

Basketball story introduces idea that we thirst...

Back in high school, I only had a part time job. So during the summer, me and my friends had a lot of free time on our hands. And one thing we enjoyed was playing basketball at an elementary school. The rims were a little over 9 feet tall, so we'd live out our hoop dreams as we dunked all over the place. And my best friend might have brought out his video camera to record our amazing dunks, and then he might have edited them into a video aptly titled *Jamasaurus Maximus*. I believe I can fly.

When we weren't dunking for the camera, we played full court on the low rims. Those punk elementary kids didn't stand a chance against our squad. I'm just kidding, we'd only play each other or other high schoolers there. And we'd play for hours in the 100 degree heat. As you can imagine, as we're piling up victories and dunk victims, we'd get really thirsty.

You know, we all have thirsts, and not just physical ones, thirsts of many kinds. We were created thirsty. And it's amazing when those thirsts are quenched. The water that came out of the hose near that basketball court was the most refreshing water I've had in my life.

Relevance: our response to our thirsts makes a big impact

But in life, it's not always as easy as being thirsty and then drinking to satisfaction. Sometimes when we get what we thirsted for, it doesn't really satisfy. Maybe you thought you'd be satisfied once you got in the club, or once you got married, or once you had a kid, but you still find yourself waking up every morning thirsty for more.

And sometimes we don't get the things we thirst for. Maybe we thirst for affirmation from our parents or our peers, and it's not coming. Or we thirst for better health, but instead keep getting worse. Or we thirst for loved one to find faith in Jesus, but they're uninterested.

Having unsatisfied thirsts can be so hard, and our response to them makes a huge impact. Handle them poorly, and we'll really harm to ourselves, our relationships, and our walks with God. Like say trying to numb our unmet thirst with a substance, leading to an enslaving addiction. Or making foolish compromises chasing a thirst, like getting into a relationship with the wrong kind of person and doing the wrong kinds of things, hearts broken in the end. Or

trying to deny our thirsts because we can't bear more disappointment, and so we settle into a life of resignation, no dreams.

Orienting to God's Word

We all need help responding well to our unsatisfied thirsts, so let's ask for God's help, and then look to His Word in our *Learning to Pray* series. Father...

Today we're talking about praying our unmet thirsts from Psalm 42. So if you've got a Bible or Bible app, open to the Old Testament book of Psalms, to Psalm 42. If not, no worries, we'll have the verses on the screen. And if you're new to reading the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers.

As you're opening, I'll share some background. Psalm 42 is of the Sons of Korah, a group of musicians who served God at the temple, singing songs of worship. The Sons of Korah were around for generations, so we don't know exactly who wrote this Psalm¹, so I'll call the author the Psalmist. And because we don't know which generation wrote the psalm, we don't know what historical events it arose from.

What we do know is that the Psalmist is far from God's temple and has enemies mocking him, so it's possible that he's been captured and taken to a foreign land. But whatever the specific circumstances, they are really bad, and he's praying his thirsts.

The story of the Psalmist's unmet thirsts

Let's see it, starting in verse 1.

¹ As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.

² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

In these verses the Psalmist compares his soul's spiritual thirst to a panting deer's physical thirst, a thirst kind of like someone who's played basketball for hours. Now deer don't wait until they're dying of thirst to look for water, so a panting deer has already been unsuccessfully looking for water. Similarly, the Psalmist has been thirsting for God's presence. He's been seeking God out, but hasn't found Him. It's been agonizing, as we see in verse 3.

³ My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

¹ It's also possible someone else wrote the Psalm and that the Sons of Korah were the ones assigned to sing it.

⁴ These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.

Rather than the Psalmist's spiritual thirst being met with the refreshing water of God's presence, he instead drinks tears, crying day and night. So this poor guy probably isn't sleeping well since he's crying day and night, and perhaps he isn't eating much either since he describes his tears as food. So he's really struggling physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and on top of that, enemies ask him repeatedly, "Where is your God?" as he suffers.

