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## Prayer: Placing Your Hope In God



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Not long ago I was trying to reconnect with an old friend. We were best friends in high school but have had little to no contact in recent years. I called with some hesitation, given it had been so long since we talked, but happily left a message hoping he would return my call. A few months have passed, and my initial hope and anxiety has given way to feelings of acceptance that he is not going to respond. For a while I wondered if I had the right phone number or if he was upset with me. Now I have concluded that he is busy and has other higher priorities. I still hope we will run into each other at some point and be able to catch up, but for now it is unlikely to happen.

For many of us, prayer can bring similar emotions and questions. We reach out to God and feel nothing in return. It is as if we did something wrong. Our prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling and fall to the floor, unnoticed. Sorrow, fear and doubt start to overtake the hope we first felt. Our hearts hurt and lift up requests and pleas, yet there is no response. These are painful times which can often leave us confused and unsettled.

The *Psalms* can be a place of comfort during these seasons of life because we see the psalmist wrestling with the same emotions and questions. We relate to the pain and struggle he so openly expresses to the Lord. Because of this, the *Psalms* teach us a great deal about prayer. Reading through the *Psalms*, it is easy to pick up the pattern of being open about struggles while also trying to hold onto truth. Other places in Scripture exhort us to pray, but in the *Psalms* we see prayer lived out. These Scriptures provide a window into the human heart, showing us how challenges can shake us to our very core. This shaking is scary and often brings into question truths we have always known.

*Psalm 42* is a great example of this. We quickly recognize the writer is feeling significant distress. *Verse 3* reads “*My tears have been my meat day and night . . .*” The author cries out in pain, his tears leading him to continually wonder “*Where is thy God?*” These are the words of someone who is hurting and whose pain is leading him to question God. He wonders why God has not answered his request by changing what is so painful in his life. This type of pain so often turns our hearts from focusing on the truths of who God is and His heart toward us.

The psalmist knows this and fights to remind himself who God truly is; “*God my rock.*” He says this to himself in the midst of his ongoing questions and pain. His circumstances have not changed, but he reminds himself that God is his rock. Not just that God is a rock, but God is *his* rock. The writer reminds himself to place his hope in God (*verses 5 and 11*). We can feel the author struggle to place his hope in God and keep it there. He is fighting to rise above the painful emotions and questions that accompany his circumstance. Throughout the *Psalm*, he also reminds himself of his hunger for God and God’s goodness. We see the back and forth between the struggle of the circumstances and finding hope in God in the midst of his circumstances. Of course this man wants his circumstances to change, but he is fighting to keep his focus on what is true about God rather than letting his circumstances or emotions define what is true.

One of the fundamental aspects of prayer is to reorient our hearts and minds back to the truth of who God is and to trust in His goodness. We ask the Lord to change the difficult things in our lives, also accepting that they may not change. Prayer is a place where we have been granted the privilege of speaking very openly and honestly to our Creator. Yet we are to always remember we are not God. We are incapable of seeing things as fully as God, and even if we could do so it would not make a difficult situation easy. We know this from the account of our Lord’s own struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane (*Matthew 26:36-46*). He saw the full picture and still asked that it could change. Dark valleys are hard because they are painful and often full of uncertainties. Prayer is a place to speak truth to our hearts so we might live faithfully and keep an accurate view of God through the challenge. This is done by following what the psalmist does in *Psalm 42*, remembering that ultimately our hope is in God and not the changing of our circumstances.

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One of the Word's clear messages throughout the Scriptures is acknowledging this life is difficult and seeing the struggle as something that points us to the Redeemer (*Romans 8*). When life is overwhelming and prayers seem to go unnoticed, remember that we serve a kind and loving God who knows and cares (*Isaiah 41:10*). He hears us and delights in our prayers (*Proverbs 15:8*). He desires to draw hearts closer to His; this is often accomplished through difficulties. He does not promise to change hard circumstances, but He does promise to never leave us. Let the main reason for prayer be that our hearts might be changed and refocused upon Him (*Deuteronomy 6:4-5*).

*Psalm 42* "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday. 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. O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? 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."