



World Christian Fellowship

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Psalms 142

God's promises are True whether you are feeling lonely or trapped alone!

Psalms 142:1-9, I cry out to the Lord with my voice; With my voice to the Lord I make my supplication. ²I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble. ³When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk They have secretly set a snare for me. ⁴Look on my right hand and see, For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul. ⁵I cried out to You, O Lord: I said, "You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living.⁶Attend to my cry, For I am brought very low; Deliver me from my persecutors, For they are stronger than I. ⁷Bring my soul out of prison, That I may praise Your name; The righteous shall surround me, For You shall deal bountifully with me."

One of the features of the Mini Davidic Psalter (**Psalms 138–145**) is that it revisits many of the key themes of the earlier collections of Davidic psalms.

One of the themes we encountered was David fleeing from his enemies and even hiding in caves (**Psalms 52–59**).

Psalm 142 is a prayer of David while hiding from his enemies in a cave. This psalm falls in a category of psalms known as complaint psalms.

It is important to remember that “complaint” in the Psalms is not a form of whining or griping.

Complaint is giving voice to our circumstances and trustfully transferring them into God’s hands.

David is crying out from a cave or pit,
Joseph did cry from the pit (**Genesis 37**)
Elijah crying out in a cave (**1 Kings 19**),
Jeremiah crying out from a pit (**Jeremiah 38**), and
Paul crying out from prison (**Acts 16**).

These are not stories of whiners.

They are powerful narratives foreshadowing or remembering Jesus himself, who spent his last night in **Garden of Gethsemane** crying out to God before his crucifixion (**Matthew 26**) as the “man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering” (**Isaiah 53:3**).

The last psalm of David that specifically mentions he was hiding in a cave is **Psalm 57**.

However, there is a major change of tone between **Psalm 57** and **Psalm 142**.

In **Psalm 57** David is animated by exuberant praise, even though he is in a cave and surrounded by enemies seeking his life.

He describes his enemies as lions and ravenous beasts. They have “spread a net” and “dug a pit” to capture him.

Psalms 57:6, *They have prepared a net for my steps; My soul is bowed down; They have dug a pit before me; Into the midst of it they themselves have fallen. Selah*

Yet, David is singing and making music. He calls on the harp and lyre to join him as he awakens the dawn with singing.

It is in **Psalm 57** that we find some of the most memorable lines of praise in the psalms.

Psalms 57:11, *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Your glory be above all the earth.*

In the meditation on Psalm 57, we note that David was able to enter that wonderful place that we called “history as narrative past.”

This is that place where you can sing and rejoice in a victory as if it has already happened, even though you are in the middle of a great trial.

The tone of Psalm 142 is quite different.

David pours out his complaint before the Lord (v. 2).

His spirit has grown faint.

He looks in every direction and only sees his enemies.

David cries out to God to rescue him.

He goes on to compare his cave to a prison.

In both psalms enemies surround David (57:4–6 and 142:6).

In both psalms he cries out for God’s mercy (57:1 and 142:1).

In both psalms he cries out to God to be his refuge (57:1 and 142:5).

In other words, the situations are very similar.

The difference is that in the one case David is more aware of God’s presence and more confident in God’s promises.

In the other, David feels more vulnerable and alone.

Yet, in both cases, God has not changed. In both cases, David must trust in the Lord. The source of David's deliverance has not changed.

Background

The Psalm is in a section of 8 Psalms that are attributed to David (**Psalms 138-145**)

A psalm attributed to a period in David's life. A period when he was a forced fugitive, because of King Saul's jealousy towards him

There are two instances where this Psalm was possibly spoken:

Cave of Adullam (**1 Samuel 22**)

A cave in the Desert of **En Gedi (1 Samuel 24)**

It is a prayer or plea that alludes to a court scene, the court of God!

Caves are interesting places to visit, but I wouldn't want to live in one.

It would be just plain spooky to spend a single night in a cave, especially alone!

They are cold and damp.

There are dangerous drop-offs and confusing webs where you could easily get lost.

We don't know whether the cave where David was hiding from Saul was teeming with roaches, but he wasn't tempted to hang a "Home Sweet Home" sign there!

Somewhere outside, Saul and his army were scouring the countryside looking for David. If they found him, it would mean instant death.

So, here he was in a cave. If he had a torch or an oil lamp, but for sure he didn't have electric lights!