So in verse 4 the Psalmist pours out his soul to God, thirsting for the joyful worship he used to enjoy. Verse 4 refers to the pilgrimage festivals. Three times a year, the Israelites would come to Jerusalem, the capital city and location of God's temple, where God's presence dwelled in a special way. Together the people would feast and worship God for His saving acts. Now far away from God's temple, the Psalmist thirsts for that joyful worship. Having expressed his thirsts, the Psalmist then asks himself questions in verse 5.

⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Here in verse 5, the Psalmist reflects on his thirsts, questioning why he's so disturbed, and reminding himself to put his hope in God. So now that he's shared about his unmet thirsts and reflected and told himself to hope in God, he's good right? Verse 6:

⁶ My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you

from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

Things are not yet resolved, for the Psalmist or for many of us. He is downcast again. I appreciate the gracious realism of the passage here, that when we're downcast over unmet thirsts, it's not a pray about it once and then we're good kind of thing; it's a process.

And this term *downcast* in verse 6 is a picture of a person collapsing and appearing to dissolve away.² That's how the Psalmist feels, maybe it's how you feel. Yet the Psalmist remembers God from Mount Mizar. That's on the very edge of the land, so the Psalmist is far from God's people worshipping at the temple. Isolated, he continues to pray in verse 7.

⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls;

all your waves and breakers have swept over me.

² HALOT - **hitpal**: impf. חָתַתָּה, יִחַתְּתָה: to **appear to have dissolved away, be dissolved**

The Psalmist's location has waterfalls and channels of water that rush down the hills to form the Jordan River, so he's using his surroundings to express how he's feeling. I've not been to Israel, but as a teenager, I saw Niagara Falls. Here's a pic of me and my sister Emily with the falls in the background. Observing from this distance, the falls are majestic. But when we took the boat ride closer to the falls, as you see how they tower over you and hear their roar, you realize you'd be in trouble if you were right underneath their power.

That's how the Psalmist feels, like he's right underneath the falls. Back in verses 1-2, his soul pants for God, but instead of the refreshing water of God's presence, in verse 3 he's drinking endless tears, and by verse 7, he's totally overwhelmed, like enduring an unending onslaught from a waterfall.

In verse 4, he longed to hear the joyful praise of God's people again, but now he's isolated, and all he hears is the roar of the falls. It even feels like he hears the waters calling out to each other, deep calls to deep, like they're coordinating their relentless attack, saying, "I'll hit him in the face, and then you hit him in the face, and then you hit him in the face."

To his credit, the Psalmist tries to turn things around in verse 8, seeking to remember God's goodness under the onslaught, saying:

⁸By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life.

Having remembered God's love, does the Psalmist feel better? Verse 9:

⁹I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me?"

Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"

¹⁰My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

In verses 4 and 6, the Psalmist says, "I remember" and in verse 8, he doesn't say "I remember", but he remembers God a third time. Here in verse 9, the Psalmist asks God, "Why have you forgotten me?" It's like he's saying to God, "Even as my thirsts have gone unmet, I've kept remembering you God, verse 4, verse 6, verse 8, so why have You forgotten me?"

The painful circumstances plus God's distance plus his enemies are too much. As the enemies keep asking, "Where is your God?" the Psalmist decides God has forgotten. This is real life stuff here.

And the pain, as verse 10 says, is a mortal agony in his bones, like they're being shattered. I told some of you before about shattering my kneecap in a car accident in high school, which is why I'm a pastor instead of a professional dunker today. Shattering my kneecap was really, really painful. The Psalmist feels that level of pain here, he's just shattered.

And in verse 11, the Psalmist again asks:

¹¹ Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

The prayer ends with a little note of hope, the Psalmist again encouraging himself to put his hope in God.

So now that we've walked a bit in the Psalmist's shoes, what can we learn about praying our unmet thirsts?

Application – When praying your thirsts...

Be real with God (1-11)

First, to be real with God. The Psalms are God-inspired prayers, and this prayer is a gracious invitation from God to be real with Him. When you're struggling, that's not the time for cautious, theologically nuanced, carefully worded expressions, it's time to be real with God. To say things like, "God, I'm drowning in tears here, all the waves crash over me, I'm utterly crushed. And yet I'm still remembering you God, even in all this pain, so why have you forgotten me?"

