

Music and Lyrics, II: “Tired of Livin’”

Reconnect – February 8, 2009

Text: Psalm 42(1-11)-43(1-5); Romans 8:38

Key Thought: When God seems far away, He’s actually closer than ever – if we can only keep on trusting Him.

Why am I discouraged? Why so sad?

I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again – my Saviour and my God! (Psalm 42/43, NLT)

Intro: Faith (George Michael)

- (I always wanted to start a service with THAT, too)
- You know, sometimes you have faith, and sometimes, even if you’ve got great scruff and ripped jeans and 80’s hair, well, sometimes, you just don’t
- Life can hit you hard – and maybe even worse, it starts to seem like you’re near the exit, because the people around you seem to start to leave – start to check out, start to move away from you
- But what do you do when it seems like God leaves? When it’s hard to have “faith, faith, fay-thuh”?
- Well, you sing the blues
- (Hey, that song was the blues, too – the Bo Diddley beat?)
- Thunk – a – thunk – a – thunk, a – thunk thunk?

Here today, gone tomorrow

- In theory, the question “How could God ever leave, when He’s everywhere, all the time?” is a good one
- But in practice, it’s all different – because so many times, when things are going well, it seems like God is close in your life – you sense Him, you think about Him, you think about how good He is and how fortunate you are
- But then, when times change and things get tough, it seems like he’s left
- John of the Cross, a 16th century Spanish mystic, called it the “Dark Night of the Soul”
- C.S. Lewis said it this way, in the most difficult time of his life, right after his wife had died:

But go to Him when your need is despicable, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double-bolting on the inside. After that, silence. (A Grief Observed)

- And it’s something that each of us seems to have in common when we get to a certain point in our relationship with God, regardless of the specific, individual circumstances
- Things were no different for those who would write the songs of the Bible

A Closer Look: Psalm 42/43

For the choir director: a psalm of the descendants of Korah

- Again, bringing it to community – honesty is welcomed and understood, not feared or suppressed
- “descendants of Korah” – a clan that had been appointed as the music leaders of the Temple worship from ancient times – it’s from the front lines

As the deer pants for streams of water, so I long for you, O God.

I thirst for God, the living God. When can I come and stand before him?

Day and night, I have only tears for food,

While my enemies continually taunt me, saying, “Where is this God of yours?”

- Thirst and hunger – two basic metaphors, gut feelings that we all share
- The singer feels this need for God on a fundamental level in the deepest part of himself – it’s not just head stuff or theoretical – this is very, very real
- But not only that – because as we see this mention of enemies, the writer has right off the bat identified themselves with *prey* – a thing that is on the run or in hiding its whole life
- “Where is this God of yours?” – sometimes we ask ourselves this question before anyone else does, but we tell ourselves, right or wrong, that everyone around us, watching us in our difficulties, is asking it to us – we almost feel like we have to answer it pre-emptively, positively, so no-one will get the “wrong idea” – which would be more accurate than wrong, actually

My heart is breaking as I remember how it used to be

I walked among the crowds of worshippers,

Leading a great procession to the house of God,

Singing for joy and giving thanks – it was the sound of a great celebration!

- They figure that the writer had been “exiled” – meaning forcibly resettled by a conquering, occupying army, that had overrun their land and destroyed their ways of life
- But whether they were the first person in the line or just identifying with the first person in line, they had known good times with God, and now those good times were only memories
- Remembering – me and all the records I’ve waded through this week, with the year transition at the Bank, and then even going through my own books and records yesterday
- You ask yourself over and over again, with everything you hold in your hands and read – what to discard and what to keep? What matters most?
- I have a hard time doing that with my books, because every one of them tells a story for me – they are either a part of my life or a reminder of a place and time in my life – and to get rid of one that I’ve had with me on my journey seems like throwing away a part of myself
- Things I’ve done, people I’ve shared my life with – sometimes the weight of the memories is a heavy load, especially when something’s been taken away – the loss of a loved one, or a job, or a relationship
- And it’s that way for the writer – they’re remembering times that may well be gone forever

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- The affirmation in the middle of this lament – in fact, it's documented that a whole lot of different cultures around Israel used the same sort of format for a lament – an individual prayer for help, poured out to a god who seemed to not be noticing
- So they took this format that everyone used – like v/c/v/c/c/b/c on the radio – and made it their own
- This is the chorus – we'll keep returning to this – but the singer chooses to come back to this, to make this the heart of their song, rather than the despair, it's the note of hope

Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember your kindness –

From Mount Hermon, the source of the Jordan,

From the land of Mount Mizar.

I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your waves and surging tides sweep over me.

- I tend to be one of those people who sees things in terms of right and wrong – and I can quickly get outraged at injustice, especially if I see it happening to someone I know, up close and personal – someone losing a job, or taking blame, or being ground up by something or other that's JUST NOT RIGHT
- But over the past 20 years, I've seen a couple of different reactions to the experience of injustice – one group has a way of getting past it – of choosing not to remember the worst of it, but to move forward
- The other group is much more tragic – I know people who have simply never gotten over the sense that they were mistreated or ripped off – and it has affected them every step of the way since – a lingering malaise, a moroseness that just doesn't go away – they get shipwrecked, and then they keep revisiting it every time they get close to getting off the rocks
- The writer has that kind of choice – to remember the bad, or the good – it's so easy to focus on the negative, perhaps it's even hardwired into our DNA, to remember our mistakes, to learn from them, to survive – but we must train ourselves to remember the good – I will yet put my hope in God, I will praise Him again

Through each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me,

And through each night I sing his songs, praying to God who gives me life.

