

Psalm 42 “O My Soul: The Necessity of Talking to Ourselves in 2022” **

Note: This is a two-part message for Sunday morning and evening.

Main Idea: In the Psalms, the Lord graciously gives us three special words that need to be a regular part of our vocabulary if we are to experience the fullness of His joy. They are: **O my soul**. This morning, we’ll be looking at Psalm 42 & 43, and then this evening at Psalm 103. With these words in mind, we’re going to consider three lessons.

I. We learn from the Psalms that we must talk.

- A. We must talk to the Lord (“O God” - Psalm 42:1).
- B. We must talk to other people (“O people of Zion” - Psalm 95:1-3).
- C. We must talk to ourselves (“O my soul” – Psalm 42:5 & 11).
 - 1. If we talk to ourselves too much, people might put us in a straightjacket.
 - 2. If we fail to talk to ourselves, we put ourselves in a straightjacket.

II. We learn from the Psalms that we must talk to ourselves.

- A. We must say, “O”.
- B. We must say, “My”.
- C. We must say, “Soul”.

III. We learn from the Psalms that we must talk to ourselves in specific ways.

- A. We learn from Psalm 42-43 that we must talk to ourselves when life is hard.
 - 1. I must ask myself why I am downcast.
 - 2. I must tell myself to hope in God.
 - 3. I must remind myself that I will again praise the God who is my salvation.
- B. We learn from Psalm 103 that we must talk to ourselves when life is good.
 - 1. I must tell myself to bless the Lord, and especially His name (1, 22).
 - 2. I must remind myself of His benefits (2-5)).
- C. We learn from Psalm 104 that we must talk to ourselves when God seems small.
 - 1. I must tell myself to praise God for His greatness (1, 35b).
 - 2. I must tell myself to reflect on His great works (2-35a).
- D. We learn from Psalm 62 that we must talk to ourselves when people attack us.
 - 1. I must tell myself to wait in silence for God alone (5a).
 - 2. I must remind myself that my hope comes from God who is my rock (5b-7).
- E. We learn from Psalm 116 that we must talk to ourselves when God delivers us.
 - 1. I am permitted to ask the Lord to deliver my soul (4).
 - 2. I must tell my soul to acknowledge the Lord’s goodness when He does (7-8).
- F. We learn from Psalm 146 that we must talk to ourselves when we’re not sure who to trust.
 - 1. I must tell myself to praise the Lord as long as I live (1-2).
 - 2. I must remind myself (and others) that people will pass away, but He will always be there (3-10).

Make It Personal: Let’s resolve to make “O my soul” a regular part of our vocabulary.

The Lord is so gracious, and we’ll see a very special demonstration of His grace as we open His Word together today. The Lord has given us a book that He has designed to help us make Him the gravitational center of our lives. It’s called The Psalms. And in the Psalms, our God has graciously given us three special words that need to be a regular part of our vocabulary if we are to experience the fullness of His joy, when times are hard, and when times are good.

They are: **O my soul**. This special phrase appears in six different psalms, and they are vital to our spiritual stability as we navigate through life.

This morning, we’ll meditate on these three words and look primarily at how they’re used in Psalm 42 & 43, and then this evening at Psalm 103 and the other four passages. By observing carefully these three words, we’re going to learn three important lessons.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 42-43

I’d like to describe two mornings to you, and you tell me the difference between them. The first is Monday morning, and it begins like this. I’m sitting at the breakfast table scanning the news and I see headlines telling me that COVID numbers are up again,

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

that they're fighting in Washington, and that the stock market (and my savings) has dropped again. Then I open Facebook and see someone ranting and raving irrationally about some issue, and I also learn that a good friend just died of COVID complications. Then I glance at my calendar for the week and notice (what I already knew) that I've packed it pretty full, and I'm wondering how I'm going to get everything done.

And I feel my hands getting cold, and my pulse beginning to race, and I find myself feeling anxious, mixed with a little fear, and a dose of anger. And then a moment later I snap at my wife when she asks me a simple question. That's Monday morning.

Then there's Tuesday morning. On Tuesday morning I'm sitting at the breakfast table scanning the news, and the COVID numbers are still up, and they're still fighting in Washington, and the stock market is still questionable, and they're ranting on Facebook, and my calendar is still packed full.

But on Tuesday morning, something's different. My hands aren't cold, and my gut isn't churning with anxiety and fear and anger, and I'm not snapping at my wife. Instead, I'm looking forward to how God is going to work in my life that day, and in the lives of my family members, and I'm actually humming a little tune to myself.

So what made the difference between Monday morning and Tuesday morning? Here's the answer in three words. *O my soul*.

