

# Psalm Sundays

**Text**  
**Psalm 42**

**Topic**  
**David recalls a time in exile when he  
felt like a deer desperate with thirst**

**Title**  
***"O, Deer, What Can the Matter Be,  
David's So Long in Despair"***

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Turns out Waldo is an immigrant whose European name is Wally.

*Where's Wally?* was published in 1987 in the United Kingdom. In the United States it was published as *Where's Waldo?*

In the book, Waldo travels to everyday places, where he sends postcards to the reader (which are the pictures in the book), and you must find him in huge crowds.

There is a brand new, COVID-19 version of *Where's Waldo?* Artists Pedro Mezzini and Clay Bennett gave Waldo a social distancing makeover. I'm not joking. As you might guess, Waldo is a quick find.

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On the cover, Waldo is sporting a surgical mask. In reviews I read, however, more than one person scolds Waldo for not sheltering at home.

Twice in Psalm 42 we will hear the question, "Where is your God?" Instead of giving a theological answer or argument, the psalmist drew back the curtain and shared his personal longings:

- 👤 In verses one through four, he is anguished because he could not be in the assembly of God's people.
- 👤 In the remaining verses, he is agonized because of some tremendous affliction.

Anguished and agonized, he nevertheless declares that his "hope" is in the Lord. His afflictions will come to their end; and he looks forward to the day he will again assemble with God's people. He never doubts that God is, in fact, present.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 "Where Is Your God?" He Is In The Great Assembly**, and **#2 "Where Is Your God?" He Is In Your Graced Afflictions**.

### **#1 - "Where Is Your God?" He Is In The Great Assembly (v1-4)**

- 👤 *Star Wars Episode 4*. It ends with the heroes being cheered at a great, galactic assembly.
- 👤 *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, near the end, features Aragorn's crowning as king in a great assembly of Middle Earth in Gondor.

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The Bible, in episode 66, looks forward to a great assembly of believers and angels:

Rev 5:11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,

Rev 7:9-11 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

Rev 7:10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Rev 7:11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

At that heavenly assembly, we are told that Jesus, "WILL DECLARE YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN; IN THE MIDST OF THE ASSEMBLY I WILL SING PRAISE TO YOU" (Hebrews 2:12).

Just how much of this the psalmist understood, we don't know. I'm guessing, however, that the psalmist had some idea that the assembling of God's people on earth was a foretaste of a gathering in Heaven.

Psa 42:1 To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation of the Sons of Korah...

"Contemplation" is from the Hebrew, *maschil*.

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One scholar noted, “[it is] a musical term denoting a melody requiring great skill in its execution.” It may be that David penned this song, but only the musical family, the Sons of Korah, could perform it.

I bet you don’t know that William Shatner recorded an album, and did a cover of *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*. It is on every list of worst covers ever.

Psa 42:1 To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation of the Sons of Korah. As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God.

“Deer” is sometimes rendered, more poetically, “hart.” The hart in this case would be parched from either a long drought, or from a recent pursuit. It was an apt description of several possible seasons in David’s life. For example:

- 👤 He was on the run from King Saul for maybe thirteen years. Long drought.
- 👤 He had to quickly evacuate the palace when his son, Absalom, rebelled. Pursuit.

We sing this chorus, but I don’t think we understand the anguish of it. We sing it as a reminder of how much we ought to long after God. We are usually more comfortable when we sing it.

Psa 42:2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

What is your go-to thirst quencher? The healthy folks over at LiveStrong say, “Go for the water.”

Christians seem to have an insatiable thirst, but I sometimes question the quenchers we reach for. Program after program after program promises to

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quench your thirst. But just thinking logically, if the program worked, why would it quickly be replaced by the next?

I came across an article titled, *Hiker Dies of Thirst with Water All Around*.

By Day 2 in the blazing Utah desert, Dave Buschow was in bad shape.

