

Teaching Plan  
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: August 27, 2017  
Lesson Title: "The Longing"  
Lesson Passage: Psalm 42:1-11

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Psalms 42 and 43 are very similar in thought and language. (For instance, the same refrain appears in 42:5 and 43:5.) Both psalms seem to voice the longing of a pilgrim who, for some reason, has been prevented from going to the sanctuary to worship, and is lonely for the presence of God. (Refer to "*when shall I come and appear before God?*" in 42:2 and "*let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to your Temple*" in 43:3.) But what has kept him from worshiping at the Temple? We cannot be sure of his situation; but, perhaps he was a refugee or one of the exiles, forced to dwell far from his native land. (Ps. 42:6 suggests that he might have been dwelling in Northern Palestine, near Mount Hermon.) On the other hand, perhaps he had been kept away from the Temple by an extended illness. Whatever the reason, he yearns for the presence of God and, in fact, concludes Psalm 42 with an expression of certainty, born of faith, that he shall yet have the opportunity to praise God.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Explain why the psalmist was unhappy.
- (2) Point out evidence that his faith had not wavered.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

*Ask class members to recall times of loneliness in their lives. Then share these ideas: Loneliness can be brought on by many different circumstances. EXAMPLES: Moving away from home. Being confined to a hospital bed. Losing cherished friends. Then suggest that there is yet another kind of loneliness, the loneliness one feels when God seems far away. Observe that this kind of loneliness comes out in sharp relief in Psalms 42 (also Psalm 43.)*

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Suggest that the psalmist in Psalms 42 is experiencing the kind of loneliness that a devout person feels when he can't seem to communicate with God. Explain: The Jews venerated the Temple because they believed it was where they could best connect with God. Apart from Temple worship, they felt alienated from the Divine Presence. For some reason, the writer of Psalm 42 has been unable to worship in the Temple. We can only speculate on the nature of his circumstances. What he says in Ps. 42:5b suggests the possibility that he is living to the far north of Palestine near Mt. Hermon (42:5b), and has been prevented by illness from making his usual pilgrimage to Jerusalem during an annual festival.*

2. *Comment on the psalmist's use of a vivid word-pictures to express his longing for communion with God in 42:1-2:* (1) In the arid terrain of southern Palestine, a deer on the run could be driven by parching thirst to search for a stream of "living water" (a perennial stream that does not dry up during a summer's drought). Similarly, the misfortunes that have kept the psalmist from the Temple have intensified his yearning for God. (2) "My soul thirsts for God" (v. 2) implies that communion with God is not a mild refreshment, but is as indispensable to life as food and drink. (3) "The living God" (v. 2) might imply a contrast with the lifeless stone and wooden idols of the psalmist's opponents. NOTE: In Jer. 17:13 the Lord is referred to as "the fountain of living waters."

3. *Refer to Ps. 42:3, where the psalmist elaborates on his frustrating plight:* (1) Here he complains that men taunt him with the question "Where is your God?" because they see his sickness as a sign that God has forsaken him. (2) This sarcastic question was frequently found on the lips of the enemies of God's people (*for example, refer to Psalm 79:10, Ps. 115:2, Joel 2:17 and Micah 7:10*). The answer they expected, of course, was that God was to be found nowhere, or that he was not concerned with the sufferings of His servant.

4. *Explain Ps. 42:6-8:* (1) "My soul is cast down within me" (v. 6) echoes the question in v. 5, "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" (2) The reason for his despondent mood is that he remembers the happier days when he led a band of pilgrims to the Temple in Jerusalem (42:4). But now he is far away in "the land of Jordan and Hermon" (Mt. Hermon is on the southern spur of the Lebanon range. This is "the land of Jordan" because the sources of the Jordan River are located in this region.) (3) "Deep calls to deep" refers to the torrents of Jordan waters descending from the rocks; but the psalmist is using this metaphor to describe his troubles and misfortunes, as suggested by the wording in v. 7b, "all thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." (4) But even in his remote location, far from Jerusalem, the psalmist realizes that he is not out of the reach of God's love. For he declares in v. 8, "By day the Lord sends me his love, that I might have a song (a prayer) at night" (42:8).

5. *Comment on Psalm 43:3-5: He expresses once again his longing to go to "the holy hill" (Zion, in Jerusalem) and worship at the altar there.* Then, in Ps. 43:5, he asks himself, "Why in the world am I in such despair? For I know that, once again, I will praise God in His sanctuary."

#### CLOSING THE LESSON

*Suggested application:* We all know persons who are unable to attend worship services because they are bedfast or confined in nursing homes, and, like the psalmist, they long to be in the house of the Lord once again. Perhaps the words of Jesus in Matt. 25:36 should encourage us to bring "Zion" to people in such limiting circumstances.