One of the most helpful chapters I've ever read (outside of the Bible) is chapter eight in Martyn Lloyd-Jones' book, *Spiritual Depression*. He entitles the chapter, "Feelings." We all have feelings, by God's design. We are emotional beings. But we get into trouble when our feelings control us, when we become feeling-oriented. To prevent that from happening, Lloyd-Jones gives us this counsel:

"You have to speak to yourself... this horrible self... Remind yourself of certain things. Remind yourself of who you are and what you are. You must talk to yourself and say: 'I am not going to be dominated by you, these moods shall not control me. I am going out, I am breaking through'. So get up and walk, and do something... This is the constant exhortation of the Scriptures. If you allow these moods to control you, you will remain miserable, but you must not allow it. Shake them off. Do not recognize them. Say again, 'Away dull sloth'."¹

This is where "O my soul" enters the picture. Lloyd-Jones is simply telling us what six of the Psalms tell us. We cannot be passive with our feelings. We must talk. We must talk to ourselves. We must talk to ourselves in specific ways.

There's today's outline. Those are the three lessons that the Psalms give us. Let's unpack these lessons one at a time.

I. We learn from the Psalms that we must talk.

Do you know what the shortest word in the Bible is? It's one letter. As far as I can determine, there are three one letter words in the English Bible. There's the article "a". There's the pronoun "I". And then there's "O."

This is a fascinating word, as we'll discuss in terms of meaning more carefully in a moment. For now, let's look at *who*. Who follows "O" in the Psalms? If you do a simple word search, you'll find "O" connected to three objects.

O my God. O my people. O my soul.

Very basic, but very important. The psalmist is showing us, by his example, that must talk, and talk specifically to these three individuals.

¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, from chapter eight, "Feelings."

A. We must talk to the Lord (“O God” - Psalm 42:1). Listen again to Psalm 42:1, “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, **O God (Elohim).**”

Sometimes the psalmist uses the covenant name of God, as in Psalm 41:4, “As for me, I said, ‘**O LORD (YAHWEH)**, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you!’”

Sometimes he uses both “God” and “LORD”, as in Psalm 3:, “Arise, **O LORD!** Save me, **O my God!** For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.” And in Psalm 13:3 (NIV), “Look on me and answer, **O LORD my God.** Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death.”

Notice, it’s not just “God,” or “Lord,” but “O God” and “O Lord.” This is prayer language here. And there’s intensity, a focus of emotion towards the most important person on the planet. As in Psalm 69:13, “But as for me, my prayer is to you, **O LORD.** At an acceptable time, **O God,** in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness.”

Sadly, far too often these sacred words are used in unsacred ways. Such as when our quarterback throws the interception, loses the game, and we mutter, “O Lord! Why do I keep cheering for this team!” A better question to ask would be, “Why did I just violate the third commandment by using God’s name in a vain and meaningless way?”

Using God’s name in vain is forbidden, of course. It is blasphemy. But this is encouraged and modelled again and again in the Psalms. Listen to David in Psalm 25:1–2, “To you, **O LORD,** I lift up my soul. ² **O my God,** in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.”

B. We must talk to other people (“O people of Zion” - Psalm 95:1-3). Notice how the psalmist calls out to the people of God in Psalm 78:1, “Give ear, **O my people,** to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth!”

And in Psalm 62:8 “Trust in him at all times, **O people;** pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.”

We see the plural in Psalm 66:8, “Bless our God, **O peoples;** let the sound of his praise be heard.”

Do you see what’s happening? We can’t keep God to ourselves! We want others to join us in praising and experiencing Him. We don’t see the exact phrase here, but listen to this invitation that the psalmist gives to his people in Psalm 95:1–3 (KJV), “**O come,** let us sing unto the LORD: Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. ² Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, And make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. ³ For the LORD *is* a great God, And a great King above all gods.”

So we must talk to God, but also to other people. And the “O” puts intensity into the appeals. There’s a third audience that we see addressed in the Psalms.

C. We must talk to ourselves (“O my soul” – Psalm 42:5 & 11). Listen again to Psalm 42:5-6a “Why are you cast down, **O my soul,** and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation, and my God.”

We see the same words in Psalm 42:11, “Why are you cast down, **O my soul,** and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”

This might sound odd to you, even unspiritual. Talk to ourselves? There’s a scene in the kids’ movie *Cars* where Lizzie says to Lightning McQueen, “You keep talking to yourself and people will think you’re crazy!”

Frankly, there’s a tension here, and we need to address it.

1. *If we talk to ourselves too much, people might put us in a straightjacket. But...*
2. *If we fail to talk to ourselves, we put ourselves in a straightjacket.*

The reality is, most people talk to themselves. The difference between crazy self-talk and necessary self-talk has to do with what we say to ourselves, and what our purpose is in this conversation. More about that a little later.

What do we see in the Psalms? This important reality. We see (or hear) three conversations going on. “*O God.*” “*O people of God.*” And “*O my soul.*”

But let’s go deeper into this, and we’ll notice there’s a frequency in the Psalms. Here’s the math. When we see “O” in the Psalms, most of the time it’s used in connection with God, not ourselves, and not others.

“O my soul” appears in eleven verses in the Psalms in the ESV.

“O Israel” appears in five verses, “O people” in five verses, “O Zion” in two verses, and “O daughter” in two verses.

“O God” appears in 97 verses. “O LORD” appears in 229 verses.