- And then we reach the very centre of the song – a bridge, breaking the traditions and the constraints of the format
- God is closer than he feels or thinks – pouring out his love, strengthening the writer, while the writer pours out his heart all night, every night, asking for God to continue to give life

“O God my Rock,” I cry, “Why have you forsaken me?

Why must I wander in darkness, oppressed by my enemies?”

Their taunts pierce me like a fatal wound.

They scoff, “Where is this God of yours?”

- God wants to deepen our relationship with Him – for us to have a deeper appreciation and reliance on Him – when things go well, we don’t often have that hunger for Him – we can tend to coast – and it’s only the introduction of that absence that can really stir us again
- Imagine if you never left your house – if you never did, if you had everything you needed – you worked from home, everyone else did, you never left – how long would it be before the people you love the most drove you absolutely bonkers? Some of us would last longer than others – the home bodies – but eventually, we’d all go stir crazy and start to loathe each other – just like they do on Survivor or Big Brother or any of the other reality shows that involve sticking very different people together
- Being away from each other can make us love each other more – “I can’t miss you if you won’t leave ;)” – but God has no such luxury, being that He is everywhere, at once

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- Time has a way of bringing us some health – and hope returns – God gives us back our dream
- Mornings like this can be traced back to days and weeks spent in Steve and Sandy’s basement, wondering why I was so discouraged, so sad – and trying to put my hope in God, trying to confidently or not-so-confidently say that one day I would praise God again, one day I would get through it

O God, take up my cause! Defend me against these ungodly people.

Rescue me from these unjust liars.

For you are God, my only safe haven. Why have you tossed me aside?

Why must I wander around in darkness, oppressed by my enemies?

- We can get so comfortable with God that we start to worship an idea of who we think He is, or who we think He should be – and the image of Him that we’ve set up to live with can be totally different – like living with one of those life-size cardboard cutouts (show in ppoint) instead of a real person
- And that’s just not good enough for Him – he wants more, because he wants more of us, on his way to changing us into something fit for forever
- Philip Yancey’s book Disappointment With God has been a refreshing breath of honesty for millions of people struggling with where God might be in their pain
- In it, he says this about God’s reaction to our struggles and heartache:

A single, elegant sentence from Isaiah summarizes God’s point of view: “In all their distress he too was distressed.” God may have hidden his face, but that face was streaked with tears. – Philip Yancey, Disappointment with God, p. 94

Send out your light and your truth; let them guide me.

Let them lead me to your holy mountain, to the place where you live.

There I will go to the altar of God, to God – the source of all my joy.

I will praise you with my harp, O God, my God!

- Ironically, when you feel that God is so far from you in your pain, is when he is so close to you, and just trying to get your attention
- C.S. Lewis again, after he had further time to grieve, on his changing perspective:

Was it my own frantic need that slammed it in my face? The time when there is nothing at all in your soul except a cry for help may be just the time when God can't give it: you are like the drowning man who can't be helped because he clutches and grabs. Perhaps your own reiterated cries deafen you to the voice you hoped to hear. (A Grief Observed)

- And when he finally gets your attention, you have a much deeper closeness to Him and reliance on Him that you can put to good use in getting through the difficult time

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- “When you're gone, the words I need to hear, will always get me through the day, and make it okay – ‘I miss you’” – the joy of reuniting makes the pain fade
- Yesterday was the end of the longest fever episode that our daughter Hope has ever had – 8 days of her in pain, in and out of sleep, crying out – and praying
- Hearing her ask God to heal her, and asking Him why He isn't, is one of the hardest things I've ever had to listen to in my life
- And it makes me realize what God hears from us, too – His children, that He loves so much, and we struggle with knowing Him as our parent, our Father – and it breaks His heart, but He has bigger dreams in mind for us than our suburban lifestyle lusts and complacencies
- Every day you and I have a choice to make, when disappointments come, when reversals show, when tough times affect us: will we put our hope in God? Will we continue to remember Him?

Key Thought:

When God seems far away, He's actually closer than ever – if we can only keep on trusting Him.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. (Romans 8:38, NLT)

Conclusion: Recognizing your “blind spot”

- JP and sadistic, Omnidirectional driver’s ed. in Brockville – no shoes, bare feet and the whammy bar
- But one surprise throughout the in-car practice was the idea of a blind spot – I never knew that one of those existed when you were driving – check any mirror, but you still need to move your head to be absolutely sure
- To be safe, you had to remember to check your blind spot, to remember that your eyes would deceive you, to remember not to trust what you thought, but to take a second look – and that has stayed with me ever since
- But what if we had a spiritual blind spot? That area of forgetfulness that kicks in when rotten things happen? The place that glazes over quickly when God seems distant?
- In our “blind spot” – close to us, but we can’t see Him – and the temptation is to believe He’s not there, that He is having no impact on our lives, that we can move forward without him – but that’s where the idea of a “blind spot” comes in, because even if we can’t see someone else, they can make a real difference in our lives from that position
- To just carry on as if it didn’t exist would mean that we were imperilling ourselves – risky behaviour, to deny what’s there – when all we have to do is move our head – change our posture – keep our hope tuned, keep humble, keep calling out to God and looking for Him
- Sometimes our blind spot can get so big that it starts to envelop just about everything of God in it –and that’s pretty big indeed
- Check your blind spot – check my blind spot – and if you see me forgetting to do it, then check it for me and let me know what’s up

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Response: I Know (Darrell Evans – the band again)