to speak. William, relax. Calm down.

Deep breaths. Stop being so stressed out. I was talking to myself. I was talking to myself. And in a similar way, we see here now in verse 5 and verse 11, the psalmist is talking to himself.

You notice how the chorus starts both times, right? Why are you downcast? Who's the you? He's talking to himself. He talks to himself, and then he keeps going, right? And I think we see in 5 and 11, he leaves two kind of post-it notes to himself or herself.

Note 1 is this. Put your hope in God. And then note 2 is the reason why. Why? For I'll still praise or profess him. Look, it's not mad.

It's not crazy to talk to yourself. Actually, we've packaged it as cognitive behavioral therapy, actually, haven't we? Right? Actually, part of secular psychology is, one of the ways to treat it is to remind yourself of truths.

[17:32] Okay? It's actually biblical to talk to yourself. But what you say to yourself matters. Secular psychology will tell you to affirm yourself, to say you have everything within you.

Remind yourself of that. You're special. The Disney movies will tell you that too. They're in pop psychology, right? Be yourself. Chase your dreams. Wish upon that wishing star.

It's not mad to talk to yourself. We all do it. But what you say to yourself matters. And Psalm 42 reminds us to put your hope in God, for you will still praise or profess his saving help.

That's where our hope and praise should come from. Not from our own achievements. Not from our own self-esteem. From God himself and his saving help.

There's a little detail here. Most translations, including NIV, they try and force the choruses to match. You'll notice verse 5 and verse 11, they read exactly the same in English.

[18:36] In Hebrew, they're actually slightly different, but I think what the translators have tried to do is just to smooth it together. The ending of verse 5 actually literally reads the salvation of his face.

That's what he's hoping on. But then in verse 11, it literally reads the salvation of my face. That's what we have hope in. This is a bit of a difference.

I'm still trying to work that out. But at the very least, we can know this. God invites us to sing our sorrows to him, yes. But he doesn't want us to remain there. He wants us to remember his saving help.

To tell ourselves that. To preach it to ourselves as a word. Actually, so that's one of the most powerful things you can do as a Christian. When you are depressed, when you are suffering, when life sucks, is to preach the gospel to yourself.

Preach God's saving help to yourself. Sing salvation song when you suffer. Whatever it looks like. To remind yourself, whatever I'm going through right now, God. God, you yourself went through far worse, didn't you?

[19 : 39] Oh yeah. That's right, you sent Jesus. And Jesus, we see the salvation of his face, do we not? Friends, if you're here, and you try and endure suffering and hardship without preaching the gospel to yourself, then you're going to suffer twice.

I'll tell you what I mean. You're going to suffer twice. Because not only do you have your sorrow to deal with, your hardship, whatever pain you're going through, you're going to start doubting whether God loves you, whether he cares for you.

Don't suffer twice. Leave a note to yourself. Oh my soul, why do you feel so melted away? Soul, I know you're feeling overwhelmed, but remind yourself this.

You have never suffered what Jesus did when he's loved you this much, when he died on the cross for your sins. So hope in God again, my soul. Praise your Savior again, my soul.

Preach to yourself. Preach the gospel to yourself. I love it, actually. There's a whole book about this that I found on my shelf again recently. I love how Joe Thorne, in this little book he calls Note to Self, The Discipline of Preaching to Self, I loved how he described this in one chapter.

[20 : 47] Let me read it a little bit for you. It says this. Dear Self, God does not promise to rid your life of affliction and difficulty.

He does, however, offer to give you the grace needed to suffer well, and through grace to discover the riches and beauty of the gospel. Self, it's not wrong to ask God to relieve you of your pain, but it is more important that in the midst of the pain, you rely on the promise of God to work out such experiences for his glory and your good.

It's a great example. It's meditating on God's truths in an ongoing conversation, preaching to yourself. And we know it works. Do you want to know why it works?

Do you want to know why I know it works? Because look at how the psalmist's language changes as he refers to God. Have a look again. In the early lines, the new NIV gets it wrong here, I think. It says, As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. That's what the original says, O God. In the early lines, God is just, O God. Formal, distant.

[21 : 52] Okay? God, the living God. But look what happens after verse 5. All right? He preaches the gospel to himself. Put your hope in God. What happens next? What's the very first word of verse 6?

My God. Can you see how powerful that is? He's gone from, O God, distant, up in the sky, to my God. There's a song, Only Holy God.

Actually, the last verse, I think, it goes, you know, only a holy God. And then, just to change it a little bit, he says, Only my holy God. Do you remember that? Who doesn't want that kind of closeness? You and I can have it when we preach the gospel to ourselves. Look, atheists can mock, haters can hate, but hope in God. Keep praising him in your struggles.