So the psalmist talks to himself in eleven verses, to his people in fourteen verses, but he talks to God in 326 verses! Those numbers indicate that while we should talk to ourselves, and eventually to others, it shouldn’t happen nearly as often as we talk to the Lord. That’s the conversation that matters most in our lives as we move through our day, for that’s the Person that matters most, our Creator God and hopefully, our Savior God.

As we’ll see shortly from the examples in the Psalms, talking to ourselves isn’t to be an end, but a means to a more meaningful conversation with the Lord, and others. Or to put it another way, we talk to ourselves in order to get ourselves in the right frame of mind so we can then talk to the Lord, and then eventually to others about the Lord.

So here’s the first point. We learn from the Psalms that we must talk. Now let’s go deeper by moving to the second point.

II. We learn from the Psalms that we must talk to ourselves.

And where should we begin in this conversation with self? With these three words.

A. We must say, “O”. Such a tiny word, so seemingly insignificant. But is there really such a thing as an insignificant word in the Bible?

We’re told in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable.” Profitable for what? “For teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

So every verse, every word, every letter in the Bible is profitable. It’s for our benefit. Jesus said in Matthew 5:18, “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” An iota is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet (yod), and a dot is a small stroke in a Hebrew letter, according to some interpreters, the smallest stroke of the smallest Hebrew letter.² This means that everything God has revealed, down to the very letters and parts of a letter, are inspired and beneficial.

² The “jot” (KJV) has become “the smallest letter” (NIV): this is almost certainly correct, for it refers to the letter י (yod), the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The “tittle” (*keraiia*) has been variously interpreted: it is the Hebrew letter ו (waw) (so G. Schwarz, “*ἰῶτα ἐν ἡ μία κεραία* [Matthäus 518],” ZNW 66 [1975]: 268–69); or the small stroke that distinguishes several pairs of Hebrew letters (כ/ב; ג/ד; ד/ד) (so Filson, Lenski, Allen, Zahn); or a purely ornamental stroke, a “crown” (Tasker, Schniewind, Schweizer; but cf. DNTT, 3:182); or it forms a hendiadys with “jot,” referring to the smallest part of the smallest letter (Lachs, pp. 106–8). Carson, D. A. (1984). *Matthew*. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 145). Zondervan Publishing House.

I looked and looked to identify the Hebrew word translated “O”, and found there is no word. It perhaps is connected with the Hebrew vowel points, or accents, but more likely has been inserted by translators³ because of the implied sense in the text.

Is there a difference between saying, “my soul” and “O my soul”? I think so. The “O” adds more focus and intensity to it, more emotion. And that’s what we’ll see when we look at some specific examples in a moment, a call to oneself for more focus and intensity in response to a life-situation.

I wanted to know more about this tiny little word, so I did a little research. I began by asking google the question, “What is ‘O’?” I found out that “O” is the fifteenth in order or in a series. And that it’s also zero, and a major blood group, and in Chemistry it refers to oxygen, and in logic to a particular negative.

Interesting, but that’s not the biblical “O”. Then I found this. “O” is a part of speech called an *interjection*. It’s the *vocative* case, or a *vocative expression*. According to Dictionary.com, it’s used in a couple of ways:

-used before a name in direct address, especially in solemn or poetic language, to lend earnestness to an appeal: *Hear, O Israel!*

-used as an expression of surprise, pain, annoyance, longing, gladness, etc.⁴

I read this statement, “Most people will never have use for O, which is used in poetic apostrophe, usually in classical addresses, always preceding the name of or pronoun representing the person being formally addressed.”

That may be the case for “most” people, but it must not be said of Bible-believing followers of Christ. The world says that we don’t need “O”. But God’s Word indicates we do, that we need to use this word, and use it a lot. We must say, “O”.

B. We must say, “My”. This of course is a personal word, a first person singular pronoun. It’s a reminder that the conversation that needs to happen in this soul-searching moment is very personal, and you’re not a part of it, not yet at least. I love my wife, and kids, and grandkids. And as your pastor, I love you. But I can’t do this for you, nor you for me.

This conversation is between me and *me*. *O my*. I need to say those words. I need to wake myself up with “O”! And then comes “my.” By saying those words, I’m reminding myself that the issue is no longer the other person who is ranting on Facebook and the conversation I’m thinking about having to straighten out that person. No, the conversation that needs to happen is right here at home. *O my soul*.

C. We must say, “Soul”. “Soul” comes from the Hebrew word *nephesh*. In the New Testament, it’s the Greek *psyche*.

Our society downplays the soul. It ignores the soul. Some even deny that it exists. Life is all about the body, the material, the stuff you can see. But the Owners Manual makes it clear that the *soul* is intrinsic to what it means to be a human being.

Genesis 2:7 says, “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a *nephesh*, a living creature.” The root of *nephesh* means “to breathe.”

As one Bible Dictionary observes, “This indicates the closeness of נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*) to the literal word for breath or spirit in the Hebrew (רוּחַ, *ruach*).”⁵

³ It appears in the ESV, NIV, KJV, but not in the CSV, nor in the French Bible (I’m told).

