

## Psalm 42 Study Questions

### 1. What does the imagery of the deer panting for water (v. 1) reveal about the believer's dependence on God?

The deer's thirst is not casual—it is survival-level desperation. The psalmist parallels this with his spiritual life: without God's presence, his soul would wither. Jesus confirmed this dependence in John 15:5: *"Without Me you can do nothing."* Like physical thirst, our souls are created to thirst for God. Jeremiah 2:13 warns of seeking "broken cisterns" instead of the fountain of living waters—showing the danger of trying to satisfy spiritual thirst elsewhere.

### 2. Why does the psalmist emphasize seeking "the living God" (v. 2)?

This contrasts the God of Israel with lifeless idols. His longing is for a personal encounter, not ritual performance. The "living God" phrase is used throughout Scripture (Deut. 5:26; Josh. 3:10; Heb. 10:31) to emphasize God's active presence and power. Worship that seeks the living God is dynamic and transformative (cf. Psalm 84:2).

### 3. What does it mean that "my tears have been my food day and night" (v. 3)?

It signifies unrelenting sorrow that even displaces appetite (cf. Psalm 102:4). His grief is compounded by mockery: *"Where is your God?"*—a taunt also heard at the cross (Matthew 27:43). This highlights that trials are not only internal but magnified by external voices of unbelief. Yet tears themselves are not wasted; Psalm 56:8 says God *"puts my tears into Your bottle."*

### 4. How do memories of joyful worship (v. 4) become both a comfort and a sorrow?

Recalling past gatherings in the temple reminds him that he once led worship with gladness. Memory sustains him, but it also intensifies his sense of loss. This tension is common in exile or seasons of dryness—where remembrance stirs longing (cf. Lamentations 3:19–24). Yet, even in pain, memory can anchor hope: "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope" (Lam. 3:21).

### 5. Why does the psalmist question his own soul (vv. 5, 11)?

Self-examination is a form of spiritual counseling. By asking, *"Why are you cast down?"* he challenges his despair rather than accepting it passively. This is the discipline of preaching truth to oneself. Psalm 103:1 models this as well: *"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!"*

### 6. What is the psalmist's antidote to despair (vv. 5, 11)?

He doesn't deny his sorrow but counters it with deliberate hope: *"Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him."* The phrase *"I shall yet"* is a declaration of future faith—trusting that God's deliverance is certain, though delayed. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as *"the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*

**7. What does the imagery of “deep calls unto deep” (v. 7) convey about the psalmist’s trials?**

The image of crashing waters suggests being overwhelmed. Each wave (trial) seems to call forth another, cascading in unrelenting succession. Yet notice the wording: “*Your waves and Your billows*”—acknowledging God’s sovereignty even over suffering. Job likewise recognized God’s hand in his trials (Job 1:21). In verse 8, this is balanced with confidence in God’s covenant love (*hesed*), showing that trial and trust coexist.

**8. Why does the psalmist call God his “Rock” while also asking, “Why have You forgotten me?” (v. 9)?**

This tension shows the paradox of faith: God is both trusted and questioned. Calling Him “*my Rock*” acknowledges God’s unchanging nature (Psalm 18:2), while the “forgotten” cry reflects human emotion under distress. Faith is not the absence of doubt—it is clinging to God amid unanswered questions.

**9. How does Psalm 42 provide a model for responding to spiritual discouragement?**

It models honesty with God: lament is not unbelief but an act of faith that brings sorrow into God’s presence. At the same time, the psalmist balances lament with exhortation: “*Hope in God.*” This rhythm mirrors Paul’s testimony: “*We are hard-pressed... yet not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair*” (2 Corinthians 4:8). Believers should neither hide their pain nor surrender to it but bring it under God’s promises.

**10. What final hope sustains the psalmist in verse 11?**

He concludes with determination: “*For I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.*” His hope rests not in changed circumstances but in God Himself as the ultimate source of joy and restoration. This anticipates the New Testament hope: “*This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast*” (Hebrews 6:19).