Preaching Series: Eight Factors in Life Transformation
Sermon Title: Seeking God

Text: Psalm 42:1-43:5 -- As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?"4 These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival. 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 6 and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore, I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.7 Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.8 By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.9 I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"10 As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?" 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. (Chapter 43) Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! 2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? 3 Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! 4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God. 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.

Introduction: My grandsons (***MJ and Beckham***) and I love to play **hide-and-seek** together. Sometimes I'm the one who hides, but most of the time it's them. Unfortunately, they don't yet seem to understand the real object of the game…***that I'm actually supposed to look until I find them***. Normally, it goes something like this. I begin to growl like a T-Rex and that's the signal to run and hide. Often they just duck under some pillows on the couch or the bed. Unfortunately, the game doesn't last too long, because they rarely stay hidden until I can find them. Oh, I will walk around and make some sort of show that I'm desperately looking for them. I'll ask the usual questions, "***Hmmm. I wonder if they're behind the door. No…maybe they're in the closet. No…***" But then, before I can discover their hiding place, they will jump out and come running up to me and say, "***Grandpa! We're right here.***" No matter how many times we play, they always seem to do the same thing. They haven't seemed to learn yet that the fun of hide-and-seek is in the SEEKING. And that's because, for MJ and Beckham, no matter how many times we play, the fun part is always in the FINDING. You know, now that I think about it, I wonder if they're the ones who have it right. **The fun isn't in the seeking, but the finding, because it means that when I find them, I'm going to tickle both until they can't**

take it any longer. Think about it. If they were so good at hiding that I couldn't find either one, eventually I would get bored, give up, and they would too.

IT OCCURS TO ME THIS MORNING THAT THIS IS NOT JUST THE WAY IT IS WHEN WE PLAY HIDE AND SEEK WITH OUR GRANDCHILDREN, BUT IT'S THE SAME WAY WHEN IT COMES TO OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. ***Seeking Him is only enjoyable if we actually find Him in the process***. We know from the Bible that God wants us to seek him, but it's important for us to remember that the real joy is not in the SEEKING, but in the FINDING. ***God wants to be found*** (**Matthew 7:7 – Seek and you will find**). He never intended for the Christian life to be an impossible hunt for an elusive God. On the contrary, it is a simple walk to a welcoming God that reveals Himself because He longs to be found by us.

This is the third message in the series, "***Eight Factors in Life Transformation***." These messages have been based on a study performed by **LifeWay Research** of 1,000 pastors and 4,000 churchgoers in North America regarding the attributes they believe convictional Christians share in common. They include: **(1)** ***Unashamed*** – which measures how open believers are in living out their Christian faith in the world and in the church. **(2)** ***Exercising Faith*** by trusting in God's perfect plan for our lives knowing that even our trials are meant for a good purpose – to increase our faith. **(3)** ***Sharing Christ***; **(4)** ***Serving the Lord***; **(5)** ***Building*** (*meaningful*) ***Relationships***; **(6)** ***Obeying God and Denying Self***; **(7)** ***Engaging in God's Word***. AND THIS MORNING I INVITE YOU TO JOIN ME AS WE CONSIDER … **(8)** ***Seeking God***. Now let's jump right into it.

If we're honest with ourselves, it's not that difficult to seek God when you sense that He is showering down blessings upon you. After all, who wouldn't want to draw near to someone who doles out good things right and left every time you do? THE REAL CHALLENGE IS TO LEARN TO SEEK GOD, WHEN, FOR ANY NUMBER OF REASONS, YOU'RE HAVING TROUBLE EVEN HEARING HIS VOICE, LET ALONE BEING COMFORTED BY HIS PRESENCE. This morning I'd like to spend some time with you in **Psalm 42 and the first part of Psalm 43,** written by **one of the Sons of Korah, a tribe of the Levites who were charged with the performance of temple music.** This unnamed author felt like he was playing some sort of spiritual hide and seek with God. While battling very difficult circumstances of his own, he sought God's intervention, yet didn't find Him as quickly as he'd hoped**. THE RESULT WAS WHAT WE MIGHT CALL 'SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION.'** Let's see if we can identify some of its causes and the cure that God provided for this godly man.

The Causes of Spiritual Depression. Both **Psalm 42 and 43** deal with SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION. THAT'S WHY THEY SHARE THE REPEATED REFRAIN, "**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 these verses we're given ***five reasons*** for the kind of spiritual malaise that believers sometimes encounter.