⁴ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/o>

⁵ Durst, D. (2016). [Soul](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

The same source points out that one study of the Hebrew term yielded over 750 uses, which can be sorted into 10 categories. Major usages communicate:

- indicate meanings of desire (Pss 25:1; 42:2)
- personal or individual being (Gen 12:5; Lev 2:1)
- a conscious self (Lev 11:44–45)
- emotional state (Gen 26:35; Job 21:4; Eccl 7:9).⁶

So *soul* is an important word, and while we could get lost in the technicalities, it's really not that complicated. We know what the soul is. Every coach knows what soul means, and it's the subject of many halftime conversations. "Team, your bodies were out there in the first half, but if you don't start putting your soul into this game, we might as well go home."

In simple terms, here's what soul is. Listen to Psalm 103:1, "Bless the LORD, O my *soul*, and *all that is within me*, bless his holy name!" Notice the parallel thought. What is soul? It is *all that is within me*.

Think of it this way. The soul is the part of us that we can't see. We can see the body, but here's what we can't see—the heart, mind, will, and emotions.

Think of the term *person*. As a person, you are much more than a body. You are a "living soul", a *nephesh hey-ya*, which includes the material part of you that others can see, but also the immaterial part that others cannot see.⁷

My body will die, and so will yours. Eventually we will receive another, resurrected body that will last forever, either in the new heaven and earth with God, or in a place called hell cut off from God. What happens to my body, of course, depends on what I've done with the Savior God has sent into the world, His own Son, Jesus Christ, who alone gives forgiveness and eternal life.

Friends, our soul will never die. Again, soul is basically synonymous with *person*. From conception in my mother's womb, I am *nephesh*, a living person. It's not so much that I *have* a soul. The soul, which in some Bible texts seems to include the body, is who I am. It's the person I am.

Listen to Psalm 63:1, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water."

Yet here's the reality. My soul will never die, but it's prone to be distracted, and even deceived. That's why I must talk to it. Regularly. O my soul!

And here's one of the great challenges to the well-being of my soul. Because of the effect of sin on my soul, I'm prone to give my feelings and emotions too high of a status in the inner workings of my soul.

This is a basic reality. It's why some of you have yet to become children of God, even though you have heard His invitation many times. You're waiting to feel something. I remember talking with a man, explaining the gospel to him, and inviting him to believe in Christ and be saved. But his response? "I just don't feel it."

Martyn Lloyd-Jones provides excellent counsel for such a person: "We are never told anywhere in Scripture that we are saved by our feelings; we are told that we are saved by believing. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.' Never once are feelings put into the primary position."⁸

⁶ Durst, D. (2016). [Soul](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

⁷ I hesitate to use the term "part", because of its Greek connotations. But I do so in the sense that Jesus did, when he talked about loving God "with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength."

⁸ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, from chapter eight, "Feelings."

If you are waiting on a feeling, my non-Christian friend, wait no longer. Here's what you need to do. Say these words, "O my soul! The King has given you an invitation to enter His family. He says that He will forgive you if you will repent and believe in His Son who died in your place and conquered the grave for your justification. It's time to believe the King, O my soul!"

This is how we are saved, and this is how we are to live, too, by exhorting ourselves to believe what we say we believe!

What should we do, my Christian friend, when we feel downcast and defeated?

Listen again to Lloyd-Jones:

"This is something we can do. I cannot make myself happy, but I can remind myself of my belief. I can exhort myself to believe, I can address my soul as the Psalmist did in Psalm 42: 'Why art thou cast down O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou' . . . believe thou, trust thou. That is the way. And then our feelings will look after themselves. Do not worry about them. Talk to yourself, and though the devil will suggest that because you do not feel, you are not a Christian, say: 'No, I do not feel anything, but whether I feel or not, I believe the Scriptures. I believe God's Word is true and I will stay my soul on it, I will believe in it come what may'. Put belief in the first place, hold on to it."⁹

Dear friend, if you're struggling, God has given you precisely what you need. Listen to the psalmist. This is what's needed. Have a conversation with yourself right now, and say these words. Say them meaningfully, purposefully, and intensely. "O my soul!" Take advantage of this grace-gift and rouse your distracted and deluded soul. Refuse to keep living by those feelings that have dominated you for so long.

You say, "But I feel like a slave to these powerful feelings that are paralyzing me."

Indeed, according to the Bible, that's exactly what you have become. A slave. You need a new master. And this is why, having said "O my soul!", you must quickly move on to, "O Lord my God!", and ask Him to do what He alone has the power to do, to set your soul free.

You say, "Can you be more specific? What specifically do I say to God as I engage in this battle for the well-being of my soul?"

Good question! And the answer brings us to point three. We learn from the Psalms that we must talk...to ourselves...*in specific ways*.

III. We learn from the Psalms that we must talk to ourselves in specific ways.

What are these specific ways? The Lord has kindly given us six examples to show us the kinds of conversations we need to be having with our souls. I want us to look at each of these one at a time, but first, just listen to the subject matter of these six conversations.

