

## The sermon

### Intro

We have longings. There's things we want to see happen in our lives (spouse, salvation of a child/friend, better job). The longer these longings remain unfulfilled, the harder it gets. What do you long for most?

Do you ask God why?

We have sufferings. There's things in our lives that make life hard. And painful. The longer these sufferings remain, the harder it gets. What suffering do you long to be released from?

Do you ask God why?

This morning the Psalmist helps us walk by faith when longings remain unfulfilled and suffering lingers.

### READ PASSAGE

### Body

#### Point 1: Long for God (42:1-2)

#### SONS OF KORAH?

Descendants of Levi who were "*in charge of the service of song in the house of the LORD*" (1 Chron 6:31; see also 1 Chron 6:16, 22, 33; 2 Chron 20:19).

*As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.* – 42:1

Panting means rapid, louder breathing. Panting can happen because of intense physical exertion or dehydration.

Can you recall a time when you were physically spent? Lifting weights this past summer. Couldn't stop breathing hard. Getting back into full court basketball after a summer off. Having to guard a high schooler who won't stop running and moving.

It could be that the deer has been running for their life and finds themselves tired and in need of refreshment. It could be that the stream has dried up because of the heat and there's nothing to drink.

*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*

To thirst is to long for a drink. Can you recall a time when you really wanted a drink? I drink so much water daily it's really hard for me to identify. Breathing heavy on Thursday nights I need water. As a kid playing in the sun longing for some grape Kool-Aid.

The idea is the deer won't be satisfied till they get some water. Only water will satisfy.

Likewise, the Psalmist longs for God. Only God can satisfy his longing.

When you're thirsty because you've been running hard while playing basketball, you want some water. Bad. When your soul's agonizing because of unmet longings or hard circumstances that won't lift, you want God. Bad.

Note this. He longs for God. Not for video games, a new car, a Disney vacation, parent approval, peer approval, a spouse. Only God can satisfy the longings of his heart. Not that we can't find enjoyment in recreation and relationships. We can give thanks for these things, but they can't satisfy our hearts. We were created to know, love, and serve God. People and stuff can dull the pain. People and stuff can't fix your soul. Only God can.

Note this. Spiritual desires are a good thing! A feeling heart is a good thing. Don't want to be up and down all over the place. Don't want to be unaffected either.

### **Living God**

Note God is living. God isn't information. God isn't a principle. God isn't a concept. God isn't a fact. God is alive. He's actively directing the affairs of the world. He's actively directing the affairs of our lives. He's making our paths straight. He's working inside us. God's alive!

### ***When shall I come and appear before God?***

The Psalmist can come before God in prayer at any time. That's not what he's talking about. He longs for the corporate worship he once experienced.

**Practical question:** what do I long for most in life?

### **Point 2: Cry to God (42:3-4)**

***My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" – 42:3***

People have been mocking him saying, "Where is your God?" In other words, God isn't acting for you. Either God doesn't exist. Or if God does exist, he doesn't care about you.

Tears over desires unfulfilled. Tears over mockery. Tears all day long.

### **Illustration**

It would be like a teenager in high school who longs for friendship, to fit in. And all they get is rejection while being told they have no friends all day long.

It would be like a person who longs for a spouse and every time they get together with family, their family assaults them with a verbal barrage of insults and ridicule for being single.

Can you think of a time when you desperately longed for something? For me, I wanted a spouse. Got married at 32. I wanted to pastor. Started here at age 44. I longed for both for a while.

Can you think of a time when you were mocked all day long? Never experienced mockery as a Christian. Was mocked routinely during high school in the form of insulting nicknames. I longed for escape. Didn't know God. I was in darkness. So I didn't know where to turn. Wish I had the empowering grace/strength of Christ back then!

Can you think of a time when you just couldn't stop crying? Generally I've been brought to tears/despair most by van doors, snow blowers, basement piping. And working a job I was ill-suited for while longing to pastor.