And it's not like this is the only Psalm with "keeping it real" prayer, it's all over the place in the Psalms, just read them and see. And it's in the rest of the Bible too. God's people crying out for a son, deliverance from slavery, the promised land, forgiveness, a spiritual blessing.

God already knows what you thirst for and how you're feeling, so you might as well be real with Him. He loves you and wants you to keep being real with Him so He can help the real you. Remember, in verses 1-4, the Psalmist expresses his thirsts and pain before saying he will yet praise God. And in verses 6-10 he again expresses his thirsts and pain, before saying he will yet praise God. And the being real with God even continues past Psalm 42. If you've got a Bible or Bible app, look at Psalm 43. There the Psalmist again expresses his thirsts and pain in verses 1-4 before saying he will yet praise God.

I can say from personal experience that it is a blessing to be this real with God. To know I can fully express my hurts and desires, not having to downplay them or bury them in some unhealthy way. God is gracious, and He patiently works with me where I'm at, like a loving father with his child. He frees me and you to be real with Him over and over, like this Psalm.

Remember God (4, 6, 8, 9)

Second, this Psalm shows us to remember God. Look back at verse 4. Here the Psalmist remembers joining God's people in worship. As God feels absent, the Psalmist thinks back to when he felt God's presence with God's people in joyful worship. The Psalmist remembering that the God Who worked in the past is still faithful in the present.

Now look at verse 6. Here again, the Psalmist deliberately chooses to focus on God, saying, "My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you."

And look at verse 8, where the Psalmist remembers God directing His love. This verse is also the first time that the Psalm uses the name LORD. Whenever you see the name "LORD" in all caps in the Old Testament, that is a translation of the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. *Yahweh* is the covenant name of God, a name that reflects God's faithful, everlasting relationship with His people. So as the Psalmist suffers, he remembers God's faithfulness in relationship.

When we're struggling with unmet thirsts, it's important to keep remembering God. It's often a struggle. I like how verse 9 illustrates this; look back there with me. The Psalmist still seeks God, even calling God "my Rock", while at the same time asking God, "Why have you forgotten me?"

Earlier this year, someone in our church family shared with me about a painful unmet thirst. We weren't talking about Psalm 42, but they shared about writing down a list of ways God had worked in their past. It didn't solve everything but remembering helped them now that life was not turning out as they hoped.

I thought about that this week as I saw the Psalmist remembering God in hard times. It's great to come to church and for other believers to help you remember God, but these verses show it's also important to remember God yourself.

Reflect on your thirsts (5, 11)

Third, the Psalmist reflects on his thirsts. In verses 5 and 11 the Psalmist asks himself why he's so downcast and disturbed. In the Psalmist's case, there doesn't appear to be anything bad going on inside. As he reflects, it does not lead to any confession of sin or repentance.

Sometimes we just really hurt and God feels distant, not because we've done anything wrong, but because we're broken people living in a broken world with an Enemy bent on our destruction. Maybe you need to hear this morning that feeling downcast doesn't necessarily mean you're doing something wrong.

But sometimes we stay downcast because something is off in our hearts. For example, if you've been dating someone for a couple of months and they unexpectedly break up with you, anyone would be bummed out about that for a while, that's normal.

But if we're really downcast about it for months and months and months, this Psalm invites you to reflect on your thirsts. Maybe you've been telling yourself that you can only be happy if you're in a romantic relationship. And that the only people who really matter are the ones in a relationship. And if you're honest, your thirst for a romantic relationship is way greater than your thirst for God. So you've stayed despairing because the romantic relationship, your true hope, has been lost.

It's so easy for all of us, myself included, to live for other things before God. So when we're staying downcast, let's reflect on our thirsts. Nothing may be off in our hearts. But if something is off, hopefully, by God's grace, as we reflect on our thirsts and pray about them, we can join the Psalmist in starting our prayer with a thirst for God.