- A. We learn from Psalm 42-43 that we must talk to ourselves **when life is hard**.
- B. We learn from Psalm 103 that we must talk to ourselves **when life is good**.
- C. We learn from Psalm 104 that we must talk to ourselves **when God seems small**.
- D. We learn from Psalm 62 that we must talk to ourselves **when people attack us**.
- E. We learn from Psalm 116 that we must talk to ourselves **when God delivers us**.
- F. We learn from Psalm 146 that we must talk to ourselves **when we're not sure who to trust**.

And I don't think this list is comprehensive. I think the lesson the Lord is giving us in the Psalms is that we cannot afford to coast and passively let our feelings control us. Instead, we need to talk to ourselves, and do it frequently and in all situations.

⁹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, from chapter eight, "Feelings."

So is your life going well right now? Then you better be speaking to your soul. Are you frustrated? Then it's time for some "O my soul". Are you happy? Then speak to your soul. Are you sad? Again, start talking. Fearful? Hurting? Angry? Start talking! And say what? The Lord shows us the kinds of things He wants us to say.

A. We learn from Psalm 42-43 that we must talk to ourselves when life is hard.

Psalm 42-43 may originally have been one psalm. It's a song with three movements with the same refrain repeated after each movement.

In movement one, verses 1-4, the psalmist talks to God and about God, and expresses his thirst for God. Apparently, he's not able to go to the temple and he's remembering "how I would go with the throng...to the house of God" (4). That's a frustrating thing for a child of God, to *not* be able to gather for public worship. You can get pretty depressed if you're not able to do what you long to do.

It's at this point that the psalmist bursts into his first refrain in verses 5-6a, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation, and my God."

In the second movement, verses 6-10, he talks again about God, calling Him "my rock," and shares what he's been saying to God, such as, "Why have you forgotten me (9)?" And what others have been saying to him, "Where is your God (10)?"

So what are you going to do when you feel forgotten by the One who's been The Rock in your life in past, and when the critics are stirring the pot by questioning His very existence? This is what you must do, what the psalmist did as he repeats the refrain in verse 11, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

Then in the third movement, Psalm 43:1-4, he asks God to vindicate him (1), affirms that "You are the God in whom I take refuge (2)," and then anticipates when he will next go to the house of "God my exceeding joy (4)." And what will he do once there? "I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God."

Then comes the refrain again, as he ends his prayer-song in verse 5, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

Have you ever been downcast, my friend? Hurting. Overwhelmed. You can hardly think straight. This is so helpful.

What should I do when life is hard? The psalmist shows me that I must talk to myself in three ways.

1. *I must ask myself why I am downcast.* It's such a simple thing, but vital. When I'm downcast, I cannot afford to be passive. I need to ask myself some questions, namely, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?"

You say, "I already know that answer! It's because I'm hurting!"

But that's not the answer. Is it possible to be hurting and *not* downcast? Indeed, it is. Look at Paul in the jail in Philippi, with his back bloodied from the unjust beating he'd just endured. What's he doing? Singing!

How does that happen? How can you sing when you're hurting? Paul did what the psalmist did, and it's what I must do. After asking myself why I am downcast...

2. *I must tell myself to hope in God.* "Put your hope in God," says the NIV. Or to put it another way, "Put your trust in God, O my soul. Your total trust."

Will that help? Sure it will, O my soul. How do I know? Because God will make this problem go away? No, my soul, not necessarily. Things may get better, or worse, as they did for my Savior, all the way to His cross.

O my soul, listen carefully. The reason I must choose right now to put my hope in God is because of this. “I will yet praise Him, my Savior, and my God.” There’s why I trust Him. He is *my Savior*.

He saved me from my sins, O my soul! Don’t you remember? Don’t you remember when I was lost, and heading for hell, and He saved me, not because I deserved it, but because He’s so gracious? And if He would give His Son for me, O my soul, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give me all things that I need.

Oh yes, that’s right, responds my soul. I’d lost sight of that. He is my Savior!

Good, O my soul! But there’s more to think about. Don’t you remember, my soul, how He’s helped me through many other challenges in life? Remember how He gave me that job when I desperately needed a job, and healed my wife when she was sick, and comforted me when I lost my mom, and restored my marriage when we were struggling? Don’t you remember, O my soul?

O yes, I do now, says my soul. Thanks for reminding me! But what should I do now? O my soul, here’s what I recommend...

3. *I must remind myself that I will again praise the God who is my salvation.*

Yes! That’s what I’ll do. I will praise Him, for He is God my Savior. And when? I’m going to do that the next time He allows me to gather at His house with His people. I’m going to praise Him. And I’m going to do that forever and ever when I’m living with Him in a new heaven and new earth, where there’s no more hurting like I’m feeling now.

But why wait, O my soul? If that’s going to happen *then*, why not praise Him right now?!

