

BIBLE STUDY FOR PSALM 42

Psalm 42 is a "psalm of lament." It should not surprise us that this is the largest single type of psalm in the Bible—more than a third of the psalms are either individual or communal laments.

The title tells us this song was written by "the sons of Korah." They are noted as the authors of eleven psalms. In the time of the Exodus, Korah led a rebellion against Moses, accusing Moses and Aaron of seeking glory for themselves. God judged Korah and the 250 leaders who followed him and they all died. But Korah's sons chose not to follow their father. For their faithfulness, they were given back their position as the gatekeepers of the Tabernacle. Later David put them in charge of the music of the temple, literally leading Israel in praising God.

2 Chronicles tells us that when the musicians joined the singers in worship, God's glory so filled the temple the priests were unable to perform their duties.

All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God (2 Chron. 5:12-14).

1. Have you ever praised God, or experienced His glory to the point that it overshadowed all else? What was that like? Was music a part of that time?



Most psalms of lament begin with a cry to God asking for his help (verses 1-2). Here, the writer realizes that he desperately needs the presence of God. He longs for it, searches for it as a hunted animal seeks water. Throughout Israel's history, his people have cried out to him to rescue them, often from situations their own sin had brought about.

Judges 3:9

1 Samuel 7:9

1 Chronicles 5:20

Psalm 34:6

2. Has there been a time in your life when you needed and wanted God more than anything else on earth? What was it that drove you to seek him?



After calling out to him, the psalmist makes his complaint known to God (verses 3-4, 6-7).

God knows every thought in our minds, every beat of our heart. He knows what we will say before we say it.

Psalm 139:1-5, 23-24

Luke 12:7, Matthew 10:30

Jeremiah 1:5

John 10:14, 10:27

1 Corinthians 13:13

3. Do you feel God knows you this intimately? Can you trust him to do what's best for you if he doesn't? If not, what can you do to change your mind and trust him more? If God knows us this well, why should we tell Him what we need?

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One of the things that is causing the author distress is that he is unable to go to the temple and worship God with others (verse 4). In the Old Testament times, corporate worship could only take place in the temple in Jerusalem. Some scholars think this psalm was written during a time of exile. Since Mt Herman and "the land of the Jordan" are in the north, this may be the Assyrian exile, over 100 years before the Babylonian exile. In any event, the psalmist feels a distance between himself and God, and God's people.

4. Have you ever been unable to worship with God's people due to distance or illness? What about another reason, such as emotional turmoil or a season of doubt? What was that like for you?

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I spent many hours, even days, examining the phrase "deep calls to deep" (verse 7). I read multiple commentaries, searched the internet, even listened to music to see how lyricists understood it. The interpretation I liked best came from *The Passion Translation: My deep need calls out to the deep kindness of your love.*

5. What does this phrase mean to you? Can you tell of a time when your deepest need was met by God's everlasting love?

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In verse 9, the writer says, "I say to God my Rock, 'Why have you forgotten me?'"

6. Why might the psalmist call God his Rock, and then say God has forgotten him?

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The author has to deal with the taunts of those around him. If in exile, he would have been surrounded by those who did not recognize the One True God. In Psalm 43, which was at one time part of Psalm 42, he says: "Vindicate me, my God, and plead my cause against an unfaithful nation. Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wicked."

7. Have you ever found yourself surrounded by those who did not share your faith in the Living God?

8. Does God need us to defend Him to unbelievers?

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The psalmist chastises himself (verses 5 and 11 and again at the end of Psalm 43). Though he has just listed his reasons for despair, he asks his soul why he should be so distraught. He reminds himself to put his hope in God rather than his circumstances. This is not an easy task; he ends up again talking about his situation, and then comes back around to a decision to praise God.

9. What do you think could help you focus your trust on God, in stressful or desperate situations? Have you been successful in doing this before?

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The modern definition of "lament" has lost the part where we confess our faith in God and reaffirm our trust in Him. The psalms of lament almost always include this. This is why I prefer to call them psalms of encouragement instead of psalms of lament.

Psalm 130:5-8

Psalm 22:22-24

Psalm 26:11-12

Psalm 51:15-17

This may also be why we find such comfort in the psalms. The writers were people like us, going through sometimes horrific circumstances. They wept and complained and even despaired like we do. *Yet they always come back to God*, restating a desire and intention to trust him no matter what. In verse 8, he says, "By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life." In verses 5 and 11, he vows to once again praise him. The writer realizes that his hope and peace can come from only one place—The Living God, The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

10. How do you experience God directing his love to you? Singing over you?

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Try writing your own psalm of lament. Include:

- A cry to God for help
- A description of your complaint and/or asking him
- what you want him to do
- A statement of trust in him
- A vow of praise