

Introduction: *If you are volunteering with SN, let me thank you in advance. It is going to be a fabulous week!

One of my mentors often said, “You can tell a lot about a person by watching their eyes.” Where our eyes go reveal what our hearts desire and whether or not we will move forward in the path of wisdom. I believe this is why Jesus said: “The eye is the lamp of the body.” If our eyes are set on that which true, beautiful and good, then our lives will be full of light, but if we set our eyes on unprofitable things, are lives will be darkened.

We should consistently evaluate where we fix our eyes. Psalm 121 is the psalm that is driving our entire series. It calls us to Look up to God: “I lift up my eyes to the hills from. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” Before we look around, before we look back, before we look to others or within, we must first LOOK UP.

This is true for every moment of life, every opportunity, every victory, every joy-filled moment *and* for those moments when we are hurting, struggling and don’t know where to turn. I want to call us, in each and every circumstance to shift the direction of our gaze UP to God.

We are beginning a 4 week series during the month of July called Look Up! Each week we will look at a different Psalm, the longest book in the middle of the Bible, and each week we will be looking at a very practical aspect of life that we all encounter at some level. Please make your way to Psalm 42-43. Pg. _____

If you have never read the Psalms, I want to commend that practice to you as a regular part of your spiritual diet. The Psalms teach us to worship, provide a guide for our prayers, reveal the character of God in vivid ways, uncover raw, real emotions, which is why I think we so often gravitate to these words, and finally, they most certainly point us to Christ.

Today we are going to consider what it looks like to . . .

“Look Up! When you are Depressed” Psalm 42-43

Psalm 42 & 43 seem to belong together. Not only do many ancient Hebrew manuscripts place them together as one Psalm, but the content should lead us to read them together. These two psalms are what scholars would describe as psalms of lament. They portray a very difficult situation, but they also provide great hope.

READ *Psalm 42-43*

The Point: When you are discouraged and depressed, look up to God for everything you need.

I know there are many people here this morning that have battled depression, are currently fighting it, or will one day deal with it. The National Institute of Health tells us “depression affects approximately 19 million Americans, or 9.5% of the population in any given one-year period. At some point in their lives, 10%-25% of women and 5%-12% of men will likely

become clinically depressed. In fact, it affects so many people that it is often referred to as the "common cold" of mental illness."

If you are not among those numbers, common sense tells us you will be a friend or family member of someone who is. That means all of us have sufficient reason to listen up. On top of that, 100% face discouragement in life, and these verses provide a great guide for those moments as well.

T: Now, we should know that this Psalm was not written to give us a comprehensive guide to understand and battle depression, BUT it will help us begin to comprehend some of the causes of depression, what depression looks like and how we can begin to move beyond it. Let me give you three encouragements as we consider the words of these psalms.

I. Seek to understand the various causes of depression.

Many of the insights I share with you today are from a book by a biblical counselor named Ed Welch. He published an excellent book in 2011 entitled *Depression: Looking Up from the Stubborn Darkness*.

"Depression is a form of suffering that can't be reduced to one universal cause." (Ed Welch)
Oftentimes we want to rush to pinpointing one specific cause or factor for why we find ourselves down in the dumps, but it is not that simple. Even in these Psalms we see there are multiple reasons for his emotional and spiritual state of being.

First off, he experiences

1) Unmet Personal Desires

- **Proverbs 13:12 says: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life."** This verse is HUGE for understanding why we become discouraged. One of the prominent reasons people slide into depression is unmet expectations in life. "I thought my life would be different." I didn't think it would take so long to get through school. I didn't think it would take so long to find an apartment (hello Boston!). I thought I'd have a better job by now; I thought I would be married. I thought I would have children. I thought I surrounded myself with people who would love me through the difficult times. I thought I would be healed of my sickness by now. I thought I would no longer struggle with those some weaknesses anymore. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick."
- How has your life not gone according to plan? Watch out for those moments, because how we respond to them could be the difference in a short time of discouragement vs. a season of depression.
- The psalmist actually has unmet spiritual desires and longing. Here's the situation: For some reason, he has been physically separated from temple worship in Jerusalem. Perhaps he has been exiled and is now in the hands of "taunting captors." We know that he has been removed from the worship of God in the magnificence of the temple. We know that the sons of Korah were actually worship leaders. That's why he refers to leading them into the temple with shouts of praise in verse 4. He longs to be there.
- He says his "soul thirsts." There is an intense longing with his entire being for God.

