



AS THE DEER
PANTS FOR THE
WATER BROOKS,
SO MY SOUL
PANTS FOR
YOU, O GOD.

P S A L M 4 2 : 1

PURPOSE

OF THE VALLEY

DATE

August 1-2

WEEK

9 of 10

OVERVIEW

Psalm 42

KEY VERSE

Psalm 42:1

SETTING THE STAGE

Before we dive into this psalm, we first need to acknowledge its author, because the author of this psalm provides us with a unique perspective. The Bible tells us in the superscript of the psalm that the author is the Sons of Korah. Who is Korah? Who are Korah's sons? In the book of Numbers chapter 16, Korah incites the most famous rebellion against God and His leader, Moses. Korah and his co-conspirators faced terrible consequences for their rebellion. Korah's Sons are descendants of Korah, but they do not share his attitude toward God and his leadership. The Sons of Korah are given a unique role of service in the Temple. They are gatekeepers.

What do gatekeepers have to do with valleys in life and why do they have the credibility to speak on this subject? The Sons of Korah were given the prime opportunity to people watch. I do not know about you, but one of my favorite things to do is to watch people. At the airport, at a coffee shop it is entertaining to see all the different people come in and out. If you put your headphones in and not listen to anything, it is beyond belief what people will say around you when they do not think you are listening!

As gatekeepers at the Temple, the Sons of Korah had the opportunity to watch people who are broken by life's circumstances come into the Temple to find restoration and perspective.

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LESSON OUTLINE

1. Growth Occurs in the Valley
2. Battles are Fought and Victories are Won in the Valley
3. The Shepherd is in the Valley

THINGS TO KNOW

- A mountain cannot exist without a valley.
- The Hebrew word for valley is used 53 times in the Old Testament; and only one time in the book of Psalms.¹

PURPOSE

OF THE VALLEY

Setting the Stage, continued >

They would regularly see people walk into the Temple estranged and come out of the Temple restored. They would see people come into the Temple with tears and sorrow only to leave with confidence and assurance in God. The Sons of Korah had a front-row seat to the purpose that can be found in the valleys. It was so important to them that they felt it necessary to write a psalm about it.

Most biblical scholars agree that Psalm 42 and 43 are a unit. The two psalms are glued together by the same refrain throughout them. The Sons of Korah write, “*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?*” These psalms have been called “Lament Psalms” because they focus on portraying the deep sorrow and grief that is common throughout the human experience. In our Western mindset, lamenting is a foreign concept. Instead of exposing our grief, sorrow, and worries, we try to bury them in work or in a pint of ice cream. But, in the Ancient Near East lamenting was common. Habakkuk lamented at the coming judgment on Israel. The book of Lamentations is one long lament written by Jeremiah. Jesus Himself lamented in the Garden of Gethsemane because of the coming pain and judgment of the cross. It was not frowned upon to express sorrow. Lamenting was viewed as a beneficial and healthy way to process the valleys of life.

Introduction

On a Sunday in late January, former NBA All-Star Kobe Bryant, was killed along with his daughter Giana and seven others. As the reports were coming in of a helicopter crash in California silence and disbelief swept across this country. Their family and friends were stricken with grief and tears upon hearing this shocking news.

Kobe Bryant was one of the greatest basketball players to ever play the game. An 18-time NBA All-Star and 5-time NBA champion he was without argument one of the most decorated players to ever grace the hardwood. He was not just known for his athletic skills, but he had a great reputation for being an incredible father as well. The unexpected tragedy shook the basketball community. The families, friends, and fans of Kobe, Giana, and the 7 others found themselves in a deep dark valley.

This year our world encountered something that impacted every person regardless of background, language spoken, bank account or belief system. COVID-19 coronavirus hit the world in such a way that individuals, families, businesses, cities, states and countries were suddenly in a deep dark valley.

There are times when the bottom of our lives falls out. We are left grief-stricken with the loss of a loved one. We are paralyzed by fear when we are served with divorce papers. We feel as if we are drowning when we are called into the boss’ office to be laid off. We call these moments of desperation, depression, anxiety and grief: valleys.



