

Praying the Psalms: Week 3

Psalms of Trust (Based on Psalms 42 and 43)

Notes from Lyndall Bywater's Talk:

Psalms 42 and 43 are an anatomy of trust – helping us to see and reflect on the process of learning to trust God ever more deeply.

Need: The process begins with need (verses 1-2). If we don't need then we don't truly trust. It's in times of need, of longing, of thirst and dryness that the one we trust can prove trustworthy.

Grief: Need usually exists where there is pain and grief (verse 3a). The expression of this grief is part of lament.

Isolation: Even our friends might misunderstand us in these times, making our pain worse (verse 3b).

The harmonies of lament and remembering: The psalmist begins to sing two different tunes, as it were, in the same prayer, pouring out the pain whilst remembering the good (verse 4). Trust is not the flipping of a switch from one mood or mode to another. It doesn't involve turning off our pain and turning on our happy thoughts. It is the art of weaving our lament and our remembering together into one and the same prayer. 'I grieve but I remember better times; I am isolated and bereft but I remember times when it wasn't always like this.' It is the pouring out of grief which often releases us to remember good things, and the speaking out of good things which often helps us to identify impacted grief in our hearts.

Self-talk: The psalmist talks to his/her soul, encouraging it to hope (verse 5). Our self-talk can be harsh and critical, robbing us of hope rather than stirring us to it.

Concerted remembering: Owning the downcast soul with grace and gentleness, the psalmist begins to remember in a concerted way – to call to mind moments when God has indeed proven faithful (verse 6). In a downcast soul moment, it can be hard to remember God doing anything except disappointment, but we can ask the Spirit to stir those memories in us too.

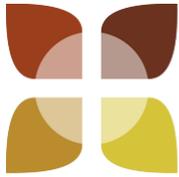
The place of utter unknowing: The pinnacle of this psalm is a description of being swept along in a waterfall (verse 7). Ultimately, trust is about allowing ourselves to be swept up in God; to recognise that we are part of something far bigger than ourselves, and to let God carry us in the midst of the utter unknowing. Prayer becomes wordless – deep calling to deep – because how could we possibly capture any of it in human language?

God is with us: In all the overwhelm of the waterfall – the things we don't understand and can sometimes hardly bear – God is with us day and night (verse 8).

The cycle begins again: Perhaps it feels like the psalmist should have finished there, on a positive note, but instead the rest of Psalm 42 and 43 take us round the same cycle at least twice more. In verse 9 we go back to grief, isolation and disappointment, only to come back to remembering and yielding again.



Trust is not linear; it isn't a 'before and after' thing, like a spiritual make-over. It's a cyclical process of owning our pain (lament), calling to mind our blessings (remembering), stirring hope in our souls, then entrusting ourselves to the ever deeper flow of God's steadfast love.



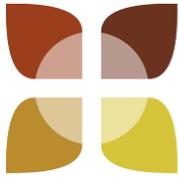
Some questions for reflection:

- Are there things which help you to remember and to lament when you pray? Do you tend to do more of one than the other?
- Has disappointment dampened your willingness to trust God? Can you identify the situation which gave rise to that disappointment?
- How positive/negative is your 'self-talk'? Do you speak kindly to your soul?
- Have you experienced times of prayer when it felt like deep was calling to deep in some way – like something deep in you was connecting to something deep in God?

Prayer activities:

- Keep a gratitude journal for a week, taking time at the end of each day to remember where you've experienced God's provision, guidance and love. At the same time, keep a lament journal, recording moments of grief and pain which have marred the day. At the end of the week, choose five or six phrases from each journal and arrange them into a psalm which has a similar cyclical structure to Psalms 42 and 43.
- If you enjoy drawing, painting or crafting, use a variety of colours to create something which expresses the mixing of lament, remembering and unknowing.
- Trust is often likened to leaning – the action whereby we transfer some of our body-weight to a wall, a surface or the back of a chair. Each time you find yourself leaning on something, stop for a moment and speak to your soul, entrusting yourself to God and affirming hope.





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- If you live near a waterfall or fast-flowing river, walk there for a time of prayer.