- Just as a deer cannot survive without water, and our souls cannot survive without God. He is the source of our life. He is the one who brings satisfaction to our souls.
- I'm not sure if you've checked the forecast yet for this week, but it is going to be pretty hot. 80s, mid-80s. Not too bad, but hot enough where most of us will be breaking a sweat out there at Soccer Nights. Get excited! Some of my favorite times as a kid were going with my dad to basketball camp in the summer. Whether we found ourselves outside in 90 weather or inside of a gym with no A/C, that felt more like a sauna than a basketball court, we were brainwashed/I mean encouraged with the following chant: The coach would yell: "I love it when it's hot." And all of the campers would shout back: "Hate it when it's not!" I love it when it's hot. Hate it when it's not (Let's try it). Now you're ready for Soccer Nights.
- Two of the key jobs at Soccer Nights this year will be our hospitality team who will keep the coolers full of water *and* the BooBoo tent team of medical professionals and volunteers who will be ready to help kids who might have an asthma flair up while playing. "Asthma is a condition in which your airways narrow and swell, leading to coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath
- One of my favorite African American preachers, Robert Smith, called the psalmist a "spiritual asthmatic." He is longing for God, panting for God. He wants more of God. His soul is thirsty.

How thirsty are you for God? How much do you desire him each day? How much does it bother you when you are not able to spend focused time in the Word and prayer?

2) Removal from Community.

- Depression and isolation are closely related.
- It was not just the worship of God that he missed, but specifically the worship of God with God's people. As a side note, what happens each Sunday as we come together to pray, hear from God's Word, encourage one another, spend time together cannot be duplicated. Yes, we should worship God personally each day, but there is really no substitute for the consistent gathering of our larger spiritual family to devote ourselves to God together.
- Whenever you see someone who is discouraged and depressed, there is a decent chance they have begun to isolate themselves from other people.

T: On top of this spiritual longing, he also had the taunts of his enemies.

3) External Circumstances & People

- Verse 3: "while they say to me all the day long, 'Where is your God?' and
- *Verses 9-10*: He is continually taunted by his adversaries. He mourns over the distressing oppression of his enemies.
- We learn more about his suffering at the hands of people in 43:1. He asks God to defend his cause against an ungodly, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me.
 - Words hold greater potential to wound us when they touch what we love. This is what I love about the psalmist. He is so distraught, because they are mocking God. He was concerned, not for us own reputation, but for God's.
- You've had this experience at some level, right? People speak derisively of God (wc) and taunt your faith. Oh, look where living for God has got you. God must really love you if he allows this in your life...

To this very short list we could add our bodies (sickness, chemical imbalances, postpartum blues, side effects from medication), our own sinful choices, as well as spiritual warfare (we are not unaware of his schemes.).

I hope you see that we should not be reductionistic when seeking to understand the causes of depression. Are there spiritual issues in play? Yes. Are there external factors and emotional challenges? Absolutely. Does our biology and physiology play a role? Yes. Because we take a holistic view of man, we know medicine is never the only solution.

When it comes to depression, we should expect multiple causes along the way.

II. Seek to understand what depression looks like.

Just as there is not more than one cause of depression, so there is more than one form of depression.

Ed Welch says it is wise to “think in terms of various depressions rather than depression. . . . Think of depression not so much as “I have it” or “I don’t have it” but as a continuum of severity. On one end it is bothersome (situational depression), at the other end debilitating (clinical depression).” Some mild forms of depression reveals itself in discontentment. Others, hopelessness.

Some of the symptoms listed by the National Institute of Health include: sadness, fatigue, insomnia, changes in appetite, difficulty making decisions, excessive crying, hopelessness, and even suicidal thoughts.

Those are symptoms, but how does it feel?

Look back at **the Psalmist**:

- In verse 3, we see “the depth of his sorrow is hyperbolically expressed by “tears” as his “food.”
- He feels **hopeless**. The refrain says he is “**downcast**” and his soul is in **turmoil**.
- He feels as though God has **forgotten** him (42:9) **and rejected** him (43:2).
- In 42:10, he says it feels as though there is a deadly wound in his bones.
- Simply put, he is overwhelmed with despair. The sorrow and oppression were relentless (have you been there?) One negative experience after another were like waves crashing over him.
- Metaphorically speaking, he felt like he was **drowning in despair**. BUT don’t miss the pronouns in verse 7. It’s not “their waterfalls and their waves”, nor is it “my waterfalls and my waves.” He says, speaking to God, “*your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.*”
- In other places the psalms refer to a troubled soul, an anguished heart, being in a low pit and the darkest depths. Perhaps your heart can resonate at times with the statement: “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly far away and be at rest.” (Psalm 55:6)

How it feels

At times, when you are depressed, you do not feel like you can take the next step. Life feels meaningless. “Why bother?” is a common refrain. Some great authors and even great Christians of the past have both written on and experienced depression.