¹ biblestudytools.com/lexicon

All of us are familiar with valleys. We have all been in a valley at one point or another in our lives. The difficult question that comes with valleys is not what is happening to me, but why is this happening to me? Frederic Nietzsche once famously said, “He who has a why can endure any how.” While there is a lot of mystery that occurs in the valleys of life, the Bible is clear that Christians can find purpose and hope in the deepest darkest valleys.

Psalm 42 will help us discover the purpose of the valley. Let’s take a look:

PSALM 42:1-6 *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. ²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God? ³My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” ⁴These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God. With the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. ⁵Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence. ⁶O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan and the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.*

When we typically think of valleys, we naturally think of all the hurt, despondency, and pain that is associated with valleys. But if we look at Scripture even beyond the Psalms, we can find deeper purpose in the valleys of life.

1. GROWTH OCCURS IN THE VALLEY

DEUTERONOMY 8:6-10 *Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. ⁷For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; ⁸a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; ⁹a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. ¹⁰When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.*

In the book of Deuteronomy, we find the nation of Israel on the precipice of the Promised Land. They have spent 40 years wandering through the desert, but they are about to come home. God describes the land they are about to enter into as “good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills” (v.7). He deems the land of valleys a good land. In this text, God is talking about literal valleys. But we learn some potent truths when we look at physical valleys and compare them to metaphorical valleys in our lives.

God shows us that growth occurs in the valleys. The land of valleys they were about to enter was a land of tremendous growth. Their valleys were filled with brooks, springs, and rivers which led to fertile soil and an abundance of resources. God describes the land of valleys as a land of wheat and barley, vines, fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey. The Israelites would enter the land of valleys with all the resources they needed to live the life God had called them to live. Tremendous growth happens in the valley. Looking back, we see that it is in the valleys of life that exponential growth has occurred in our lives. While the mountain tops in life are great experiences, we learn less about who we truly are and who God is while on the mountain top. Growth occurs in the valley.

Why does growth tend to happen in our lives most when we are in the valleys? It is because broken hearts are fertile soil for Gospel seeds to take root. When we look at the greatest accounts of life-change throughout Scripture it typically occurs in

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people walking through the valleys of life. Abram and Sara were wrestling with infertility. But God showed up in their valley and began to cultivate faith and shaped Abram into Abraham so that he would be the father of Israel. Moses found himself in a deep dark valley in life as a fugitive running from Egypt because of murder. God reached down into the fertile soil of Moses' heart and shaped him into the great leader that could lead an entire nation out of bondage into freedom. Nehemiah found himself in the valley of brokenness over Jerusalem. God used Nehemiah's valley to lead him to action and begin the restorative work on the walls of Jerusalem. All throughout the

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Gospel accounts, Jesus' miracles took place in the lives of people who were walking through valleys. The lepers walked through the valleys of estrangement. Jairus' was walking through the valley of grief with the loss of his daughter. It is in the valleys of life where God does great work in us, resulting in great growth.

In Psalm 42 the Sons of Korah repeat the phrase, "*Why are you in despair, O my soul?*" They encourage us to take inventory of our own hearts to determine the reason why we are suffering from depression and despair. There certainly can be times of great sadness, grief, and sorrow in life. We desire to know what the reasons are for our inner suffering. But the Sons of Korah do not stop there. They see that knowledge does not change the valley, but hope changes your perspective of the valley. They challenge us to "*Hope in God*" (v.5). Korah's sons give great advice to us because they do not encourage us to hope in a change of circumstances. They do not encourage us to hope in a changing of emotional seasons. They challenge us to hope in God! The word "hope" does not mean ambiguous optimism. Biblical hope is always rooted in assurance in God. During life's valleys, we can be confident that God is doing something in our lives. He is growing us. He is tilling up hardened soil and cultivating spiritual fruit through our circumstances. We can have confidence that our suffering is not in vain. There is purpose in the valley – and it is growth.

Valleys are not only places of great growth; valleys are where battles and victories occur!