Back in the mid-1700s, Katharina A. von Schlegel wrote a hymn in which she put into practice what we’re learning from the Psalms.¹⁰

*Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In every change, He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heav’nly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

*Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake
To guide the future, as He has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know
His voice Who ruled them while He dwelt below.*

*Be still, my soul: when dearest friends depart,
And all is darkened in the vale of tears,
Then shalt thou better know His love, His heart,
Who comes to soothe thy sorrow and thy fears.
Be still, my soul: thy Jesus can repay
From His own fullness all He takes away.*

*Be still, my soul: the hour is hast’ning on
When we shall be forever with the Lord.*

¹⁰ https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Be_Still_My_Soul/

*When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.*

*Be still, my soul: begin the song of praise
On earth, believing, to Thy Lord on high;
Acknowledge Him in all thy words and ways,
So shall He view thee with a well-pleased eye.
Be still, my soul: the Sun of life divine
Through passing clouds shall but more brightly shine.*

Make It Personal: Let's do, as did the hymnist, as did the psalmist. Let's resolve to make "O my soul" a regular part of our vocabulary.

B. We learn from Psalm 103 that we must talk to ourselves when life is good.

You wouldn't think that we'd need to self-counsel when life is good, but we do, every bit as much as when life is hard. Why? What are we prone to do when life is good? We're prone to forget the One who made it so good!

Listen to Psalm 103:1-5, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, ³ who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ⁵ who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

What do I need to say to myself when life is good? Two things.

1. *I must tell myself to bless the Lord, and especially His name (1, 22).* The psalmist does this twice in Psalm 103. He begins verse 1, "Bless the LORD, O my soul." And he ends the psalm the same way in verse 22, "Bless the LORD, O my soul." These two commands are like two bookends to this psalm, and in the rest of the psalm he does what he exhorts himself to do. He blesses the Lord!

Specifically, He blesses His holy name. What is His name? We don't see it in our English Bibles, but the psalmist just gave His name. Bless *Yahweh* (LORD). That is God's covenant name. He is the I AM THAT I AM who met with Moses at the burning bush and redeemed Israel out of bondage.

The self-counsel to bless His name is counsel that says, "Remember who He is! He is the Holy One, and there's none like Him!"

But there's another reason to bless Him, not just for who He is, but for what He's done. This brings us to the second "O my soul" in verse 2, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

2. *I must remind myself of His benefits (2-5).* It's so important to remind ourselves to remember! Why? Because we're so prone to forget, to take for granted what our God does for us, past and present.

The psalmist reminds himself of five particular benefits, and we should do the same.

- who forgives all your iniquity
- who heals all your diseases
- who redeems your life from the pit
- who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy
- who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's

Friends, this is what He does for us (these verbs are present tense), and we must remind ourselves continually. He forgives our iniquity, all of it! If we're in Christ, there's not one sin He holds against us. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

He heals all our diseases. All of them. But wait, how can that be? Sometimes God's people get sick and die, don't they? Yes. Then what happened to them? He took them to heaven, and they're not sick anymore! He either heals us now, or then, but He always heals our diseases. Ten thousand years from now we will bless the One who healed all our diseases. So do it now, O my soul!

What else should we not forget? A third benefit. He redeems my life from the pit (AV "from destruction"). This applies in two ways. When He saved us, He rescued from the eternal pit of destruction, for which we certainly bless His name! But He doesn't stop there. He's still rescuing us from the pits we find ourselves in during this life. Which means we have continual, ongoing reasons to bless Him.

E.g.—

Here's a fourth benefit that comes from our gracious God. He crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. To crown speaks of royalty. You put a crown on a king or queen. That's what our God does with us. But does He put on our head? His "loving kindness and tender mercies" (AV). Wow! He does not treat us as we deserve. To the contrary, He delights in always being kind and gracious and merciful towards us.

How many meals did He provide for you in the past seven days? How many enjoyable conversations did you have with your family and friends? Did you experience anything pleasant this past week, read any good book, enjoy the beauty of snow falling? Why did we experience these blessings? They came from Him, and they came specifically because He has chosen to crown us with His unfailing love and mercy! And for this we say, O my soul, bless the Lord!

And one more. He *satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's*. Some of us have been experiencing this so long that we forget what it used to be like, what it's still like for the multitudes all around us who are *not satisfied*. Our God satisfies us. With what? With good! With good things, says the AV. And what's the outcome? Renewal. He renews our youth, like He does with the eagle.

Psalm 92:14 says this about God's people, "They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green."

So when God sends a blessing our way, what should we do with it? Many things, including, enjoy the blessing, and use it for His glorious kingdom purposes. But here's one thing we must tell ourselves never to do. Forget. Forget not all His benefits.

What happens if don't? What happens when we fail to remind ourselves of these benefits? What happens is that we become smug and complacent and proud and stale. Don't let that happen, O my soul!

C. We learn from Psalm 104 that we must talk to ourselves when God seems small.

It's interesting what happens in Psalm 104. The psalmist begins by saying, "Praise the Lord, O my soul." He tells his soul to praise the Lord, and then he does just that in verses 2-34. He praises the Lord, not just with his mouth, but with his inner being, his heart, the unseen soul.

