

Psalms 42:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.

Analysis

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. This verse introduces the psalm's refrain (repeated in 42:11 and 43:5), revealing internal dialogue—the psalmist addressing his own soul. This models spiritual self-exhortation, refusing to let emotions dictate faith. The structure moves from diagnosis (cast down, disquieted) to prescription (hope in God) to confident expectation (I shall yet praise).

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" (ma-tishtochachi nafshi, מַה־תִּשְׁתַּחַחַי נַפְשִׁי) begins with probing question. Shachach means to bow down, be bowed down, be depressed. The Hithpael form suggests reflexive action—the soul casting itself down, sinking, bowing in dejection. Ma (why?) demands reason—not accepting depression as inevitable but questioning its basis. This isn't denying feelings but examining whether they rest on truth or lies. The psalmist doesn't say "Stop feeling this way" but asks "Why are you feeling this way?"

"And why art thou disquieted in me?" (uma-tehemi alay, וּמַה־תְּהִמֵּת עֲלֵי) adds second question. Hamah means to murmur, growl, roar, be turbulent, be restless. The verb describes waves roaring (Psalm 46:3), nations raging (Psalm 2:1), or bowels churning. The image is internal tumult—emotional turbulence, anxious restlessness, mental agitation. The psalmist experiences not merely sadness but internal chaos, yet rather than surrendering to it, he questions it: "Why this

turmoil within me?"

"Hope thou in God" (hochili le'Elohim, הָזַחְלֵי לְאֱלֹהִים) is imperative self-command. Yachal means to wait, hope, expect. Hope in biblical usage isn't wishful thinking but confident expectation based on God's character and promises. The psalmist commands his soul to reorient from present feelings to future certainty grounded in God's faithfulness. This is choice, not feeling—deciding to trust despite contrary emotions.

"For I shall yet praise him" (ki-od odenu, פִּי-עַזְׁד אָזְּדָה) expresses confident future expectation. Od means yet, still, again, continuing. The psalmist is certain that present despair is temporary; future praise is inevitable. Yadah means to praise, give thanks, confess. The imperfect tense indicates future certainty: "I will praise." This isn't hoping he might feel like praising but declaring he will praise because circumstances will change and God will prove faithful.

"For the help of his countenance" (yeshuot panav, יְשׁוּעָה פָּנָיו) identifies the basis for future praise. Yeshuot (plural of salvation/deliverance) means saving acts, deliverances, victories. Panav (his face/countenance) connects to verse 2's longing to "appear before God." The phrase can mean "saving presence of his face" or "the salvation that comes from his face." God's face turned toward His people signals favor, blessing, presence. The benediction of Numbers 6:24-26 prays: "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." The psalmist anticipates experiencing God's favorable presence, which will produce deliverance and renewed praise.

Historical Context

This refrain structure (42:5, 11; 43:5) provides liturgical framework, likely used in corporate worship. The repeated question-answer-confidence pattern modeled for Israel how to move through despair to hope. This wasn't denying legitimate suffering but refusing to end there, choosing trust despite feelings.

The practice of addressing one's own soul appears throughout Psalms. Psalm

103:1: "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name." Psalm 116:7: "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee." This models spiritual self-awareness and self-exhortation. Believers aren't merely passive victims of emotions but active agents who can address their inner turmoil with truth.

The concept resonates with Israel's history of remembering God's faithfulness during present difficulty. When facing Red Sea, Moses declared: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD" (Exodus 14:13). When surrounded by enemies, Jehoshaphat prayed and sang (2 Chronicles 20). When facing Goliath, David recalled God's past deliverances from lion and bear (1 Samuel 17:37). Faith grounded in God's proven character enables confident expectation of future deliverance.

The Reformers emphasized this pattern as mark of authentic faith. Luther experienced severe depression ("Anfechtung") yet counseled believers to preach gospel to themselves, commanding their souls to hope in God regardless of feelings. Puritan writers extensively addressed melancholy, distinguishing between spiritual conviction (appropriate response to sin) and unfounded despair (to be resisted through truth). They recognized emotional struggles as part of Christian experience while insisting emotions must submit to truth.

Modern psychology recognizes cognitive behavioral therapy's effectiveness—examining thoughts underlying emotions and replacing lies with truth. The psalmist practiced this millennia earlier: identifying emotions ("cast down," "disquieted"), questioning their basis ("Why?"), replacing them with truth ("hope in God"), and expecting future change ("I shall yet praise"). This models healthy spirituality that neither denies feelings nor is enslaved by them.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between denying difficult emotions and questioning their basis? How does the psalmist model healthy emotional processing?
2. How can believers practice self-exhortation—speaking truth to their own souls—during depression, anxiety, or despair?
3. What does it mean to 'hope in God' when feelings suggest hopelessness? Is this denying reality or appealing to deeper reality?
4. How does remembering God's past faithfulness enable confident expectation of future deliverance?
5. What role should emotions play in Christian faith and life, and when must they be disciplined by truth rather than allowed to dominate?

Interlinear Text

מָה תַּשְׁתַּחַ וְתַחַ יְיָ נֶפֶשִׁי וְתַתְּקַמְּ וְלֹא
H4100 Why art thou cast down O my soul and why art thou disquieted H5921
H7817 H5315 H1993

הָזַחַ לְאֱלֹהִים עַד כִּי אָזְךָ כִּי יְשֻׁעָה וְתַ
H3176 H430 H3588 H5750 for I shall yet praise him for the help
H3034 H3444

פְּנֵיכֶם:
of his countenance
H6440

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 37:7 (Parallel theme): Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

Psalms 61:2 (Parallel theme): From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Psalms 56:3 (Parallel theme): What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.

Matthew 1:23 (References God): Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Psalms 43:5 (Resurrection): Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

Psalms 42:11 (Resurrection): Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

1 Samuel 30:6 (References God): And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.

Numbers 6:26 (Parallel theme): The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

Psalms 71:14 (Resurrection): But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.

Job 13:15 (Parallel theme): Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.