Pale, wracked by cramps, his speech slurred, the 29-year-old New Jersey man was desperate for water and hallucinating so badly he mistook a tree for a person.

After going roughly 10 hours without a drink in the 100-degree heat, he finally dropped dead of thirst, face down in the dirt, less than 100 yards from the goal: a cave with a pool of water.

But Buschow was no solitary soul, lost and alone in the desert. He and 11 other hikers from various walks of life were being led by expert guides on a wilderness-survival adventure designed to test their physical and mental toughness.

And the guides, it turned out, were carrying emergency water on that torrid summer day.

Buschow wasn't told that, and he wasn't offered any. The guides did not want him to fail the \$3,175 course. They wanted him to dig deep, push himself beyond his known limits, and make it to the cave on his own.

Too many so-called Christian thirst quenchers are exactly like that.

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They make you do work for the water, when in fact God has promised it to you by grace.

Here is a better quench: Repetitive reading of Scripture, out loud.

David's particular thirst was spiritual, and it could only be quenched by "appearing" before the "living God." He meant appearing in the Temple, with the assembly of God's people.

Now David, of all Jews, knew that God was omnipresent. In another psalm he would sing, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You *are* there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You *are there*. If I take the wings of the morning, *And* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me." (139:7-10).

Notwithstanding God's omnipresence, David panted for the assembling of the saints.

Psa 42:3 My tears have been my food day and night, While they continually say to me, "Where is your God?"

He fasted, but not on purpose. He was so overwhelmed by his exile that he cried through mealtimes, as all the days blended together.

Who was asking, "Where is your God?" Enemies, for sure. David had been anointed with oil by Samuel as the rightful king; but he languished in exile, a hunted man.

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It could also have been those who accompanied David in his exile. Even though friends, they must have wondered why the return of the king was waiting.

Psa 42:4 *When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, With the voice of joy and praise, With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.*

David was recalling the 'normal' Hebrew life:

- 👤 Regular assemblies of God's people in the Tabernacle, which was the center of Jewish life.
- 👤 Seven annual pilgrim feasts, three of which were graciously mandatory, and would swell the population of Jerusalem with pilgrims.

In this psalm, at this time in David's life, the thing he missed most was worshipping with other believers. He had the omnipresence of God. God the Holy Spirit was with him. He longed for His presence in the assembly.

This was the guy who wanted to get God out of the Tabernacle and into a Temple.

Even when told "No," he continued to plan for the Temple to be built by his son, Solomon. David was a hardcore worship junkie.

For David, there could be no "new normal." He must get back to worship as prescribed by God.

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**P**salm 42 is not about COVID-19... Not about sheltering in place, or social distancing when in public. But it's principles can suggest a meditation.

In this time of sheltering-exile, what is it you really miss the most? Your honest answer will give you a look at your actual priorities. I'm not saying meeting together as the church must be #1, or else. But you should have a longing for it - and feel anguished that it has been rendered difficult, if not impossible.

And we must never settle for some forced "new normal."

Let me share an ominous thought. Churches are virtual; on-line, on YouTube, on Facebook, etc. These platforms are getting increasingly political. For example, here is a recent quote: "Under mounting pressure to counter misinformation around the COVID-19 pandemic, Facebook is increasingly dictating what its users should see and think."

Facebook is removing posts that they feel violate their opinions about COVID-19.

It's only the push of a button away from tech giants censoring the virtual church. If this quarantine goes too much longer - it will happen.

Another recent article said, "Significant monitoring and speech control are inevitable components of a mature and flourishing internet, and governments must play a large role in these practices to ensure that the internet is compatible with society's norms and values."

Wow.

## **#2 - "Where Is Your God?" He Is In Your Graced Afflictions (v5-11)**

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Do you talk to yourself? You probably do; I know I do. We are in good company. In these remaining verses, David has a conversation with himself as he is talking to God. Let's listen in.

Psa 42:5 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance.