And why is He doing this? We don't exactly what was happening in the psalmist's life. But I do know this. He was facing the same challenge we all face living in the world. It's captured in the title of the book written by Ed Welch, *When People are Big and God Is Small*. God is big, there's none greater. But we can't see Him, and we're

prone to allow other things, tiny little specks when compared to Him, become great in our eyes. It could be people. It could be a job, or a relationship, or a lot of other things. But we become so fixated with it that God becomes small.

So what should we do? We need to talk to ourselves when God seems small. And what should I talk about? Two wonderful subjects.

1. *I must tell myself to praise God for His greatness (1, 35b).*
2. *I must tell myself to reflect on His great works (2-35a).*

That's what the psalmist does in these 35 verses. He slows down and calls upon His soul to praise God for His greatness and reflect on His great works.

Oh, how important this is! And here's a specific reason. When God is small in our thinking, what happens when you pray? For most of us, what happens is that we start talking to God and then quickly move to other things. This particularly happens when we're facing hardship and hurting. We start to pray, but then we begin to rehash the pain situation we're in, and then try to solve the problem in our heads. It's like a broken record. It might sound like this...

"Lord, I need Your help right now. I don't know how we're going to make it this month. The bills keep piling up. And the kids keep fighting. And...where is that water bill anyway? And why is it so high this month? Maybe we've got a leak somewhere. I need to get to the hardware store and fix that leaky faucet. And maybe the time-out chair isn't working like it used to. I guess it's time to ground those kids. Oh well, thanks for listening, Lord." Honey! Has that toilet been running all night?!

Friends, often we're just not ready to talk with God. We need to take about thirty seconds and do what the psalmist did three times in this prayer. He talked to himself to rouse his soul from playing that broken record again, so that the prayer-conversation was truly to God and about God rather than a rehearsal of the problem.

D. We learn from Psalm 62 that we must talk to ourselves when people attack us.

Listen to Psalm 62:5-7, "For God alone, **O my soul**, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. ⁶ He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. ⁷ On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God."

For the sake of time we won't develop this psalm other than to say this. The psalmist was hurting, in part, because people were attacking him. So how did he deal with it? He talked to his soul, and then to God about it. As must we.

1. *I must tell myself to wait in silence for God alone (5a).*
2. *I must remind myself that my hope comes from God who is my rock (5b-7).*

Here's a confession. Sundays are glorious days for a pastor. They are also opportunities for the pastor to practice "O my soul."

I remember preaching one Sunday morning and heading to the back door to greet people. A faithful member of the church approached me and tapped his watch. "Went a little long today," he said to me.

I don't recall what I said to him. I probably just said thank you for the...helpful feedback...and reached for the next hand to shake. But I do recall the kinds of thoughts that began to flood my mind, like, "Oh yea, if you'd just listen instead of dosing off, I could finish sooner since I wouldn't have to keep repeating myself."

Not really. Actually, the conversation I needed to have immediately wasn't with him. And frankly, until I had it, I wouldn't be much company to my wife and kids that afternoon.

It's the same conversation you need to have, ladies, when you work hard and prepare a meal for your family, and hear the response, "I don't like this. Why don't you cook something I like?"

The first conversation you and I need to have is, "O my soul! Why are you downcast?" Then, "O my Lord! I'm struggling right now. Please help me to respond in a way that pleases You, as Your Son did when He was mistreated." And then, after those two conversations, it *may* be time for (I say *may* because most of the time love covers a multitude of sins), "O my people, it's time for us to have a little chat."

E. We learn from Psalm 116 that we must talk to ourselves when God delivers us.

Notice Psalm 116:7, "Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you." I like how the NIV puts it, "Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you."

Notice the flow of the verse. "Be at rest once more, O my soul." What's the intended effect of God's care for us? Rest for the soul. What does that mean? A soul at rest is a soul no longer in turmoil. A resting soul is a trusting soul. It's like a weaned child.

That's the picture we find in Psalm 131. Listen to this wonderful psalm:

"A SONG OF ASCENTS. OF DAVID. ¹ O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. ² But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. ³ O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore."

Notice "O Lord" in verse 1. And notice "O Israel" in verse 3. How is it that this man of God has something meaningful to say to his people? It's because of some soul work that happens in verse 2. "I have quieted my soul. I have become like a weaned child with its mother. That's what my soul is like, like a weaned child."

What's true of a weaned child? Before it's weaned, a baby wants momma because of what she can do for him. Give me milk. Change my diaper. Put a blanket on me. But once weaned, the baby learns that momma is more than a supplier of goods. She is a person who loves me. And I love her, not simply because she does things for me, but because I have a relationship with her. I am hers, and she is mine.

My friends, we must engage in this kind of soul work every day. And it requires talking to ourselves. And when God delivers us, we acknowledge His amazing goodness.

This is what happens in Psalm 116. We gain a couple of insights.

1. *I am permitted to ask the Lord to deliver my soul (4).*
2. *I must tell my soul to acknowledge the Lord's goodness when He does (7-8).*

F. We learn from Psalm 146 that we must talk to ourselves when we're not sure who to trust.

Listen to Psalm 146:1, "Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!" We've heard these words in the previous psalms, but this is a different situation. This time the psalmist is saying them because he isn't sure who to trust. We know that because he gives the exhortation in verse 3, "Put not your trust in princes."

