

Session 3 · When the Cares of My Heart Are Many

Psalms 42-43; Psalm 94:19; Psalm 56:3; 1 Kings 19:1-13

PART 1: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that God's own prayer book gives anxious people words, that lament is faithful prayer and not faithless negativity, and that when God met his most burned-out prophet, his first gifts were food and sleep. The body is not an obstacle to the spiritual life; it is part of the person God is saving.

Catholic Touchstone. The Psalms are the Church's own prayer, prayed daily in the Liturgy of the Hours; and the human person is a unity of body and soul, so care of the body belongs to the life of faith.

What You Need to Know

Roughly a third of the Psalter is lament: prayers of distress, complaint, and fear, preserved by God's own inspiration as models of prayer. This fact alone dismantles a common assumption in the pews, that "real" Christians only ever give thanks and that voicing distress to God is irreverent. The Psalter says otherwise on nearly every other page. Lament is covenant speech: it complains *to* God, which is itself an act of faith, because you do not file grievances with someone you have given up on.

Psalms 42-43 are widely regarded as one poem: Psalm 43 carries no title of its own, the same refrain structures both, and some manuscripts transmit them together. Its speaker talks to his own soul: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God" (42:5, 11; 43:5). This is Scripture modeling something anxious people know well: the inner conversation. The psalmist neither obeys his feelings nor denies them; he addresses them, and preaches hope to himself, three times, because once is not enough. Remember that refrain carefully and do not comment on it beyond tonight's scope; it has an appointment later in the study, and nothing may be said about that tonight.

Psalm 94:19 gives the session its title: "When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul." The Hebrew behind "cares" denotes anxious, disquieting thoughts, and lexical discussion links the word with branching; our image for it is a tangled thicket, which every anxious person recognizes: worry is rarely one thought, it is a thicket. And Psalm 56:3 gives the study its most portable prayer: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." Not "I am never afraid": *when*.

Then Elijah. Fresh from the triumph at Carmel, one threat from Jezebel sends him fleeing for his life into the wilderness, where he collapses under a broom tree and prays to die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life" (1 Kings 19:4). Note carefully how God begins: not with rebuke, not with a lecture, not with "where is your faith after Carmel?" Watch the order in 19:5-8: he sleeps; an angel touches him and says "Arise and eat"; he eats and drinks and lies down *again*; the angel comes a second time and again says "Arise and eat"; and only then does he travel forty days in the strength of that food. Sleep, food, more sleep, food again, then the road. Only after his bodily depletion has been met does God speak with him at Horeb, and even then, not in wind, earthquake, or fire, but in "a still small voice" (19:12), and then Elijah is re-commissioned with work to do and told he is not alone: seven thousand have not bowed to Baal (19:18). God's pedagogy with a depleted man: rest, food, gentle presence, purpose, and the correction of his belief that he is alone. Nothing in the Church's doctrine of creation or of the body-soul unity gives any basis for being embarrassed by that ordering.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight is mostly Old Testament, but watch its inner echo: Elijah at Horeb strongly recalls Moses at Sinai: the same mountain (Horeb, traditionally identified with Sinai; compare Ex 3:1 with Ex 19 and the Deuteronomic usage), forty days (19:8; Ex 24:18), a cave or cleft in the rock while the LORD passes by. The group will find Exodus 33:21-22 themselves tonight. The point of the echo: Elijah, despairing, is being taken back to the place where the covenant began, to relearn who God is, and how God actually spoke there: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger" (Ex 34:6). The New Testament will complete the pattern: the vocabulary of the cast-down soul is taken

up on Christ's own lips in the Passion. Where and how is a later session's discovery, so say nothing further tonight. For your own accuracy: this is a verbal echo of the Greek psalter, not a quotation of Psalm 42-43 by Jesus.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

Augustine, who preached through the entire Psalter, teaches in substance that the Psalms are the prayer of the whole Christ, head and members: Christ prays in us and we in him. When you pray a lament, you are not muttering alone in the dark; you are praying words the Church prays with you, words the Spirit inspired, words Christ himself has made his own.

Expositions on the Psalms (Tier 2: summary of his teaching).

Ours to add: the anxious Christian who cannot find words has been handed a book of them.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Teresa of Ávila

Teresa, a doctor of the Church in the ways of prayer, told her busy sisters, in the line everyone remembers, that "the Lord walks among the pots and pans": God is to be found while the duties of obedience are being done, not only after them.

