

Sermon Series: More Than Enough: How Jesus Meets Our Deepest Needs

To be used with: Session Three: Our Need for Hope

Sermon Title Possibilities: The Believer's Hope;
Our Hope in Christ

Scripture: Psalm 42-43

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *More Than Enough* these sermon outlines will use similar Scripture passages to reinforce the same themes as the study regarding our need for hope.

Introduction: When earthquakes strike and hurricanes devastate cities, it is easy to become hopeless. When personal misfortune and suffering come upon us, such as when a job is lost or a house foreclosed or a child dies or a tragic accident kills an innocent person or an unexpected downturn in events, bringing inconvenience, pain, grief, and turmoil, it is easy to become hopeless.

1. The Reason for Hopelessness. (42:1-10)

The Psalmist felt separated from God (vv. 1-2), sadness (v. 3), forgotten (v. 9), sick (v. 10), oppressed (v. 9).

The Psalmist experienced what one man wrote of as the “dark night of the soul.” That time when one feels completely and utterly alone, abandoned by God. The Psalmist, like us, questioned God (42:9-10). The Psalmist’s words sound similar to the darkest moment of Jesus on the cross when he cried out, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” Repeatedly, ten times in fact, the Psalmist questioned God. He was fond of using the word we often use when life careens out of control. In speaking to God, we ask, “Why?” And, God did not answer. The Psalmist is greeted with silence and separation.

Have you ever had these feelings? Have you ever felt separated from God? Have you ever questioned: “Where is God?” Have you ever longed for the presence of God only to feel that he is strangely and sadly absent? Have you ever felt isolated and abandoned by your heavenly Father? Have you ever said that it is hard to be enthusiastic about living for God when he seems to be absent at the most inconvenient times?

2. The Result of Hopelessness (42:5,11; 43:5)

This separation and feeling that God had abandoned him caused great conflict within the Psalmist. Physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually he was hurting. He was in pain.

Consequently, the Psalmist cried out three times, “Why am I so depressed? Why this turmoil within me?” (Psalm 42:5, 11, 43:5 HCSB). The word *depressed* is translated often as downcast. The term *downcast* is the picture of a sheep, which has turned on its

back and can't get up by itself or without help. Legs sticking straight up in the air, the sheep is helpless. The sheep may kick and flail in the air. It may bleat and cry out. It knows it is vulnerable to attack. The sheep is helpless, powerless, and exposed to danger. Not only is the sheep defenseless to attack, it is prone to die if left in this condition. When sheep lay on their backs, gas begins to collect in their stomachs. It hardens the stomach, cuts off the air passage. They suffocate in a matter of hours. A downcast sheep is a picture of hopelessness.

The Psalmist feels like a downcast sheep. He feels like curling up in the fetal position and quitting. Likewise, it applies to us when we are at the end of the rope and the rope is slipping in our hands. We are ready to throw in the towel. We are in a situation where we feel all alone, abandoned by God, hearing the taunts of our enemies, knowing that it is just a matter of time. Feeling that God is absent, we have given up hope.

In such situations, most people give up on God. Feeling as though God has abandoned them, they turn the tables and abandon God. They have no use for a God who seems absent and separated from their lives.

3. The Response to Hopelessness (42:5, 11, 43:5)

The Psalmist did not give up on God. He found help in the words: "Put your hope in God" (Psalm 42:5, 11, 43:5 HCSB).

While faith belongs more to the mind and love to the heart, hope concerns itself with the soul. Hope is medicinal. Hope can transform despair, defeat, and death knowing that there are no hopeless situations there are simply people who have grown hopeless about them.

When our situation appears bad, hopeless, in fact, remember the words of the social critic, Richard John Neuhaus: "The times may be bad, but they are the only times we are given. Remember, hope is still a Christian virtue, and despair is a mortal sin."

The Christian's hope is both subjective and objective. It is subjective in that it is a feeling. But it is objective in that it clings to something real and powerful. For the Christian that something that is beyond ourselves is God—the living God. God is both the inspirer and the object of hope.

The Psalmist spoke of God as the living God (v.1), my Savior and my God (vv. 5-6), my Rock (v. 9), my stronghold (43:2), my joy and delight (43:4). God, for the Psalmist, was not merely a subjective experience but an objective reality.

4. The Removal of Hopelessness

To rid ourselves of hopelessness the Psalmist provides some very practical advice.

- A. *Remember God (42:4).* When you are feeling blue, remember past days of victory when you knew God was real and present.
- B. *Praise God (42:5).* To praise God is to accept from God's hand whatever may come, be that good or bad, helpful or hurtful, life or death. Praise recognizes that

God is God and he has the right to do whatever he pleases. To truly praise God is to accept whatever comes to us.

- C. *Pray to God (42:8)*. The greatest prayers may very well be those prayers when we can't feel God or hear from God, but we keep on praying believing that God is present and while we can't sense him we know that he is present.
- D. *Learn of God (43:3)*. The word *truth* is a reference to God's Word and the word *light* is the understanding of the truth. Every believer in Jesus Christ must ultimately come to the place where he or she is going to trust God's Word completely before he or she can experience the present reality of God. God's Word is our single source of tangible truth. Our greatest learning experiences are when we are going through the difficult and painful experiences of life. Don't waste a hurt. God is trying to teach us a lesson. During those times we can respond either as a victim or a student. A victim is always questioning: Why me? The student is always saying: What can I learn?

Conclusion: Our situation may appear hopeless. We may sense that God has abandoned us. We may agree with the critics who question, "Where is your God?" But hold on, or even better, hope on. God is not dead. God is not distant. God is present.

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