When we're struggling with knowing who to trust, we need to self-counsel. And what should we say? Two things.

1. *I must tell myself to praise the Lord as long as I live (1-2).*
2. *I must remind myself (and others) that people will pass away, but He will always be there (3-10).*

Friends, this is reality in a post-Genesis 3 world. At times we sin. At other times we're sinned against. And when either happens, we often end up with a sin-sick, troubled soul.

But our God has given us what we need. He's given us the Psalter, which is like a medicine chest for the soul. He's also given us another source of medicine. This one isn't inspired, as the Psalms are, but it's very helpful.

It's the hymnal. For centuries God's people have been doing the kind of soul-work we've just seen the psalmist do, and some of them have written down their spiritual remedies.

For instance, a Swedish preacher, Carl Boberg, penned these words, later translated and adapted into English by a British minister, Stuart Hine: "Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee, how great Thou art, how great Thou art!"

Here's another.¹¹ In 1834 Henry Francis Lyte wrote this hymn:

*Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet your tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
evermore his praises sing.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Praise the everlasting King!*¹²

Here's one by Joachim Neander (in the 1600s), translated by Catherine Winkworth (in the 1800s):¹³

*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!
Come, all who hear; now to his temple draw near,
join me in glad adoration.*

In 1961, Timothy Dudley-Smith, who served in the Church of England, wrote a hymn, "Tell Out, My Soul." Here are the first two verses:¹⁴

*Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his Word;
in God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.*

*Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name, the Lord, the Mighty One.*

Here's one that may be new to you, but it was written by Isaac Watts around 1700.¹⁵

*Begin, my tongue, some heavenly theme,
And speak some boundless thing,*

¹¹ From *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, #3

¹² https://hymnary.org/text/praise_my_soul_the_king_of_heaven

¹³ From *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, #8

¹⁴ From *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, #27

¹⁵ From *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, #70

*The mighty works or mightier Name
Of our eternal King.*

*Tell of His wondrous faithfulness
And sound His power abroad;
Sing the sweet promise of His grace,
The love and truth of God.*

*His very word of grace is strong
As that which built the skies;
The voice that rolls the stars along
Speaks all the promises.*

*O might I hear Thy heavenly tongue
But whisper, "Thou art mine,"
Those gentle words should raise my song
To notes almost divine.*

Charles Wesley wrote this self-counsel in 1742:¹⁶

*Arise, my soul, arise,
shake off your guilty fears;
the bleeding Sacrifice
in my behalf appears.
Before the throne my Surety stands,
before the throne my Surety stands;
my name is written on his hands,
my name is written on his hands.*

In 1851 Matthew Bridges wrote this exhortation to his soul, and ours:

*Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne.
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless king
through all eternity.¹⁷*

Earlier I mentioned, "Be Still, My Soul."¹⁸ Here is, "Be Calm, My Soul," written in 1959 by Gloria Roe.

*Be calm my soul, faint not with care
Though burdens deep our hearts would tear
He is the Lord, all He commands
He holdeth me safe in His hands.*

¹⁶ From *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, #199

¹⁷ From *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, #234

¹⁸ From *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, #347

*Be calm my soul, melt not in fear
Though shadows dark press in so near
Yet in despair I see His light
Lead me, O Lord with wond'rous sight.*

*Be calm my soul, rest in Him sure
No wave of doubt His words endure
My longing soul is satisfied
He now leads forth, my Strength and my Guide.¹⁹*

Make It Personal: Let's resolve to make "O my soul" a regular part of our vocabulary.

Closing Song (in the AM): #347 "*Be Still, My Soul*" (all three verses)

Communion (at the end of the AM service)

When we come to the Lord's table, we're coming to remember our Savior and what He endured in order to save us. It's interesting that the Bible doesn't record the Lord Jesus ever saying, "O my soul." He likely did, for He fulfilled the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. But the truth is, He didn't need to say, "O my soul," for His soul was never distracted, and certainly never deceived, like ours so often is.

But we do hear Him talking about His soul. During His passion week He said in John 12:27–28, "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour."²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

He said His soul was troubled. Never has a soul felt the depth of such trouble, as He anticipated the terrible agonies of the coming cross.

Then, just hours before He was crucified, He was in Gethsemane and said this to Peter, James, and John in Matthew 26:38–39, "'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.'³⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.'"

A troubled soul. A soul full of sorrow even until death. This was the cup He had come to drink, in obedience to His Father. He, the Perfect One, would save sinners by taking their place, their sin, their punishment. And then He would give those sinners His righteousness, His forgiveness, and a place in His forever family.

And He drank that cup, which is why we gather to drink this cup. Communion is for sinners who have put their total trust in this Savior and what He accomplished. We are saved, not by our works, but by His work, by grace alone, through faith alone.

Have you repented and received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? Then this is for you. It's time to remember, to say, "O my soul, remember what He did for you."

We're told in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, "The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

¹⁹ From *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, #421