2. BATTLES ARE FOUGHT AND VICTORIES ARE WON IN THE VALLEY

When we look throughout the landscape of the Bible, we notice that important battles and victories occur in the valleys. Valleys provide the necessary space and ideal terrain for battles to occur. Perhaps, the most famous battle that took place in Scripture occurs in the Valley of Elah, it is where David fought Goliath (*1 Samuel 17*). For many days the Israelites camped on one side of the valley and the Philistines on the other, as the giant Goliath hurled insults at the people of Israel and the Lord. The Israelites viewed the valley of Elah as a place of hopelessness as they expected to experience great defeat. But that was not the case for David. David found purpose in the valley.

The valleys in life are filled with battles. We battle against insecurity, doubt, anger, and regret.

As David stood before Goliath in the Valley of Elah he realized the valley was a place of opportunity for victory. The Israelites crumbled from fear in the valley when they saw the giant, but David saw a 'giant opportunity' for victory. And with God's help, David seized that opportunity and defeated the giant.

The final battle in this world, the battle of Armageddon will take place in the valley of Megiddo. All the demons, the principalities and Satan himself will gather against God's people in the valley. There has never been and there will never be a more intimidating sight. Yet once again, God will be victorious. He will conquer the enemy and all his satanic forces with His Word. God will be eternally victorious in that valley.

The valleys in life are filled with battles. We battle against insecurity, doubt, anger, and regret. Some of the battles that will rage against us will be battles of spiritual warfare as we wrestle with

Satan and his demons. But it is important to know that we can be victorious in the valleys of life!

Psalms 42 gives us a great key to experiencing victory in the battles that take place during our valley. The sons of Korah write about inner turmoil and the battle that rages within us at times. They paint vivid pictures of depression and sorrow. They write, “My tears have been my food day and night.” (v.3) There is intense weeping. “All Your breakers and Your waves have gone over me.” (v.7b) There is a sense of being emotionally consumed by your circumstances. They parallel your emotional state to feeling as if you are drowning. They describe a sense of being so overwhelmed that they might even lose their way.

Have you ever been in a whiteout blizzard? For most of us in Texas, the only blizzards that we are familiar with come from Dairy Queen! But in the Great Plains and the Mid-Western States, whiteouts are a common occurrence. The snow fiercely falls impeding your vision and preventing you from normal, day-to-day functions. The snowfall can become so dense and thick at times you cannot see your hand in front of you. Many farmers have died as they ventured out to their barns to take care of their animals in a whiteout. Losing their way in the blizzard, they wander in circles not knowing where to take refuge. Many froze to death, in their own backyard just steps away from their back porch. But over time, the farmers developed a simple but effective tactic to help them navigate their way through the blizzard called “roping off.” At the first sign of a blizzard, farmers take a long rope and attach it to their back door and run it to their barn door. This allows them to venture out into the wintry storm to take care of their animals and find their way back home. The rope serves as a guide for them. It is anchored to their home and provides direction, assurance, and stability when they cannot see.²

In the valleys of life, we can feel like a Great Plains farmer during a whiteout blizzard. Becoming so overwhelmed by our emotions and circumstances that we lose our way home. What the writers of Psalm 42 encourage us to do is to “rope off” our lives. To tie a rope that is anchored to the stability and unchanging nature of God. When life’s blizzards come, and we become disoriented, we can have an assurance that despite an everchanging environment, God does not change! Tethering to God leads to victory in our lives.

The Psalmist writes, “My soul is cast down within me: therefore I remember you” (v.6) As Believers in Christ, we have access to timeless universal truths about God and His character that guide us in the midst of valleys. Even though Psalms 42 and 43 display times of despair and displacement, they also showcase deep theological truths that can help us walk through the valleys of life victoriously.

As Believers in Christ, we have access to timeless universal truths about God and His character that guide us in the midst of valleys.

- He is the only One who can quench the thirst of my soul. (*Psalm 42:1*)
- He is worthy to be worshipped. (*Psalm 42:4*)
- He is my salvation. (*Psalm 42:5*)
- He is my God. (*Psalm 42:6*)
- He commands His love to me. (*Psalm 42:8*)
- He sings songs to me in the darkest of nights. (*Psalm 42:8*)
- He is the God of my life. (*Psalm 42:8*)
- He is my Rock. (*Psalm 42:9*)
- He is my Vindicator. (*Psalm 43:1*)
- He is my Defender. (*Psalm 43:1*)

² Illustration taken from Palmer, Parker J. *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey toward an Undivided Life: Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2008.