Note this. It's okay to cry! Crying isn't spiritual weakness. Tears can move us closer to God! **God might use distressing circumstances to stir hunger for him!**

You might not be mocked all day by humans saying, "Where is your God?" Maybe this actually happens to you? If not, your enemy Satan does taunt you: look at your life, does God really care about you?

***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. – 42:4***

Here's where I get the idea of unmet desires.

As the Psalmist longs and weeps and prays, he remembers the good old days. The time when he led the people in **“songs of praise.”** He was a “worship leader.” *“the house of God”* would be the sanctuary or the temple depending on when this was written. He wants to be in God’s house. He wants to celebrate God with God’s people. This is his unmet longing. He’s separated from corporate worship.

He’s like a shut-in who wishes they were here.

**“pour out my soul”** = he spills, empties himself before God. There’s nothing left to share. He’s told God everything. Every single longing. Every single distress. This is how to communicate with God! Tell him everything! Don’t be shy. Don’t be awkward. Be direct. Be honest. Be real.

### **Corporate worship**

A few thoughts on corporate worship. I want this to be your attitude towards our Sunday morning service.

Is this your attitude towards our Sunday morning service? Does it torment your soul, does it bring you to tears, to miss our gathering? I’d suggest it should.

What creates this longing? What’s good about Sunday morning?

1. Life-giving content that stimulates affection for God.

Song lyrics. Scripture readings. Confessions. Catechisms. Covenants. Prayers. Sermons.

2. Fellowship.

People who think like us and feel like us. People who delight in God and long to honor him and long to learn his ways.

People who care about us. People we can share our tears with. People who will listen. People who will pray for us. People who will encourage and admonish us for our good.

Sunday morning can be zero-content hype. Sunday morning can be dull, repetitive ritual. Sunday morning can be isolating consumerism. In and out and don’t really know anyone. Sunday morning can fall flat. Sunday morning can be so much more!

Note this. Longing for corporate worship is a good thing!

**Practical question:** do I enter the building on Sunday mornings with an expectation that I will encounter the living God?

If we can improve this service in such a way that it’s more life-giving, it better connects you with the living God, talk to me. Not looking for personal preferences. Looking for spiritual gains.

### **Point 3: Challenge your heart (42:5-6)**

***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 <sup>6</sup> and my God. 42:5-6a***

The Psalmist addresses himself.

**“cast down”** = the Psalmist’s soul is downed/lowered by the mockery and unmet spiritual longing. Weakened, depressed, discouraged. Circumstances are weakening his resolve. Strength is failing.

**“in turmoil”** = loud noises or turbulence (unrest, commotion). Noisy inside. Thoughts racing. Not good thoughts. Inner being in turmoil. Great agitation in his soul.

### What's going on here?

1. The Psalmist is challenging himself.

Soul, why are you cast down? This shouldn't be. Inner being, why are you in turmoil? This shouldn't be. Admitting things aren't right within.

2. The Psalmist is encouraging himself: *"Hope in God."*

All hope is not lost. I have God. Hope isn't in self. Hope isn't in circumstances. Hope isn't in other people. Hope is in God.

3. The Psalmist is expressing confidence: *"for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."*

This is confident declaration. I'm despairing now, but this won't always be the case. Praise will return. The fog will lift.

When despair holds sway we need to challenge ourselves, encourage ourselves to faith, and maintain confidence in God. There's reason for hope because I'm not the final word. The living God saves, delivers, rescues.

Can you think of a time when your heart was in turmoil and you counseled yourself?

For me, when I longed to be a pastor. When I have financial worries. When I worry about a child's heart. When equipment failures crush my soul. When selfishness is winning the day. When my attitude towards my children isn't right. Basically everything.

**Practical question:** what do I tell myself when despair is creeping in?

### Point 4: Remember God (42:6-8)

***My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.*** – 42:6

What's the antidote for despair? Remembering God.

He's in *"the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar."* He's not in Jerusalem. He's not leading worship. He's not celebrating God with God's people. He's living with mockers.

***Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.*** – 42:7

God controls the waters in our lives. Breakers are collapsing waves. Calamity collapsing upon us.