- **The Sense that God is Distant** (**Psalm 42:1-2, 6 -- As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? VERSE 6 -- My soul is cast down within me; therefore, I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar**). Though we don't know the name of the person who wrote this Psalm, we know at least some of what was bothering him. He was far from Jerusalem and the temple worship he so enjoyed there on Mount Zion. **In a very real sense, he felt cut-off from God**. So much so, in fact, that he identified with a deer that pants for flowing streams of water, longing to have its thirst satisfied. In **verse six** he indicates that he's writing from "***the land of Jordan and Hermon, from Mt. Mizar***." This was the region beyond the Jordan River to the north and east. It was pretty far from Jerusalem. Some have suggested that if a traveler were headed east in the direction of Babylon, **this was the last point from which a person might catch a glimpse of the familiar mountains of his homeland to the south**. So, the Psalmist is far from home and feels distant from God. The fact that he was a Levite who was to help with Temple music yet was unable to do so, probably added to his sense of alienation from the Lord. TO HIM, GOD FELT VERY DISTANT.
- **The Taunts of Unbelievers** (**Psalm 42:3, 9-10 -- My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?" – VERSES 9-10 -- I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"10 As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?"**). Far away from Jerusalem (*and perhaps his beloved Israel*), ***the Psalmist was surrounded by unbelievers***. They chided and taunted him constantly, "***Where is your God?***" **This MUST have caused him a lot of PERSONAL PAIN**. In ancient times when a people suffered, it was believed that their god was EITHER **unloving** and didn't care to do anything to help them, or worse, that he was **impotent** and lacked the power to deliver them. Either way God's seeming failure to come to the Psalmist's aid, left him open to all kinds of mocking comments from those who worshipped idols and false gods. (**Review: The sense that God felt distant; The taunts of unbelievers.**)
- **The Memories of Better Days** (**Psalm 42:4 -- These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival**). It's as if he's saying, "***Remember the good ole days***? ***I used to join the multitudes as we approached the temple for worship. In fact, I would lead them and we'd all be shouting and praising God. It was really something to behold***!" **Psalm 150** captures some of this: **Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His might heavens! Praise Him for His mighty deeds; praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with trumpet sound; praise Him with lute and harp! Praise Him with tambourine and dance; praise Him with strings and pipe! Praise Him with sounding cymbals; praise Him with LOUD CLASHING CYMBALS! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord**! These were among his best memories, but at a time when he felt distant from God and was taunted by

unbelievers, they did not bring him much comfort. Rather, they may have added to his depression because they were only memories and not part of his present experience.

- **The Overwhelming Trials of Life** (**Psalm 42:7-8 -- Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.8 By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life**). This is what the Psalmist is referring to when he writes of **the waves and breakers that have swept over him**. He does not fill us in as to what they were, but it is safe to assume they had something to do with the adverse circumstances he faced being away from Jerusalem. At the very point that he wrote these words he may have been sitting beside a mountain stream with its waterfalls and currents. At any other time, they might have provoked him to give thanks to God for their beauty, but under his current circumstances they only reminded him of the difficulties he faced.

  A while back I heard the story of the elderly lady was well known for her faith and for her boldness in talking about it. She would stand on her front porch and shout, "***Praise the Lord***!" Next door to her lived an atheist who would get so angry at her proclamations he would shout, "***There ain't no Lord***!" Hard times set in on the elderly lady and she prayed for God to send her some assistance. She stood on her porch and shouted, "***Praise the Lord! God, I need FOOD! I am having a hard time. Please, Lord, send me some groceries***! The next morning, the lady went out on her porch and saw a large bag of groceries and shouted, "***Praise the Lord***!" The atheist neighbor jumped from behind a bush and said, "***Ha Ha!! I told you there was no Lord. I bought those groceries. God didn't***." The lady started jumping up and down and clapping her hands and saying, "***PRAISE THE LORD! He not only sent me groceries, but He got the devil pay for them***!" Not everyone is like that little old lady and has the ability to see the hand of the Lord in everything. Sometimes though the blessings might be right there in us, spiritual depression can limit us to focusing only on the pain that life brings.
- **The Unjust Attacks of Others** (**Psalm 43:1-2 – Vindicate me O God and defend my cause against ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! 2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?**). We know these attacks are unjust because the Psalmist prays for ***vindication***. The word means to "CLEAR OF ACCUSATION OR BLAME." Evidently ungodly people were the source of these assaults on his character. I suspect that any of us who have attempted to walk with the Lord for even a year or two, have also been subjected to something similar. Jesus warned in **John 15:19-20**, "**If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you**."