And this double chorus reminds us that even in deep sorrows, God becomes my God. He becomes our salvation. The verses of Psalm 42 say, Pour out your sorrows to God.

[22 : 53] He gives us permission. Yet the choruses tell us not to stay there. You need to preach the gospel to yourself. No matter how hard it is, no matter what life brings your way, profess that saving help that God has given you.

And we know that. It's through Jesus. And finally, I think, we want to also meditate on this fact that in verse 8, we see the bridge, and the bridge invites us to ponder his loyal love, to ponder God's loyal love.

I did a music degree once upon a time at college, so I have this desire, urge to analyze songs randomly. I don't know why. It's still there. When you think of well-known bridges to worship songs, I wonder if you've stopped to analyze why there's a bridge in the first place.

Why not just cut the bridge out and just repeat the chorus, right? I think bridges can be helpful, okay? When we sang Blessed Be Your Name, what was the bridge of that song? You give and take away.

My heart will choose to say, Blessed Be Your Name, right? Just simple truths. Think of how that bridge, even though you technically don't need it, helps to distill and bring the message of the song into a high intensity, right?

[24 : 03] It's helpful to have a bridge. Or how, let me think of another one. There's a bridge that goes like this. You have no rival. You have no equal, right? That reminds us.

It helps us to ponder how good, beautiful, powerful Jesus' name is from a fresh angle, doesn't it? And so I think that's what the bridge here in verse 8 does too, okay? It's a bit different to the rest of the psalm, isn't it?

By day the Lord directs His love. At night His song is with me. A prayer to the God of my life. It's kind of like, couldn't you have like matched it with the chorus or the verses? Why does this verse exist?

Let me tell you something. Up till this point in the original lyrics, you may even notice it. God has been called El or Elohim, the Hebrew word. It's kind of like a generic word for God, like Shen in Chinese.

It's kind of like just a general word for God. And yet here, as the psalmist talks to himself again, right, in verse 8, he tells himself in a very compressed, bridgey, distilled way, he calls God for the first and only time by His special name, Yahweh, okay?

[25 : 14] By day, the Lord, you'll see in some of your Bibles, it's capitalized, L-O-R-D, capitalized. This is where our English translation are trying to say that this is God's special covenant promise-keeping name, okay?

This is the name that Moses gets told when God meets Israel, Redeemer, Moses, in the burning bush, okay? But Moses says, who are you?

And he says, I am who I am, Yahweh. Before Moses gets the Ten Commandments, he's reminded again, I am Yahweh, who brought you out of Egypt. This is the name God's people will hear over and over again through the portable tent years, the wilderness years, the King David years, the make way for Yahweh years, right?

So, this may look like a random one-sentence bridge to us, but this was such a powerful reminder. Just to hear Yahweh's name, wow, that is a powerful reminder that there is a promise-keeping God who is directing all things, even our sorrows, with his loyal, steadfast love.

And if you're here and you're still struggling to know whether to follow Jesus, if you're sick of love being kind of conditional on you doing well, on you obeying people, or you achieving something at school or at work, then you need the loyal love of Yahweh.

[26 : 41] You need a love that says, I have promised to love you and care for you and redeem you, and nothing you can do can change that. You need to be introduced to this love.

So, if you're not a Christian and you want to know more about Yahweh's loyal love, you need to talk to the person who brought you here. Well, come and talk to me afterwards. I'd love to introduce you to Yahweh's loyal love.

By day, Yahweh, directs His love. At night, His song is with me. This is a prayer to the God of my life. What a lifeline, hey? What a lifeline. For anyone who has cried themselves to sleep, if you have lost count of your disappointments or if you've forgotten what it's even like to laugh, here's a bridge that says, remember, I am the promise keeping God.

I will sing to you love by day and you can sing my song by night. His loyal love, friends, will get you through the darkest valleys. It was a Tuesday morning, 2006.

I was hanging around Auckland Uni's School of Music. I was in between classes, about to start one, I think. My brother walked in with tears down his face and I still remember him just walking up to me.

[28 : 01] He just showed his little Nokia phone to me and on the screen it said, mum died. My mum was living in Malaysia at the time and so we never got to say goodbye.

And as a young believer, I had so many questions. What happened? Why did my mum die so suddenly? Where is she now? What do I do?

In my grief, I poured out my questions to God and I poured out my questions to my pastor at the time. And one of the most helpful things that he, my pastor, shared with me was God's faithful, promise-keeping love.

He wrote it in a letter and let me quote him. He says this, times like these are always difficult. But I have confidence that Yahweh, the Lord, will guide you through this trial and your faith in him will be