***"all your breakers and your waves have gone over me"*** acknowledges God sent these distressing circumstances. I'm where I'm at because God wills it.

***By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.*** – 42:8

The Psalmist speaks truth to himself. God not only sends breakers and waves into our lives. God orders (*"commands"*) steadfast love into our lives. God's steadfast love is his settled commitment to us. Loyalty. He's pledged himself to care for us. He'll never leave us nor forsake us. Here God's steadfast love is his activity on our behalf. God's steadfast love is active. It's not just sentiment. God acts in us. God acts for us. God's love moves him to act!

Unmet longings. Taunted all day. My heart's falling. My hope is close to gone. But God's steadfast love sustains me during the day. In the middle of my torment, because of his love, God sends me a song at night, which I pray back to him.

God sends waters over me. God orders steadfast love for me.

Desires remain unfulfilled. Mockery remains. Inner turmoil lingers. God's steadfast love lingers too!

Note this. **He doesn't revise his theology to fit his circumstances. He imposes his theology on his circumstances.** Life is hard. God is showering me with love. Good theology!

In the middle of my work distress, God moved me to a more desirable position. In the middle of ministry longings, God moved me to a church where I could use my gifts. In the middle of costly equipment calamity, God provided financially.

All the while, God sustained my weary heart.

**Practical question:** where do I see God's love at work in the middle of my hardship?

### **Point 5: Ask why? (42:9-11)**

*I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"*  
– 42:9

The Psalmist has cried, prayed, challenged himself, remembered God, but the oppression hasn't lifted. Despair remains.

So he asks why? He feels forgotten. So he asks why? Things aren't as they should be. God shouldn't you put an end to the oppression that's causing my tears?

Hard times aren't lifting.

*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?"* – 42:10

Their taunts are like a knife to my bones. All day long. Day after day. Not ending.

The Psalmist isn't satisfied with these circumstances. He wants relief. He tells God.

The Psalmist speaks the truth to himself once again.

*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.* – 42:11

### **RECAP: what do you do when circumstances remain painful and desires remain unfulfilled?**

1. Thirst for God.
2. Cry.
3. Pour out your heart to God.
4. Challenge you heart.
5. Hope in God.
6. Remember God.
7. Acknowledge God's breakers.
8. Acknowledge God's steadfast love.
9. Ask why?

It's okay to ask God why if we're reverent. Confusion is okay. Grief over distressing circumstances is okay. Grief over unmet spiritual desires is okay. It's wrong to charge God with malice or foolishness.

Sometimes life doesn't make sense to us. Sometimes life is horrific. Why is okay.

The Psalmist hasn't forgotten God in his despair. His heart's a mix of despair and faith, turmoil and confidence, suffering and hopeful expectation.

**Practical question:** do I reverently ask God why?

## **Conclusion**

We were created by God to know God, love God, serve God. We were created with spiritual longings. People attempt to satisfy these longings in a variety of ways: false religion, manmade spirituality (New Age), social justice/self-righteousness/religious duty.

Spiritual longings are satisfied in relationship with God. In Jesus Christ. We can know God through Jesus.

Jesus came to communicate the Father, particularly through his death and resurrection. On the cross, Jesus died as a substitute for sinners, revealing the Father's stance towards sin (it must be punished) and the Father's stance towards sinners (God gives mercy to sinners when they come to him through Jesus).

When we grasp our sin, our brokenness, our need for God's forgiveness, our need for a new heart, and we see that our spiritual needs are met in Christ, we turn to him in faith (we trust his promises) and repentance (we turn from sin, we change our mind about sin).

If we understand our spiritual needs, and we find these needs met in Jesus, we'll love Jesus. How could we not love a God who dies in our place, grants us eternal life, and shows us how to do life in God's world?

If we get Jesus, we'll love Jesus. If we love Jesus, we'll serve Jesus. And our spiritual longings will be satisfied because we'll be living as we were designed to all along.

If you don't know God, turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection.