

REFLECTIONS ON PSALMS 42-43

Preface

*As spiritual therapy during my dear wife's last earthly days, I am researching and writing a brief commentary on each of the 150 Psalms. After finishing them in numerical order, I decided to separate them thematically. So many remind me of my saintly mother whose practice was to read from the Psalter daily. She died in 1989 at age ninety-two, reading a book about the writing of the gospel hymn, "He Leadeth Me."! I am sending my research and reflections on **Psalms 42 & 43** to the few people who are still living who knew my mother closely—and a few of my own dear friends. The first two volumes of the Old Testament are in the hands of the publisher; I am now finishing "the writings" which were Mama's favorite books of the Hebrew Bible. I thought you might like to join me in reflecting on these favorite psalms of hers. If you should be so led, feel free to forward this to any of your own kith, kin, and friends.*

Perhaps the most frequently quoted statement in all the writings of St. Augustine is, "Our souls are restless until they rest in Thee," but we all too seldom know that his quotation is paraphrased from Psalm 42:1. Long before Augustine, the early church used this verse for the candidates for baptism to quote as they entered the waters to be immersed:

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul has thirsted for God, for the living God."

This psalm, though, was written long before there were any Christians! The old Hebrew who wrote it was lonely and sought refuge with his Lord. His loneliness was further burdened by scorners who teased with meanness: "Where is your God?" In his deep frustration, the psalmist discovered what many of us do when "our soul is cast down within us." He discovered that the **Deep calls to Deep**. It is one of the most profound and universally experienced verses of the entire Bible. God's voice, even when muted in dire circumstances, is heard in what John Wesley called "divine impressions upon the soul" or "God's whispers to the heart."

Emerson once wrote that we must let the centuries speak lest one's hours should falsify the "witness of the ages." Our loneliness, our poverty, our fear, our physical and emotional fatigue nor any other deprecating circumstance cannot eradicate the witness of the Scriptures. For us, the Scriptures are the "witness of the ages" that become the "balm of Gilead to make the wounded whole" or "to heal the sin sick soul."

As my own childhood was ending, my Daddy died at age forty-nine, leaving my mother with no home and no money. She very infrequently confessed that she never had a moment of security—emotional or financial—from the death of her father when she was twenty until she entered the

Methodist Retirement Home when she was sixty-six years old. It was then that she gave the acreage inherited from her father in exchange for a life care contract. At last, for the first time in forty-six years, she had the security again of food, shelter, and fellowship in a Christianity community. She lived there twenty-six years as a contented “happy camper.” Each year she wrote a birthday card with a note to sixty-six people. Among those still living, her granddaughters aspire to keep up that ministry of friendship.

As a child I either saw Mama go alone, or I accompanied her, as she made her way every day, when the weather allowed it, to the foot of the hill where there was a spring where we bucketed our water. There she sat on a stump and opened her *New Testament and Psalms*. Over the years, the pages became frayed from usage and the covers were taped to the spine. She could quote many of the psalms from memory, including this one. Those days had a profound impact on me though she never once accompanied her meditation with a lecture to me! I simply saw her walk the walk.

Her heavenly Father took the place of her earthly father and when she was so frequently tired and discouraged, she would turn to this psalm, read the first verse about thirsting for God and, then, as daylight faded and twilight began, she would come to this verse: “Why are you cast down O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?” *(The word “cast down” is best translated as “bowed down” by some sort of unrelentingly depressing circumstances. Mama did not know that academically, but she felt it emotionally; it was underlined in pencil.)*

From those circumstances, my dear mother had no escape, but by faith she read the last verse of Psalm 42: “**Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God..**” Then she would fill her water buckets, hand me her Bible to carry, and trudge back up the hill at the end of a day that had begun before dawn and had included cooking three meals on a wood cook stove and caring for an unkind mother-in-law. She knew and taught me by osmosis that just as the human body cannot live without water, the human being cannot live as God created us without a relationship with our Creator.

Psalm 43 is much like a suffix to Psalm 42. Each ends with an identical verse: “Why are you cast down O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Hope in God for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.” (42:5,11; 43:5) Both are profound examples of the truth expressed in 42:7a-**“Deep calls to deep.”** This is the spirituality that overcomes any life circumstance.

Written January 30, 2021 by Donald Williams Haynes, son of Treva Joy Williams Haynes