

Hi everyone, my name is Kaitlin. I am in my second year of biblical studies and theology at Tyndale University with a minor in youth ministry. This is my first time preaching and although you may not recognize me, I have been around Southridge my entire life and am excited to have the opportunity to share with you this morning.

Has there ever been a time when you have experienced deep grief or pain that doesn't seem to end and wondered where God is or felt forgotten by him? I know I have and I'm sure we all have, so good news! You are in good company with everyone in this room and the writers of the psalms – lament psalms give us a way to connect with God through these big emotions.

Psalms 42 and 43 are one example of this type of psalm, and, together, can be viewed as a single Psalm. There is a lot of connected language, repeated themes and words, and there is no Psalm title for Psalm 43. Reading through the rest of the book of Psalms, we can see that many have titles. Psalm 42 has the title “to the choirmaster, a maskil of the sons of Korah.” Psalm 43 does not have a title, therefore it can be seen that these psalms are one as they may share the title. Reading Psalms 42 and 43 thinking of it as one psalm helps us as readers get a fuller picture of what the message is for us.

Repetition throughout scripture is super important to notice. Things are repeated for a reason and looking at the repetition in Psalms 42 and 43 help us see the key themes and emphasis. The refrain is repeated three times throughout these psalms. The same words are said in 42:5, 11 and 43:5. The refrain emphasizes how the psalmist is struggling, deeply in pain and yet knows the truth of who God is and how he can rely on God, especially when it is challenging.

There is also a repeated theme of praise throughout these psalms. The psalmist continually speaks about how he longs to be back at the temple, praising God in community. In Psalm 42:4

and the verses of the refrain, the psalmist reminds themselves of the beauty of praising God and the goodness that comes from community and praise. The psalmist clings to this memory and picture of hope.

This image of the temple and praising God is hopeful for the psalmist because of their attachment to the temple. For people during the Bible times before Jesus came to earth, the temple was where God's presence was. There was significance to being in the temple because that is where God was said to dwell. Being separated from the temple for the psalmist meant that they felt far away from God's presence. They are likely separated from the temple because of being in exile. We can see the psalmist's longing for God in verses 1 and 2 as they express their deep need for God just as a deer needs water to survive. They also make it clear that they are away from the temple by asking where they can go to be in his presence. But we also see in 42:4 and 43:3 a direct reference to the house of God and the place where God dwells.

In chapter 42 verses 3, 6 and 9 and chapter 43:2, we can feel the psalmist's deep agony and pain as he writes. They clearly feel alone and are facing adversity and finding it really challenging to be resilient and positive. They are using language that conveys a sense of being lost and uncertain about what move to make next. They have been crying so much that their tears might as well be sustaining them. The psalmist feels forgotten and rejected by God like they are no longer in his sight.

Another theme to be aware of is who the psalmist is speaking to as they write. It seems clear that the psalmist is alone and for all of Psalm 42, they are only speaking to themselves. They are going over the story of their circumstances, however long that has been going on, and focusing on the pain they are in and all the bad things that have happened. They are stuck in the cycle of only seeing the bad. But in Psalm 43 there is a shift. The psalmist begins to directly address God.

They plead with God to vindicate them in verse 1 and in verse 3 they make a really important change; they ask for God's guidance. The psalmist has surrendered their life to God and has decided that although the pain is incredibly difficult, they need God to help them – they cannot do it alone.

In 43:4, the word joy is a small but impactful word to notice. In today's society, I believe that we often think of joy as happiness and that it would be impossible to be happy while in a season of suffering. But digging deeper into the true meaning of joy, we learn it is an outcome of living life with God. Joy is a full-body experience that is possible to have during difficult times because it does not come from circumstances. It comes from recognizing who God is and his faithfulness. The psalmist is trying to remember the active joy they felt while going to the temple to be in God's presence and with his people. They are trying to seek out joy in the current moment. Finding joy in God through praising him and building a relationship with him, can make walking through challenges easier.

The psalmist goes on a journey as they lament. Nothing seems to be going right for the psalmist, I imagine they feel as if it's one thing after another that keeps going wrong – they are far from God's presence, they are alone, and their enemies are discouraging them and speaking negativity all around. As we talked about, they start the journey on their own, but we can learn quickly as we observe their journey throughout chapter 42 that this doesn't get them anywhere. When they begin to involve God in their lamenting, they start to make progress in working through their feelings and not being stuck in the heaviness and weight of grief.

Memory is a big factor throughout this psalm. The psalmist often reflects on when life was going well but throughout Psalm 42, rather than being encouraged by God's faithfulness through

remembering how they were close with God before, the psalmist gets stuck on how they are no longer in that intimate space with God.

I think it is also significant to look at the type of help the psalmist asks of God. They ask for God's light and truth (in the ESV) or light and faithful care (in the NIV). Through this request, the psalmist has actively surrendered their life and emotions to God. Light and truth communicate that the psalmist desires hope – something to keep them going and looking forward, and God's authentic character, justice, and sovereignty to become a reality in their life.