In a classic commentary on Psalm 42, Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote,

Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are **listening** to yourself instead of **talking** to yourself? Now this man's treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: Instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, "Self, listen for moment, I will speak to you."

Great advice. Take control of the conversation. Maybe even filibuster against despair and depression.

"Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance." In the Bible, "hope" denotes certainty. David's other voice was certain he would "praise" and experience God's "countenance."

I think this looks forward to once again being in the assembly, worshipping God. It was there that Jews experienced His manifested presence among them - "the help of His countenance."

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Having the complete revelation of God, we look farther forward to the great assemblies in Heaven. Mean time, we have God the Holy Spirit indwelling us.

This verse, part of it at least, is quoted. In the gospels of Matthew and Mark by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. It's not very obvious; it is something language scholars have carefully identified.

That being said, I find it wondrous that Jesus found comfort in the psalms - just like we do. I've mentioned before: Jesus quoted from Psalms more than any other Old Testament book. Perhaps we should, too.

Psa 42:6 O my God, my soul is cast down within me; Therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, And from the heights of Hermon, From the Hill Mizar.

David was "cast down," but after talking to himself, he had a better handle on what he wanted to say to the Lord. He might be in exile, giving us his GPS coordinates; but he would "remember" the Lord.

That doesn't mean he had drifted from Him; we saw how his soul longed for God. It means he would "remember" God's promises to him. He *would* be king; he *would* see his son on the throne.

Psa 42:7 Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All Your waves and billows have gone over me.

"Deep calls unto deep" is sometimes lifted as a stand-alone phrase to describe God trying to teach us deep things. In context, not so much. The Pulpit Commentary says this:

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The rolling up of the waves into a swell, and the break of the top of the swell, and its dash upon the shore, are surprisingly represented in the sound of the two last words. The psalmist seems to represent himself as cast away at sea; and by wave impelling wave, is carried to a rock, around which the surges dash in all directions, forming hollow sounds in the creeks and caverns. At last, several waves breaking over him, tear him away from that rock to which he clung, and where he had a little before found a resting-place, and, apparently, an escape from danger. "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." He is then whelmed in the deep, and God alone can save him.

Psa 42:8 The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, And in the night His song *shall be* with me - A prayer to the God of my life.

I think The Message Bible captures this better: "GOD promises to love me all day, sing songs all through the night! My life is God's prayer."

David portrays God as a loving parent, singing comforting songs if need be to His son in the night.

He loved God three thousand for comforting him.

How is "my life... God's prayer?" If prayer is having a conversation with God, people can 'hear' what God and I are saying by seeing my life. My countenance reveals His countenance as we daily look into His wonderful face and are changed from glory-to-glory into His image.

Psa 42:9 I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

Psa 42:10 As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, "Where *is* your God?"

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This makes it sound like David had again sunken into despair. One version starts the verse, "I sometimes say."

This, then, is what David would sometimes say, and would have said, **if not for the intervention of talking to himself.**

Instead of what he sometimes said, he said,

Psa 42:11 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

My paraphrase: "Get yourself out of verse 9&10 thinking, and think verse 11.

"I shall yet praise Him," I suggest, anticipates a return to the assembly of saints. After all, that is David's great yearning - his thirst quencher - in this psalm.

The "help of my countenance" means David's afflictions, understood as in the will of God, will contribute to a better countenance. People will see God in him.

One example would be Stephen, the first martyr.

Before being stoned to death, we are told that "all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15).

You may never glow; but on a spiritual level, folks can 'see' God's countenance in you.

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I'm using the term, "graced afflictions." The waves may dash you upon the rocks; and just when you think you've found something to hold on to, you're drawn out to sea. When God is your only hope, when His grace is sufficient, *that* is when you shine.

**W**here is your God? David answered that question by letting us look into his personal conversations with God, and with himself. His answer, if that's what we can call it, was this: God manifests His grace through my afflictions; and He manifests Himself in the great assembly of His people.

Grace & gathering. It boils down to those two words.

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