Whether he was literally alone or had already been joined by the 400 malcontents who eventually joined him (**1 Samuel 22:2**), we don't know. But he felt alone, trapped, with no escape.

This was not the program that David had envisioned when as a teenager, Samuel had anointed him to be the next king of Israel. Kings live in palaces, with servants waiting on them, eating good food, and enjoying all the luxuries that life can give.

Kings do not live in dark, damp, dangerous caves with the bats and other creepy crawlers! It seemed more like a prison (v. 7) than a palace.

But caves are effective classrooms in the school of faith and prayer.

David prayed when he was in the cave, but later when he was in the palace, he fell into temptation and sin with Bathsheba.

The caves have heard the best prayers. One of the main courses in the school of faith is learning how to handle trials.

So, David as a young man, waiting to be king, found out that class met in a cave.

When God puts you in circumstances where you feel trapped and alone, cry out to Him in believing prayer.

Before we look at this Psalm in detail, note that it is very individual.

David writes,

- I cry aloud.
- I make supplication.
- I pour out my complaint.
- I declare my trouble. (vv. 1-2).

The first-person pronoun continues throughout the psalm.

This teaches us that faith in God must be personal.

Your parents' faith will not do when you find yourself in a cave. Husbands, your wife's faith is good for her, but it won't get you through dark, difficult trials.

You must know God personally through personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. You must know personally how to call upon Him when you feel trapped, lonely, and under attack.

Also, your faith in the Lord must be strong enough that you can stand alone when you need to.

It's great to have fellow Christians who can pray with you and support you.

David looks forward to that day at the end of the psalm. But there are many times when fellow Christians and perhaps even your family will not stand with you. They may distance themselves from you because of your convictions. They may criticize you for being too serious about your faith.

David had felt the scorn of his own brothers when he went out to fight Goliath (**1 Samuel 17:28**).

I had realised early in my Christian walk that I have got to follow Christ as my Lord no matter what my family or anyone else may do.

If you have never made that personal commitment to Christ, you must begin there.

David had done that.

- ✓ As a young shepherd, he knew God as his personal Shepherd (Psalm 23:1).
- ✓ David had trusted God to help him defend the flock against lions and bears (1 Samuel 17:34-35).
- ✓ David had trusted God to defeat the Philistine giant, Goliath.

As a result, David had been propelled into national fame. Saul appointed David over the army. But his unsought early fame and military success had aroused the insane jealousy of King Saul.

So, David had to flee for his life and now, here he was, hiding in the cave, trapped and alone. While few of us can identify with David's early fame and success, perhaps we can identify with his plight.

- 1. Plea (1-3a)**
- 2. Plight (3b-4)**
- 3. Portion (5-6a) and,**

4. Prospect (6b-7).

We will look at “David’s plight,” before we look at “David’s plea.”

1. David’s plight.

The enemy has me trapped and lonely, with no one to care for my soul.

V 3b-4, *In the way in which I walk They have secretly set a snare for me. ⁴Look on my right hand and see, For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul.*

We can’t know for sure whether David was literally all alone in the cave, or whether he just felt alone.

1 Samuel 22:1-2, *David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father’s house heard it, they went down there to him. ²And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him.*

When David says, “Look to the right and see, for there is no one who regards me,”

David means either that there was no one to defend him militarily or that there was no one to defend him by presenting his case in court.

When he says, “no one cares for my soul,” it may be that although he had these 400 men there with him, they were all so focused on their own troubles that they did not care about David’s troubles.

So, he may not have been alone physically, but he felt alone emotionally and spiritually.

Or, he may have written the psalm before these men started moving into the cave with him.

I am not sure which would be the greater problem:

- to be all alone in a cave,
- fearing for your life, or
- to be there with 400 malcontents who are now looking to you for leadership and provision!

It would be no small thing to provide enough food and water every day for 400 men, let alone deal with the inevitable squabbles that would have erupted among men with their baggage of troubles!

But whether alone or with 400 discontented men, David felt trapped and lonely, with no one to care for his soul.

You don't have to be in his exact circumstances to have the same feelings.

Maybe you feel trapped and alone in a dark cave of guilt.

You have done things that you know are wrong. Perhaps you fled from that situation, but you had be ashamed if anyone in your current situation learned about your past. Your guilt has alienated you from God.

You don't know who to talk to or where to turn.

David wrote other psalms about the painful experience of feeling the guilt of his sins (**Psalms 32, 38, 51**).

Maybe you feel trapped and alone because you profess to be a Christian, but you are enslaved to some life-dominating sin.