Book of the Foundations, ch. 5 (commonly cited 5.8). Tier 1 for the saying, in the familiar short English form; the fuller sentence adds that he helps us interiorly and exteriorly.

Our extension, not hers: if that is true of a kitchen, it is true of a body. Cooking, eating, sleeping, and the care of tired bodies are not interruptions of the spiritual life, which is exactly what Elijah's angel implies with "arise and eat."

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio)

Pray, hope, and do not worry. That is the counsel remembered as Padre Pio's, from a friar who spent decades in spiritual direction and was intimately acquainted with suffering. In substance: prayer entrusts the matter to God; hope holds the future open in him; and worry is the one ingredient that adds nothing. Not a platitude, but triage.

A counsel long associated with him in the Church's memory (Tier 2: traditional attribution; no letter or critical locus is claimed here).

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 2582-2584:** Elijah as a model of prayer; at Horeb, like Moses, he "hides in a cleft of the rock until the mysterious presence of God has passed by."
- **CCC 2585-2589:** the Psalms, prayed by Christ and the Church, "the masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament"; they express prayer's every register, including distress.
- **CCC 364:** "The human body shares in the dignity of the image of God." The person is a body-soul unity; tending the body is not spiritually second-class.

THREAD WATCH (leader only, never read aloud)

The Psalm 42 refrain is loaded tonight. "Why are you cast down, O my soul" will return in Session 4 in a place that lands like thunder. Let the group get the refrain deep in their ears tonight (that is why the pre-reading was Psalms 42-43), but say nothing about where it reappears.

The body thread is now live. Elijah: bread and sleep before the whisper. It develops in Session 4 (Christ's bodily agony, an angel strengthening him) and cashes out in Sessions 5-6 (embodied practices, and finally the sacraments, where grace comes through matter). Keep it quiet; let the pattern accumulate.

Sealed question discipline: Elijah asking to die may prompt the general question of whether despairing feelings are sinful. That question, asked in general, holds until Session 4. **The deferral covers the doctrine only. It**

never covers a person.

IF SOMEONE SPEAKS ABOUT THEMSELVES TONIGHT (leader only)

Elijah prays to die, and in a room of ordinary adults that line sometimes opens a door. If anyone speaks about wanting to die, or about not wanting to be here, do not defer it to Session 4 and do not treat it as a doctrinal question. Say plainly and warmly, in your own words: feelings like this, and unwanted thoughts that arrive on their own, are not the sin of despair; God does not shame a person who is suffering; and you are glad they said it out loud.

Then take it seriously as what it is. Stay with the person after the session rather than letting them leave alone. Ask directly and calmly whether they are thinking of harming themselves. If there is any present intention or plan, treat it as an emergency: involve appropriate help immediately, contact emergency services if danger may be imminent, and stay with them until someone competent is with them. In the United States the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline connects to trained help by call or text.

Follow up in the days after, and encourage professional care as the good it is (Session 1 panel). A study leader is not a clinician, and does not need to be; you need to notice, stay, and connect.

Session Goals

1. Legitimize lament: a third of the Psalter, covenant speech, faith with its eyes open.
2. Give the group the inner-conversation refrain of Psalm 42-43 and the portable prayer of Psalm 56:3.
3. Walk through God's full response to Elijah from the text itself: sleep, food, a gentle voice, then mission and the correction of his belief that he is alone.
4. Establish that the body belongs to the life of faith (CCC 364), grounding this study's practical realism.

The 90 Minutes

- **0:00** Gather and opening prayer (5 min)
- **0:05** Win (12 min)
- **0:17** Build part one: the lament psalms (25 min)
- **0:42** Build part two: Elijah (30 min)
- **1:12** Send (10 min)
- **1:22** Live It This Week and memory verse (5 min)
- **1:27** Closing prayer (3 min).
- **Non-cuttable:** the lament reading of Psalm 42-43 with question 2 (it plants a refrain the study needs), and the Elijah half.
- **If you run long, cut in this order:** (1) W1, (2) the Dig Deeper, reading Ps 94:19 and 56:3 aloud yourself instead of discussing them, (3) Send S1.

