

“FEELING SPIRITUALLY DRY”

Psalm 42

Psalm 42 speaks of a person who is going through a spiritually dry time. Against his will, he is in the far north of the country, in the area of snow-capped Mount Hermon, the headwaters of the Jordan River. Nothing indicates how he got there. Perhaps he was part of one of the many caravans of captives that enemy kings took with them after an invasion.

Our author is far away from Jerusalem and from the temple where he longs to be. It pains him that he is unable to take part in the festivities there: Verse 4. Not only that, he is being ridiculed by his enemies because of his faith: Verse 3.

In verses 1-2, the image of a deer thirsting for water vividly shows how deeply and painfully the psalmist feels his own lack. He longed for the living God—the source of living water (cf. Jer. 2:13).

In verses 6-7, the thunder of the waterfalls as Mt. Hermon’s snow melted seems to answer to the depth of the psalmist’s own feelings of despair. We can relate to the psalmist as we consider a time when we were (are?) feeling spiritually dry.

1. WHAT CAUSES SPIRITUAL DROUGHT?

a. Unconfessed sin

→ Explain how unconfessed sin “dries us up” spiritually. Psalm 32:1, 2; Psalm 66:18.

b. Neglect of spiritual disciplines

→ What are ‘spiritual disciplines’ and how do they contribute to our walk with God?

→ How can John 15:10-11 encourage us to practice spiritual disciplines?

c. Dependence on feelings and emotions

→ To what extent are our feelings/emotions a proper gauge of our spiritual life?

→ What are the dangers of giving emotions too great a role in our spiritual walk?

d. Physical fatigue

→ How can our physical condition affect our spiritual condition?

e. God allows it

→ Psalm 42:5 seems to indicate that the psalmist is going through a time of waiting. What does God wish to accomplish in us when we are not aware of anything we’ve done wrong, and yet find no relief from our spiritual dryness? (cp. Rom. 8:24-25).

2. WHAT IS THE ANSWER TO SPIRITUAL DROUGHT?

a. Face your situation honestly, 5a, 6a.

→ What is the difference between reflective thinking and brooding? How can understanding the difference help you think about your spiritual state more effectively?

b. Bring to mind God's character, 5b, 8.

→ How does the psalmist get past despair?

→ Notice that the psalmist speaks of God as “my” God (possessive pronoun, verses 6,9,11). How is this significant when we find ourselves in a spiritual desert?

c. Begin now, 6b.

→ The Psalmist could not go back to Jerusalem, so he had to start where he was if he was ever going to overcome spiritual drought. What can you do today to seek God’s presence?