It makes you ashamed to tell others about Christ.

It alienates you from fellow believers.

If your Christian friends knew the truth, you fear that they would distance themselves from you.

Maybe you wonder whether your faith is genuine.

Maybe the cave that has you feeling trapped and alone is not due to your sin or guilt, but rather to your Christian commitment.

Your family feels convicted by your stand for Christ, so they have pressured you to tone it down. When that didn't work, they drew back and excluded you from feeling like you are part of the family.

They don't invite you to family gatherings, or if they do, when you get there, no one talks with you.

Or, at work you catch criticism because you are a Christian. Your fellow workers don't include you in their circle of friendship. The boss favours the workers who laugh at his dirty jokes, and they get the promotions.

Whatever your circumstances, if you have made the commitment to follow Christ as Lord, you have probably felt as David felt here.

No escape, lonely, and no one who cares for you.

What should you do when you are there?

Again, it's one of God's most effective classrooms in the school of faith and prayer.

2. David Plea

V 1-3a, *I cry out to the Lord with my voice; With my voice to the Lord I make my supplication. ²I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble. ³When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path.*

Help me, Lord, because You know my path (3a).

There is no cave so deep, so dark, but we may out of it send up our prayers, and our souls in prayer, to God.

So, no matter how trapped or alone you may feel, you can still cry out to God in prayer.

This psalm is titled a “maskil,” and while we don’t know for sure what that means in the psalm titles, the verb means “to make wise or prudent, or to have success or skill”.

This psalm teaches us some important lessons on how to be wise or skilful in prayer.

a) Prayer must be heartfelt and honest

Prayers must be from the heart and honest.

Also, prayer should be submission to God and His sovereign will.

You can't miss the intensity of David's prayer.

V 1-2, *"I cry aloud with my voice to the Lord; I make supplication with my voice to the Lord. I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare my trouble before Him."*

Again, in the following verses.

V 5- 6, *"I cried out to You, O Lord; ... Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me."*

The repetition drives home David's fervency. He is in deep water, over his head, and so like a drowning man, he cries out, "Help! Save me or I perish!"

Of course, David's fervency came out of a very desperate situation. He literally feared for his life.

Our normal, everyday prayers will not always be so heartfelt and fervent.

Cold prayers, like cold suitors, are seldom effective in their aims.

David says (**V 2**), *"I pour out my complaint before Him."*

This verse and other similar psalms teach us to be honest in our prayers.

We should not be hypocrites toward God, offering up a nice, polite prayer when our hearts are hurting because of our circumstances. He knows our thoughts, so we can't hide anything from Him.

We are free to be honest with the Lord, but always with a submissive heart to His sovereign will.

If I am angry with God, I need to confess and turn from my anger before I can rightly pray to Him about other things.

When my kids were younger, perhaps they had a complaint against me. Since I am human, it may have been a legitimate complaint!

They would say, "Dad, you promised to do something with me today, but you forgot." If they complained with a submissive attitude, I would listen and respond.

But if they came at me angrily and defiantly, even if their complaint was legitimate, I would first deal with their disrespectful spirit. They weren't allowed to rail defiantly at me as their father, even if I were at fault.

When it comes to the Sovereign of the universe, He is always right.

- ✓ God never wrongs anyone.
- ✓ God always disciplines us for our good.

Hebrew 12:10, *For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.*

If God gave us what we deserve, we would all go straight to hell.

So even if we feel that we have been treated unfairly, before we bring our complaint to Him, we better deal with our attitude.

Be honest, yes, but always in submission to God, showing reverence to Him as Lord and Master.

b) acknowledge our insufficiency & God's sufficiency.

David admits that his spirit was overwhelmed within him (v. 3).

He says that there is no escape (v. 4).

He was "brought very low" (v. 6).

His enemies were "too strong" for him (v. 6).

He felt like he was in prison (v. 7).

He wasn't saying, "I have got all this figured out, Lord, but I need a little boost." Rather, he was admitting his own insufficiency, but God's all-sufficiency.

A main reason that we do not always pray, as the Bible tells us to do (**Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:17**) is that we don't recognize our own insufficiency.

We proudly think, "I can handle this by myself."

So, the Lord graciously puts us in situations where we are overwhelmed, so that we learn to depend on Him alone.

c) Prayers are not information.

Prayer is not an information to God about your circumstances rather preparing ourselves to receive what we ask of Him.

God knows all things.

He knew David's path (v. 3).