PART 2: DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

*Lord, you are near to the brokenhearted, and you save the crushed in spirit.
You gave your people a book of prayers with room in it for fear, tears, and complaint.
Give us the honesty to pray them, the ears to hear your still small voice,
and the humility to receive your care in whatever form you send it, even bread and sleep.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Win

W1. When something is genuinely wrong, are you naturally a venter, a stuffer, or a fixer? What did your family of origin do with hard feelings?

W2. Have you ever felt that saying a dark thing out loud to God would be disrespectful, or dangerous? Where do you think that instinct comes from?

Build

Read Psalm 42 and Psalm 43 aloud as one poem (they share a refrain; many manuscripts join them). Assign one strong reader, unhurried.

1. List everything this psalmist is actually feeling and experiencing. Be exhaustive. Does anything on the list surprise you, coming from the Bible's own prayer book?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Thirst and absence ("When shall I come and behold the face of God?", 42:2); tears as food day and night (42:3); mockery ("Where is your God?", 42:3, 10); aching memory of better days (42:4); a cast-down, disquieted soul (42:5, 11; 43:5); the sense of being forgotten by God ("Why have you forgotten me?", 42:9); oppression and injustice (43:1-2). This is inspired Scripture: God preserved these words as a model of prayer. The surprise, for many, is that nothing here is edited for politeness. The Psalter assumes what this study has been saying: God wants the real person, not the performance.

2. Three times the psalmist says the same thing to his own soul: "Why are you cast down, O my soul... Hope in God; for I shall again praise him." What is he doing, and why might it take three repetitions?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He is neither obeying his feelings nor denying them; he is *addressing* them. He interrogates his soul (why?), then preaches to it (hope in God), then makes a promise about the future (I shall again praise him). It takes three rounds because that is how it actually goes; anxious feelings do not stand down after one memo. Scripture here models the inner conversation as a discipline: you can speak to your own soul instead of merely listening to it. Keep this refrain in your ears.

DIG DEEPER

Two pocket verses to carry out of the Psalter tonight. Ps 94:19: "When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul"; the Hebrew word for "cares" is glossed as anxious or disquieting thoughts, and lexicons connect it with branching; the thicket is our picture for it, and it is exactly how worry grows. And Ps 56:3, one short line that fits any moment: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." Not "I am never afraid." *When*. The Psalter's realism is total.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "Lament is faithless negativity"

Build it at full strength. A sincere and serious Christian objects, with Scripture in hand: covenant people are commanded to rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:16-18), and told that the answer to anxiety is prayer and petition *with thanksgiving* (Phil 4:4-7). Israel's grumbling in the wilderness is judged, not praised. So, the objection runs, rehearsing complaint trains the heart in unbelief; the commanded alternative is trust voiced as thanksgiving. That is not a slogan, it is an argument, and wallowing does exist.

Press, then answer from the text. The decisive fact: God himself inspired a prayer book of which roughly a third is lament, gave it to Israel, and had it prayed and sung in her worship. Whatever lament is, God does not classify it as unbelief. Watch its grammar: every complaint is aimed *at God*, in covenant, usually by name; you do not file grievances with someone you have abandoned. The address is the faith. And nearly every lament turns ("Hope in God; for I shall again praise him"), not because the pain resolved, but because the God addressed is trustworthy. Lament and thanksgiving are not rivals; lament is thanksgiving's road through the valley. Suppressed pain, by contrast, tends to leak out sideways, at spouses, children, and drivers in traffic. The Psalter offers the honest alternative: bring it to the throne, out loud, and let the turning happen there.

Now read 1 Kings 19:1-18 aloud. Set it up first: Elijah has just come from the greatest public triumph of his life, fire from heaven on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). One threat from Queen Jezebel later, he is running for his life. Read the whole span; the last verses matter and the group should hear them rather than be told them.

3. Under the broom tree Elijah prays to die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life" (19:4). The great prophet, soon after the greatest victory of his life. What does the sequence (triumph, then collapse) tell you? And what is the very first thing God does about it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Collapse does not wait politely for failure; it often arrives right after our peak output, when the adrenaline drains and the body presents its bill. Elijah is depleted: afraid, exhausted, and finished ("It is enough"). And God's first response to a prophet praying for death is not a rebuke, not a lecture, not "where is your faith?" It is sleep, and then an angel, a touch, and "Arise and eat": a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water; then he lies down again; then the angel comes a second time and feeds him again, and only then does he travel (19:5-8). Note the order, because it is not the order we would have chosen: rest, food, more rest, food again, and not one word yet about his vocation. Before God addresses what Elijah is for, he attends to what Elijah is made of.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "This mountain scene is a rerun. Another man stood on this same mountain while the LORD passed by, hidden in the rock. Find him." Point them to Exodus 33; let them locate verses 21-22 ("Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock... I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by"). Ask: why would God take his despairing prophet back to *this* mountain, of all places?