Of course, these are the only causes of spiritual depression. Here are a few others identified by Martin Lloyd Jones not found in the text: temperament, physical health, spiritual attack, unbelief, an emotional letdown.

The Cure for Spiritual Depression (**Psalm 43:3-5 -- Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! 4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God. 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**). If you're in the company of the Psalmist and mentally battling spiritual depression today, the solution is to renew your zeal to seek God. Here is a twofold solution for you to consider.

- **TALK TO GOD**. The man who penned this Psalm prayed, "**Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me**." "***Light***" refers to the mercy or favor of God. It's as if he's praying that in this time of darkness, God would show him favor and restore him to the light. When coupled with the "***truth***" which here has to do with God's promise to keep His Word, **the Psalmist is asking God to demonstrate His faithfulness to him as one of His people by restoring to him the privileges and blessings that were previously his**. Does the Psalmist believe this prayer will bring about the desired result? **NOTICE THE PROGRESSION**: In the latter half of **verse three** and then in **verse four**, he expresses his confidence that God's light and truth that will lead to **the mountain of God** *(Mount Zion)*, **the temple of God** *(on Mount Zion)*, **the altar of God** (*in the midst of the Temple*) and ultimately the presence of God.
- **TALK TO YOURSELF**. **Verses five and eleven in chapter forty-two and verse five in chapter forty-three** all say the same thing. To get out of spiritual depression you must not only talk to God, but to yourself.
  1. **Ask Yourself**, "**Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil with in me*?***" This is not the power of positive thinking. It is the opportunity to ***correct wrong thoughts*** that occasionally supplant the truth.
  2. **Challenge Yourself**, "**Hope in God**…" There can be no lasting hope in anything or anyone else. In **Psalm 25:3**, King David says, "**No one whose hope is in you (the Lord) will ever be put to shame**."
  3. **Remind Yourself**, "**for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God**." Neither God nor His purposes for us has changed. We exist for His glory and so we shall praise Him for His salvation (**Ephesians 1:4-6—"In love, God predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace…**".

The Life Transformation Study: Christians on the path to spiritual maturity have a habit of seeking God through prayer and worship and not just in church but as a part of their daily lives.

- **73% of the respondents set aside time for prayer either every day or at least a few times a week**.
- **75% agree with the statement: I find myself praying at the spur of the moment throughout the day.**

- **<u>54%</u> said that they set aside time for private worship, praise or thanksgiving either every day or at least a few times a week**.
- **Women are slightly more likely than men to set aside time for prayer and private worship throughout the week**.
- **<u>78%</u> indicated that one of the main reasons why they live the way they do is to please and honor God**.
- Says **Ed Stetzer**, the president of LifeWay Research, "**Spiritual maturity is not an accident; seeking God speaks of intentionality—**(it identifies) **the believer who desire to know God in a deeper way and strives toward that goal**."

Conclusion: Seeking God is one of the eight characteristics of a convictional Christian. It is what marks us as people who realize that the Christian life is not so much about what we receive from the hand of God, as it is <u>learning to enjoy the presence of God</u>. It was King David who said, "**One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple** (**Psalm 27:4**). It isn't just kings or Levites who can enjoy this special privilege. Anyone can seek the Lord and find Him, especially in the difficult times of life. It's entirely up to us. While staying alone in her convent, an 85-year-old Catholic nun got trapped inside a broken elevator for ***four days and three nights*** (*sounds like a time share offer*). She tried pushing the inside elevator door, but the electricity went off. She had her cell phone with her, but there wasn't a signal. Fortunately, she had carried a jar of water, some celery sticks, and a few cough drops into the elevator. At first she said to herself, "***This can't happen!"*** But then she decided to turn her elevator into a personal prayer retreat. "***It was either panic or pray***," she later told an interviewer for CNN. **<u>She started viewing the experience as a *gift*</u>**. "***I believe that God's presence was my strength and my joy—really***," she said. "***I felt God's presence almost immediately. I felt like he provided the opportunity for a closer relationship***." May God raise up people like that 85-year-old nun right here at River Ridge Church, people who resolve to see personal struggles as opportunities to seek and find the Lord and draw closer to Him. This is, after all, what life transformation is all about.