- John of the Cross called it **“the dark night of the soul.”**
- **Robert Burton said: “If there is a hell upon earth, it is to be found in a melancholy heart,”**
- Another called it **“malignant sadness.”** It can be almost impossible for a severely depressed person to filter any experience outside of the lens of their own misery.
- **Depression** is painful. It is **a form of suffering.** It is a lonely place, and perhaps one of the greatest encouragements you could hear this morning is this: *you are not alone.*

I know you feel as though no one else understands your pain, no one else has walked a mile in your shoes, but just look in the Bible and you will find great men and women of God who were depressed

- No, look at people in the Bible. People like King David, Jeremiah, even Jesus was called “a man of sorrows.” He was deeply saddened by the brokenness in our world. He wept tears over the condition of people’s souls. Before he was crucified his soul was in deep anguish.
- Look at the history of the church. Charles Spurgeon, one of my favorite figures from church history, and one of the greatest preachers who ever lived said: “I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for.”
- Look at your friends and family. You are not alone. Bring it out into light. Satan loves to lie and tell us we’re the only one, that people will look down upon us if we share our struggle.

T: The Psalmist knew God is ultimately sovereign over everything in life, which is why he cries out to God for help, which leads us to our third encouragement.

III. Apply God’s remedies for depression by looking to him.

1) Admit you are weak.

- Part of moving forward when we are discouraged is coming to grips with how you are really feeling. Some people ignore, others isolate, but one of the best ways to begin dealing with depression is bringing it out in the open.
- Yesterday was the 4th of July... We are Americans. Independent, strong, brave, resilient, self-made...
- Don’t be afraid to ask the hard questions: “God, where are you? Why is this happening?”

2) Preach to yourself.

- We need to preach to ourselves more than we listen to ourselves. We are constantly interpreting the events of life. We are constantly thinking thoughts and expressing desires that may or may not line up with God’s will for our lives. “I’ll never be good enough. This will never change. I deserved that. What were they thinking?”
- That is why we must preach to ourselves and that is exactly what we see in the common refrain of these Psalms 42:5,11, 43:5
- Hope in God
 - Hope waits on God to act. “Hope says, ‘You are my God,’ in anticipation of the fulfillment of the promises, even when help is far off.” Hope believes that God is moving even when we can’t see him in our current circumstances. And don’t miss this:
 - T: Hope moves from the why to the who
- Who is this God?
 - Remind yourself of God’s character. He is . . . “The living God (42:2), my salvation, my God (5), the Lord, the God of my life (8), God, my rock (9) [Cathedral Ledge - PIC]

Parker, can you move that rock? Kesed, can you move that rock? What about daddy?], God is our rock, our refuge (43:2), and God my exceeding joy (43:4).

- Remind yourself of God's care. He is . . . the God who is present (42:2), who gives steadfast love and songs (8), who vindicates and defends (43:1), sends his light and truth and leads us (3), and who is worthy of praise (4).
- Here is a guy who is fighting for faith by faith. Look closely at this psalm (I love this): Verse 8 follows verse 7. This is faith in the midst of the fight. Look at verse 9: "I say to God, my rock: 'Why have you forgotten me? . . .'"
- Don't let your feelings define your faith. Every time you turn to God, however small, you are exercising faith. This is powerful!
- C.S. Lewis makes this point in *The Screwtape Letters*. These letters depict the unseen spiritual battle going on through a series of letters of a demon uncle named Screwtape writing to his demon nephew in training, Wormwood. In one letter he says: "***Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's [God's] will, looks around upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.***"

3) Do the Next Thing to the glory of God.

- Though these are not found explicitly in this Psalm, let me offer a few strategies as next steps.
- Add greater structure to your daily and weekly schedule. (That might include your sleep schedule, when you eat and exercise. It could involve writing down one thing you will do each day).
- Additionally, those who are depressed really need to live in community. This burden is too great to bear alone. This is one of the beauties of the church. We all have our struggles and we need to be vulnerable enough to share it with some trusted friends.
- Another strategy is service. God is an ecstatic God. He loves to pour out and he made us to pour out. We find satisfaction as we give ourselves away for the sake of others.

4) Prayer & Praise

- These entire psalms are one big prayer to God, but I want to draw your attention to Psalm 43:3
- "Send out your light and your truth"
 - Light - understanding and life
 - Truth - Word of guidance
 - LEAD
- What a great prayer.
- In faith we can trust that God will come through, he will respond, and he will restore us back to the place of praise as we trust in him.
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Conclusion:

I want us to conclude our time by engaging in step four of our strategy for fighting discouragement and depression. What has you discouraged today? Who do you know that is depressed? Could we pray for them this morning, and then after we pray we are going to sing a song that is both a prayer of confession as well as a praise to God for how he supplies everything we need.