For God is the only One great enough to satisfy our thirsts. A relationship, a career, any earthly thing can't ultimately satisfy. Only God can, and because He will, even in despair, the Psalmist ends his prayer with, "I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God." Notice he's not saying, "I'm praising God now," but he's also not saying, "I'll never praise God again." He's saying in faith, "I will yet praise Him." He's planning his praises even while in despair, trusting that God will one day satisfy his thirsts.

Gospel Worship

And we today can trust like this because of what Jesus has done. Jesus entered the chaos of this world, suffering alongside us and then suffering for us on the cross, taking all our sins.

I have no clue about the depth of your pain, but Jesus does. Like the Psalmist, Jesus knows what it is to have enemies. While on the cross, they mocked Jesus, saying, "He trusts in God, let's see if God will rescue Him now."

Like the Psalmist, Jesus knows what it is to really thirst. On the cross, in agony, Jesus said, “I thirst.”

And while the Psalmist felt like God forgot him, on the cross Jesus really was forsaken: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Why did Jesus take the mocking and the thirst and the forsaking by God? It’s because Jesus thirsted to be with you, He thirsted to bring us home, going through Hell to make it happen.

On the cross Jesus thirsted so that He could say to us, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” Because Jesus thirsted, we can drink of the living water of God’s presence. And that really is our ultimate thirst, to find God today even in our unmet desires, and to one day be with Him face to face.

The Psalmist thirsted to worship God, together with God’s people, at God’s temple. The New Testament shows that we thirst ultimately for the heavenly temple, to worship God, together. It’s what the apostle Paul talks about when he says he desires to depart and be with Jesus, which is better by far. We look forward to that day, when He quenches all our thirsts, our hearts made full by the only One Who can truly satisfy.

Next Step

This morning we’ve seen that when we’re thirsty, be real, remember, and reflect. If you like writing in your Bible, you could write that next to this Psalm: be real with God, remember God, and reflect on your thirsts.

This sermon series is *Learning to Pray*, so in the spirit of that, we’re going pray Psalm 42 in here. That’s our next step this morning, to pray Psalm 42. To help with that, I’ve created a handout. So Deacons, please pass out those handouts, and also pencils for anyone who wants one. You can raise your hand if you’d like a pencil.

The handout can help you pray your thirsts. But if you’d rather flip the handout over and write your own prayer on the back, or pray in your head, or draw a picture to God that expresses your thirsts, that’s great too. Just pray your thirsts.

And Jake, would you come on up? Jake will play as we pray.

If you're using the prayer handout, the first section encourages you to be real with God. You could pray something like, "God, I'm thirsty for a better job. I've been in this dead-end job for so long. I really feel like a nobody there, no status, no impact, not making enough to get out of debt. Where are you at God in this, have you forgotten about me?"

In the second section, you remember God. You could pray something like, "God, I remember when I was sick, how you got me through and provided for all my needs, even when I couldn't work. And God, I remember when I was reading Your Word and knew You were in my room with me, overwhelmed by Your love. You're still with me now."

In the third section you reflect on your thirsts. Maybe, like the Psalmist, your heart is in a good place, you're down just because life is hard. If so, you could say, "God, I think I'm downcast because it stinks to keep working a low paying job I dislike that's going nowhere." Or maybe, as you reflect, you see your heart isn't in the best place. You could add something like, "God, I'm also downcast because I'm living as if the most important thing is having a great job, as if I don't matter because people think my job doesn't matter. Help me."

Finally, you can express faith. You may not be ready to praise, and that's okay. Praying your thirsts is a process, sometimes its two steps forward, one step back, or even two or three steps back. Just keep praying.

Or maybe you're not ready to praise God, but you're ready to say in faith, "God, I will yet praise you." Or maybe you are ready to praise Him, saying, "God, I praise you for how you're working and for that day when you'll satisfy all my thirsts."

So let's spend a few minutes praying, and I'll come up at the end to pray for us all.

Let's pray...

Dismissal – Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.