



Community Group Discussion Guide

Psalm 43 – October 17, 2021

Today, we are studying the book of Psalm 43. As I read these verses, I am reminded of the 5 stages of grief, typically brought on by the loss of a loved one. In a nutshell, they are:

1. **Denial** – We initially don't want to accept that the loss has occurred.
2. **Anger** – We next get angry over what has occurred.
3. **Bargaining** – Once we get past being angry, we start trying to bargain our way out of the pain and sorrow we are feeling at our loss. "Please, God, I will devote myself fully to you if only you'll bring them back!"
4. **Depression** – This is the funk that sets in once the reality hits that the situation won't change no matter what we do.
5. **Acceptance** – The final phase in grief is where we come to terms with our loss and learn to accept it for what it is and that life must go on.

I'm sure we've all heard of these 5 stages at some point in our lives, presumably when we are going through a time of great sorrow. As we read through these 5 short verses of Psalm 43, we can detect a similar list emerging for the "grieving" Christian, those who are going through a great time of trial, tribulation, or persecution.

Without further ado, here is my take on the 4 stages of Christian tribulation:

Stage 1: Indignation

Psalm 43:1 – *Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me!*

Anyone who has accepted Christ's wonderful gift and moved past the initial euphoric state that envelopes every new Christian eventually transitions back into the daily grind of life in this world. We think that things should all be rainbows and kittens after receiving our salvation but things actually get worse... much worse, as we are told in John 15!

John 15:18-19 – ¹⁸*"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹If 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.*

John 17:14 – ¹⁴*I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

Therefore, we should not be surprised when we struggle to live in this world.

Stage 2: Abandonment and Fear

Psalm 43:2 – 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?*

The next stage we enter is where we let our human fears and frailties take hold and override the spiritual peace that we possess through God. It's easy to let the daily grind of this life wear us down and shift our focus from how God is only a prayer away to thinking that we are standing all alone with no help in sight. Much like the "Tokyo Rose" broadcasters of World War II, Satan whispers his lies in our ears to try and demoralize us and make our lives ineffectual in our walk with Christ. We have been warned of as much such as we can find in John 17 and 1 Peter 5:

John 17:15-16 – ¹⁵ *I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.* ¹⁶ *They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

1 Peter 5:8-10 – ⁸ *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* ⁹ *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.* ¹⁰ *And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*

Stage 3: Petitioning

Psalm 43:3-4 – 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.*

The next stage we typically face is one of hope where we finally remember that "he (God) is actually not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). We merely need to call out to Him for His help. Our fear may not magically dissipate but God will provide a peace and calm to shore us up. We are reassured of this fact by Philippians 4.

Philippians 4:6-7 – ⁶ *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Stage 4: Acceptance and Hope

Psalm 43:5 – 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.*

Once we remember just who God is and who we are in relation to Him, our hearts can take courage and begin to rejoice! There is a light at the end of the tunnel and it's not a train!

Summary

So, there we have it, the unofficial 4 stages of Christian trial and tribulation. We will undoubtedly endure this process enumerable times in our lifetimes. It's inevitable! But we should take heart as each time that we successfully come through it, we become stronger and closer to our Lord as well as better prepared for the next time we must face another spiritual trial!

Questions for Discussion:

1. Have you ever felt abandoned by God? If so, how did you overcome those feelings?
2. Have you ever felt that you were being attacked by Satan or his minions? If so, how did you overcome?
3. If not, then take a moment to consider if it's possible that you have indeed been attacked by Satan in the past but were unaware you were under attack?
4. Why would Satan seek out Christians to devour them as 1 Peter mentions?
5. Do you feel that we here in the "Bible Belt" prepare ourselves and our children for the kind of persecution and temptations that we've been warned about? If not, then what can we do to better prepare?
6. When you feel you're being persecuted or abandoned, what steps should we take in response?