Not only does He know our paths also, He ordains our paths.

Psalms 139:16, *Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.*

Matthew 6:8, *“Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”*

So, prayer is not to inform God about our situation!

Then Why pray?

Prayer, in part, is to help us recognize and verbalize our needs, so that we consciously depend on God to supply those needs.

We are not appointed to declare God’s perfections, His majesty, holiness, goodness, and all-sufficiency.

Or our own meanness, emptiness, dependence, and unworthiness, our wants, and desires, to inform God of these things.

Or to incline His heart and prevail with Him to be willing to show us mercy.

But rather suitably to affect our own hearts with the things we express, and so to prepare us to receive the blessings we ask.

David twice states that his cry or supplication the Hebrew word means, “an appeal to kindness,” is “to the Lord” (v. 1).

Twice again he pours out his complaint and declares his trouble “before Him” (v. 2). The Hebrew word translated before Him is, literally, “to His face.”

It teaches us that prayer is not just running through a list of requests. Rather, prayer is coming into God’s presence and communing with Him face to face.

We have seen David’s plight, which is often, our plight.

We have seen his plea, which should be our plea.

3. David’s Portion.

*V 5-6a, I cried out to You, O Lord: I said, “You are my refuge,
My portion in the land of the living.⁶Attend to my cry,
For I am brought very low;*

Although David was hiding in a cave, he didn’t see the cave as his refuge, but rather, the Lord.

He didn’t look to his position as the future king as his portion. Rather, whether in a cave or in a palace, the Lord was his portion.

Psalms 16:5, O Lord, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot.

Psalms 73:26, *My flesh and my heart fail;
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

God is the highest good of the reasonable creature and the enjoyment of Him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied.

To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here.

Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance.

These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun.

These are but streams, but God is the fountain.

These are but drops but God is the ocean.

Therefore, it becomes us to spend this life only as a journey towards heaven. It becomes us to make the seeking of our highest end and proper good, the whole work of our lives.

Why should we labour for, or set our hearts on, anything else, but that which is our proper end, and true happiness?

4. David's Prospect.

The Lord will deliver me so that I may give thanks to Him in the company of the righteous.

V 6b-7, *“Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me. Bring my soul out of prison, so that I may give thanks to Your name; the righteous will surround me, for You will deal bountifully with me.”*

Having thought about God as his refuge and portion, David now moves from despair to confident hope.

He knows that he is weak, but his God is stronger than any enemies.

So, by faith he looks ahead to the time when he will give thanks to God for rescuing him, surrounded by God’s people.

Note that David’s focus is not, “Deliver me so that I will be happy again.”

So often, that is the implied (if not stated) aim of our prayers. “I’m unhappy in these trials. Deliver me so that I will be happy.”

But that’s the wrong motive for prayer.

David wants to be delivered “so that I may give thanks to Your name.”

Some versions translate it, “praise Your name.”

The Hebrew verb means to confess or acknowledge.

David wants to extol God's power, faithfulness, and mercy in the company of the saints.

David wants God to answer his prayer so that he can glorify God.

In the other psalm from the cave, David twice repeats the refrain.

Psalms 57:5, *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Your glory be above all the earth.*

Psalms 57:11, *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Your glory be above all the earth.*

That is always a solid ground for our prayers.

Conclusion

Christ and the Psalm

Christ at Gethsemane was in something of the situation as the Psalmist was. Deeply distressed and troubled

Betrayal, enemies in pursuit of him, his disciples weary and not watchful!

He looked to the Father and found strength to face the cross,
the momentary alienation

If your troubles do not lead you to go deeper in faith and
prayer, you are missing the lesson of the cave!

Let your loneliness, gloom, and despair make you cry out to
the Lord to bring your soul out of prison, so that you may give
thanks to His name!

The Lord knows you are there.

Let the cave hear your best prayers!

All of us encounter difficult periods in our lives. We find
ourselves afraid and struggling. The reasons may be very
different, but we can all relate to David's words when he cries
out for God to set him free from his prison (v. 7).

Many things imprison us, but the truth of God's Word remains
unchanged, whether we feel it or not.

Sometimes we can enter that amazing space of sensing and
almost tasting the victory that is ours before it even begins to
unfold.

At other times, we experience what feels like the absence of
God and the silence of heaven.

However, in both cases, the Lord is still our refuge and our strength. His promises are true.

We still cry out to him, knowing that, in the end, God will vindicate the faith of his servants.