4. At Horeb the LORD is not in the wind, earthquake, or fire, but in "a still small voice" (19:12). Why this mountain, of all mountains? And after the whisper, what else does God give him? Look at 19:15-18 and name each thing.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Horeb is Sinai (Ex 3:1), the mountain of the covenant, where Moses too was hidden in the rock as the LORD passed by proclaiming his own name: "merciful and gracious, slow to anger" (Ex 34:6). God takes his burned-out prophet back to the beginning, to relearn who God is. Start with what the text states: the LORD is not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, and Elijah responds only to the low whisper. *One pastoral reading, offered as such:* he

has had quite enough of fire and spectacle, Carmel was fire and it did not heal him, and a whisper requires closeness. Invite other readings; the text gives the contrast and leaves the reason open. Then, in the verses you have just read, God gives him two more things: a mission (19:15-16) and the end of his isolation. Distinguish those last two carefully. The seven thousand who have not bowed (19:18) are not companions placed around him; they are a remnant, and their disclosure corrects his belief that he is the only one left. Elisha, whom he is sent to anoint (19:16) and who follows him (19:19-21), is an actual companion. *Our summary, not the text's own label:* taken together this looks like a pattern of care, bodily provision, renewed encounter, mission, and the correction of a lie he believed about being alone, with not one ounce of shame in it.

5. Where in your own life have you treated the body's needs (sleep, food, rest, help) as spiritually second-class? What does tonight do to that assumption?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Let people talk; the false spirituality of pushing through is widespread and often praised. The correction is doctrinal, not just practical: "the human body shares in the dignity of the image of God" (CCC 364); the person is one body-soul unity, so exhaustion is a whole-person event and care of the body is care of the person God made. Sometimes the most spiritual thing available is a meal and some sleep. In the narrative Elijah sleeps and the angel twice tells him to eat; the sandwich and the nap are our shorthand, but the ordering is the text's. This is not the whole answer to anxiety, but it is never absent from it.

Send

S1. Which psalm line from tonight do you most need in your own voice this month? Say it aloud once, now, if you are willing.

S2. Elijah thought he was the only one left, and he was off by seven thousand. Where might you be underestimating the companions God has already put around you, including this room?

Live It This Week

- **Pray one lament, out loud.** Once this week, alone, read Psalm 42-43 aloud as your own prayer, unedited. When you reach the refrain, address your own soul by it.
- **The pocket prayer.** Put Ps 56:3 where you will hit it in real moments (mirror, dashboard, lock screen): "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you."
- **One broom-tree mercy.** Choose one concrete bodily kindness this week as an act of faith, not indulgence: a full night's sleep, a real meal, a walk, asked-for help. Elijah's angel insists.

Memory verse: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." (Psalm 56:3)

Closing Prayer

*Father of mercies, you met your servant Elijah with bread, with sleep, and with a still small voice.
Meet each of us where we are actually depleted. Teach us to pray the prayers you wrote,
to speak hope to our own souls, and to receive your care without shame.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

PART 3: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

PASSAGE	WHERE IT IS USED
Ps 42-43	Main text: lament, the refrain to the soul
Ps 94:19	Dig Deeper and session title: many cares, your consolations
Ps 56:3	Dig Deeper and memory verse: when I am afraid
Ps 34:18	Opening prayer: near to the brokenhearted
1 Kings 19:1-18	Main text: broom tree, sleep and food, still small voice, mission, remnant
1 Kings 18	Setting: Carmel, shortly before the collapse
1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21	Answer 4: the mission, and Elisha as actual companion
Ex 33:21-22	Live Discovery: Moses hidden in the rock as the LORD passes
Ex 34:6	Answer 4: the name proclaimed: merciful and gracious
Ex 3:1; Ex 19; Ex 24:18	Leader background: Horeb traditionally identified with Sinai; forty days
1 Thess 5:16-18; Phil 4:4-7	Steelman: rejoice always, thanksgiving as the commanded alternative