

For the choir director. A Maskil of the sons of Korah.

As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;
When shall I come and appear before God?
My tears have been my food day and night,
While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

These 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.

Why 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.

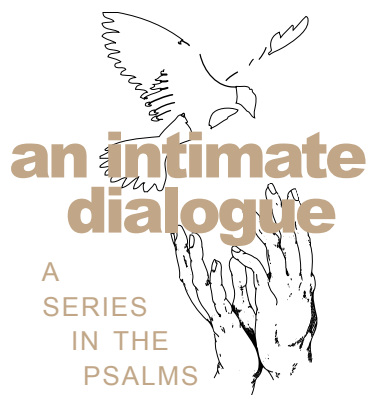
O my God, my soul is in despair within me;
Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan
And the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.

Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls;

All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me.

The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime;

And His song will be with me in the night,
A prayer to the God of my life.



A SELF-IMPOSED REMOVE

EVEN CALLOW YOUTH can miss home and hearth. Even the exotic allure of world travel can fade when compared to family, and friends, and normalcy.

Thirty-seven years ago a fresh-faced, wet-behind-the-ears Midwesterner found himself pining for home. His current "home" was a gray, metal, decidedly un-homey cruiser on station off the coast of Vietnam. Surrounded by the ship's hostile natives, the monotony of unrelenting boredom, and mile after mile of featureless sea, the teenager discovered heretofore unplumbed depths of homesickness and despair.

Every few weeks the tedium of this alien, factory-like prison was relieved, for a few days, by the exotic sights and fleshly blandishments of a nearby port of call. The young man took in the dazzling sights, found amusing diversions, and, for a while, forgot the pain of his homesickness. In the end, however, the synthetic distractions only deepened his longing for the organic normalcy of family and home.

going our own way

The exiled Jew of Psalms 42-43 pined not just for the normalcy of home, but for

the presence of his God. Having been taken away, by force, from Jerusalem and temple worship—from all that was comfortable and customary—he longed for a cool drink of Jehovah to relieve his spirit-thirst.

As the thirsting deer longs for the life-restoring stream, so I long for You, O God. I am in a drought, and all of my being thirsts for You—the One from whom all life flows. When, O God, will I see Your face again? Missing You, I have cried myself to sleep, and wept throughout the day, while everyone around me has mocked my longing, saying, "So where is this God of yours?" These thoughts break my heart; my soul aches to worship again in Your house. For I recall the joy of the procession as we all came to worship You, the loud "Hosannas!" we would sing during the pilgrimage.

This eloquent, ancient yearning, however, cannot translate into Christ-life without adaptation. For the believer cannot be separated from his "temple" against his will.

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

1 Corinthians 3:16

Since our very person is our place of worship, no one else can remove us from God's presence. No one else can physically prevent that spiritual union. But we can. We can forget Him, forget the sweet communion of our spirit with His. Worse, we can intentionally go our own way, shutting off the sound of His voice—until we come back, for a while, to our senses.

But then I ask myself: "Why am I so depressed? Why is this tearing me apart?" I still have You! There will come a day when I will once again bow down and lift my hands to adore You in Your temple. I will once again praise You for Your salvation.

in the wilderness

The cold truth for the believer is that time spent absent from God is time spent in the wilderness. Without His guiding presence we flail about, chase down rabbit trails, and begin to question His commitment to our situation. We are the ones who have severed—if temporarily—the relationship, yet we now accuse Him of abandoning us to the terrors of our self-imposed desolation.

Yet I still despair, O God. I remember how You were at the Jordan. But even the natural world—Your creation!—conspires against me. Wave after wave has swamped me, left me gasping for air. You are in control, O God, and I can depend on Your love and kindness throughout each day, and my nights will be filled with Your praise.

I will say to my God, "You once protected me, giving me a strong footing high above my enemies. Why are You now oblivious to my plight? Now because of those enemies I am covered in ashes of mourning. Why?" Day after day, those who hedge me in with their hate, stripping away my dignity, taunt me, saying, "So where is your God now?"

Because the Spirit never leaves the Christian, even one who has stopped

listening to His counsel may be snapped back to reality.

Then again I ask myself: "Why am I so depressed? Why is this tearing me apart?" I still have You! There will come a day when I will once again bow down and lift my hands to adore You in Your temple. I will once again praise You for Your salvation.

returning home

Then, invariably, when trials or temptations return, or old enemies reinvigorate their efforts against us, we again pay the price of not walking steadily with our God. We accuse all of heaven of turning against us—or at least forgetting our plight—and we crumple under the burdensome weight of doubt and disbelief.

We cry out to the Lord: all we want is to return home, to the safety and transport of His presence. All we want is to return to the Joy.

Pronounce me innocent, O God; on behalf of my innocence, wrestle with those who do not know You. Give me the means to escape those who are treacherous and do evil. For You are my place of safety, my stronghold—why then have You turned against me?! I am still covered in the ashes of mourning. Why? O my God, appoint Your servants—illumination and truth—to draw me back home to the place where You dwell: Your sacred mountain. Once I am there, I will kneel before Your altar, where I will worship You with overwhelming joy. I will sing to You, and lift my hands in praise, My God.

And one last time we reprimand ourselves for our short-sightedness—our temporary insanity in choosing, if even for a little while, the temporal over the eternal.

So then, why am I so depressed? Why am I letting this tear me apart? I still have You! There will come a day when I will once again bow down and lift my hands to adore You in Your temple. I will once again praise You for Your salvation.

I will say to God my rock, "Why have You forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"
As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me,
While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"
Why are you in despair, O my soul?
And why have you become disturbed within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him,
The help of my countenance and my God.

Vindicate me, O God, and plead my case against an ungodly nation;
O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!
For You are the God of my strength; why have You rejected me?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?
O send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me;
Let them bring me to Your holy hill
And to Your dwelling places.
Then I will go to the altar of God,
To God my exceeding joy;
And upon the lyre I shall praise You, O God, my God.

Why are you in despair, O my soul?
And why are you disturbed within me?
Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him,
The help of my countenance and my God.

Psalms 42:1-43:5