To summarize and go over these key pieces we've covered, we learn that the psalmist is experiencing grief from the loss of not being able to be in God's presence at the temple. They are crying out in need of God, but are so overwhelmed and lost in their circumstances, that they forget to turn to the Lord who is waiting with open arms. They then shift from speaking to themselves to speaking directly to God, telling him their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, being brutally honest and vulnerable, and not holding back. As they begin to seek God, they are further comforted and provided with a safe space to grieve. God is their father; he is personal and involved in their life and the psalmist experiences this firsthand throughout Psalm 43. How can we learn from the psalmist and find joy in who God is and draw near to him to experience his love and comfort in raw ways? One of the biggest things we can learn from Psalms 42 and 43 is that we can learn to find joy while crying out to God in pain and grief. This is a side of God we only experience on earth, because in heaven there won't be pain. It is not easy, I myself struggle with wanting to wallow in the feelings of despair and loneliness because I don't feel like I have the energy to search for the good, but it is helpful and is what starts us on the road to healing.

Psalms 42 and 43 are just one example of lament psalms. All lament psalms can give us words when we don't feel like we have any to say to God. Through lament psalms, we learn that God

wants to relate to us in our grief and he can handle all the big emotions we have, no matter what they are. Lament psalms also give us permission to grieve WITH God, being honest and open with how we are feeling. Not only do the psalmists demonstrate this to us, but Jesus also demonstrates this to us in Matthew 26:38-39 when he says, “Then he said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.’ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’” Jesus prayed this prayer 3 times in the garden of Gethsemane just hours before his death. Jesus experienced the same emotions we face and understands the battle of wanting to seek God and do his will, while also drowning in grief. We can have the confidence to go to God with whatever we are feeling because Jesus did the same, and the psalmist demonstrates this in the same way.

Feeling our emotions and allowing ourselves to grieve is quite countercultural. Society often teaches us to not feel the big, hard emotions or that other’s suffering is worse than ours so we shouldn’t have certain emotions, or we don’t have the right to feel a certain way because others have it worse than we do. I’ve had these thoughts myself way more times than I can count. Up until about 2.5 years ago, I didn’t process any of my “negative” emotions. I only ever allowed myself to be happy, shoving everything else down until I broke and couldn’t keep it in anymore. But circumstances in our lives are allowed to be difficult – we can’t compare our sufferings. We are also often shown that we need to do things alone or that these “negative” emotions shouldn’t be shown to anyone else and need to be dealt with behind closed doors because they are too much for others to handle. But lament psalms encourage us to go to God and bring him into our grief and suffering. The psalmist also longed for his community – he longed to have someone else to share in his pain and be someone to walk alongside him, being a comfort and a presence,

even if they can't fix anything. We are not expected to go through life alone and we are not expected to shove down or aside feelings that are valid and real. We are allowed to grieve, and we are invited into the beautiful opportunity of being comforted by our loving God, whose heart breaks with us.

How do we lament? How do we work with the emotions and the way God has wired us? The practice of lament is something I have found beneficial in working on allowing myself to feel emotions, but also experience them with God. I made a point of writing a letter of lament once a month about anything I had experienced throughout the month that had bothered me, made me sad or any losses I had to grieve and give space for. Through intentionally lamenting, we learn to intentionally bring our struggles and heartaches to God. Journaling is another practice that is beneficial as we go through seasons of challenges in life. Every day, if you take time to write down how you saw God throughout your day, the things you did, the things that happened to you, the interactions you had, etc., you will create a book of reminders of God's faithfulness that you can look back on for when it is hard to see how God is good and faithful.

As we learn to lament with God, trusting he can handle the emotions, we strengthen our relationship with him, so we come out of the storms stronger than we were before, in both faith and character. One of the most profound experiences I have had while grieving with God was when I was in BC 2 years ago. I was having a conversation with a mentor and had voiced confusion as to why God felt far away in a painful situation from a few years earlier. My mentor asked me to put myself back in the place where I received the bad news. He then asked me if Jesus was in the room, where would he be? What would he look like? What is his body language? What is he doing? Is he saying anything? As I pictured Jesus with me in this moment of pain, I realized, I was not alone. He had been with me the entire time and was sad too. My

mentor then asked me, if I could ask Jesus a question, what would it be? Through this process, I was able to grieve together WITH God and realize that he wasn't against me or just passively watching this experience happen to me, but he was in the middle of it and was incredibly involved in supporting me and carrying me through in a variety of ways, even if I didn't recognize it at the time. Where does Jesus want to grieve with you today?

While lament psalms are expressions from people to God, one of the primary purposes for them is to experience God's characteristic of comfort – God intends to meet us where we are as we lament. Where does God want to meet you personally today?

Maybe you're a college student who didn't get into your dream program; or a young adult longing for a life partner; or a young family wrestling with infertility or miscarriage; or a couple navigating separation. Maybe your heart's aching over a friendship that's strained and struggling to be repaired; or there's a medical diagnosis that's rocking your world; or the loss of a job, or an uncertain future; or the loss of a loved one, as you carry the emptiness left behind. Maybe today you're the person whose plans and expectations changed; the person who has had to move from a place they love or a place they've been in for a long time; the person who feels alone and like no one sees or understands them; the parents who had their kid move away from home or the parents who have become empty nesters; the person who is experiencing family complications and broken relationships; or the one who feels forgotten by God.

Wherever you find yourself this morning, I pray that you will know our Father's deep love for you and his desire to be with you in all moments of life. Would you allow yourself to feel the hard emotions, but even more, enter into this spiritual practice of lament, allowing yourself to feel them WITH your loving comforter and provider. Let's pray...