- He is my Strength and Refuge. (*Psalm 43:2*)
- He sends light toward me. (*Psalm 43:3*)
- He sends truth toward me. (*Psalm 43:3*)
- He leads me. (*Psalm 43:3*)
- He is my exceeding joy. (*Psalm 43:4*)

No matter what battle may rage in our soul or the valleys that we walk through in life, if we keep these truths in front of us, we will be victorious. The truth of God will remind us that the valleys we are in are not permanent. As we fix our gaze on God and remember Him, we can endure the valleys and press on to the mountaintops.

We do not just find victory in the valley; we find a much greater prize, the Shepherd.

3. THE SHEPHERD IS IN THE VALLEY

Without a doubt, the most famous scripture passage about valleys occurs in the Twenty-Third Psalm. David writes, “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*” This verse is commonly read at funerals. Often, the pastor reads this to the congregation to provide courage and comfort as they walk through deep dark valleys of grief and sorrow. What is it about this Scripture that provides courage and comfort? David knows that he does not have to fear in the valley of the shadow of death because the Shepherd is there.

As Christians what brings us great courage in the valley is that we are not alone. God is with us.

As Christians what brings us great courage in the valley is that we are not alone. God is with us. We may walk in pain, but God takes every step beside us. In our suffering, He does not abandon us. During our grief, He weeps with us, just like He did at Lazarus’ tomb. In our sorrow, He sympathizes with us. Christians never walk through the valley alone. When everyone else has abandoned us, God has promised to never leave us or forsake us. We know that the Shepherd with the comforting rod and staff that David was referring to in Psalm 23 is Jesus. In the New Testament, Jesus Himself tells us, “*I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep*” (*John 10:11*).

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He walks with us through our valleys because He experienced the darkest valley of history. The Good Shepherd laid His life down for the sheep. In His voluntary act of laying His life down for the sheep, He experienced total loneliness. His disciples left Him, and as He took on our sin He was abandoned and forsaken by the Father. Jesus experienced unsurpassed pain and heartache on the cross. He cried tears of agony. He unjustly received the wrath of God. He was publicly shamed, mocked and ridiculed. He died a death He did not deserve. The Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep. He experienced total abandonment so that we would never have to experience it. He received the wrath of God so that we would never endure it. He was publicly mocked so that we would be eternally accepted as children of God. Jesus is our Good Shepherd who walked through the valley of the shadow of death, all the way to the cross so that we could find purpose in our valleys.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Jerry Sittser is a Christian author and professor. He has written some incredible books, but none more powerful than his testimony of walking through the valley. In *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss*, Sittser recalls a traumatic car accident that he was involved in that took the life of his wife, mother and daughter. He was broken and grief-stricken. Sittser wrote this book to document his grief process and to recount how God gave him purpose in the valley. He writes, “The experience of loss does not have to be the defining moment in our lives. Instead, the defining moment can be our response to the loss. It is not what happens to us that matters so much as what happens in us.”³ The valleys we find ourselves in can be paralyzing, but God can use them to give us purpose in life.

If you find yourself walking through the valley in life you can be confident that God wants to use that valley to produce growth in your life. While we may find the valley to be a tempting place to abandon faith in God we must be vigilant to hold our faith in God. Jerry Bridges writes, “Trust is not a passive state of mind. It is a vigorous act of the soul by which we choose to lay hold on the promises of God and cling to them despite the adversity that at times seeks to overwhelm us.”⁴

The valley that you are in may look like a battlefield now, but God wants you to walk through it victoriously. In the darkest valleys we can rest assured that we do not have to fear because the Good Shepherd is walking with us every step of our way, giving purpose to our pain.

It is in the valley that we become like the deer panting for water. Psalm 42:1 “*As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God.*” We can be confident that God will satisfy our thirst in the midst of the valley, as His plan continues to shape our purpose.

³ Sittser, Gerald Lawson. *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss*. Vereeniging: Christian Art, 2011.

⁴ Bridges, Jerry. *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Nav Press, 2008) 214.