

Psalm 142 “Still Crying in a Cave” **

Main Idea: While crying in a cave in Psalm 142 David verbalized four thoughts which he expressed to God. We can learn from David how to respond to our ‘cave experiences.’

I. David tells us what he did (1-2).

- A. He asked Yahweh for mercy.
- B. He told Yahweh his predicament.

II. David tells us how he felt (3-4).

- A. He felt weak.
- B. He felt vulnerable.
- C. He felt alone.

III. David tells us what he knew (5-6).

- A. He was desperate.
- B. God is sufficient.
 - 1. Make sure Yahweh is your refuge.
 - 2. Make sure Yahweh is your portion.

IV. David tells us what he wanted (7).

- A. He desired to be set free.
- B. He desired to praise Yahweh’s name.
- C. He desired to see Yahweh’s people gather together.

Take another look: What do we see in this cave experience?

- 1. This psalm teaches us about Christ.
- 2. This psalm teaches us about our desperate need for Christ.

A promise is an amazing thing. When someone makes a promise to you, they are using words to communicate *intended action*, to tell you what will or will not happen. And when God makes a promise that intended action is as good as done!

“I will never leave you,” God said in Hebrews 13:5. And He meant it.

“I am going to prepare a place for you,” Jesus said in John 14:2, followed by this announcement in verse 3, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” You will be with me forever! What an astounding promise!

And ponder these words that John heard from the heavenly throne in Revelation 21:4, “He will wipe every tear

from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” That’s what is coming. There will be no tears in that day. We have God’s Word on it.

But what about *now*? Yes, there will be no more tears *then*, but what about *now*? Now is a different story, isn’t it?

We are soldiers in a battle. Do soldiers ever cry? David did. David, the fearless follower of Yahweh who smote Goliath on the battle field, was not tearless. Sometimes a soldier gets weary *in* the battle, and sometimes he gets weary *of* the battle, especially when the outcome seems uncertain.

Of the 73 psalms attributed to David, this man of God wrote many of them with tears coursing down his cheeks. We looked at one of them last week, Psalm 57, in a message entitled, “Crying in a Cave.” David was a cave for good reason. Saul and his SWAT team were trying to kill him.

David actually wrote two psalms while hiding in a cave, Psalm 57 and Psalm 142 which lies before us. Derek Kidner observes, “Together the two psalms give us some idea of the fluctuating state of David’s emotions in the ordeal. Psalm 57 is bold and animated, almost enjoying the situation for the certainty of its triumphant outcome. In the present psalm [142] the strain of being hated and hunted is almost too much, and faith is at full stretch.”^[1]

What a vivid word picture those final words provide! Sometimes our faith is “at full stretch”! When that happens, what is the God-honoring way to respond? Psalm 142 shows us. It’s worth noting that this is the last of eight psalms that David penned while he was running from Saul (the others include Psalms 34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, & possibly 63). Notice the details in the title to Psalm 142...

A maskil of David. We’re not sure what *maskil* means. It’s possibly some sort of musical term. The NKJV calls this “a contemplation of David.”

When he was in the cave. Which raises the question, what cave? The Scriptures mention at least two caves where David hid: one in Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1) and the other in Engedi (1 Sam. 24:1-3). By the way, don’t picture some tiny hole in the side of a hill. The cave at Engedi was big enough to hold David *and* his 600 men, *plus* Saul who entered the cave and didn’t even notice David! Keil & Delitzsch offer a helpful description of the cave’s layout: “... starting from a narrow concealed entrance, forms such a labyrinthine maze of passages and vaults that the torches and lines of explorers have not to the present time been able to reach the extremities of it.”^[2]

Why was David in the cave in the first place? Simply put, because he had nowhere else safe to go. And notice the activity that took place in the cave...

A prayer.^[3] That’s interesting. Most of the psalms record prayers, but this one calls itself “a prayer.” The title of Psalm 142 makes it clear from the outset that David talked to the Lord from that cave. This is a prayer that teaches us how to pray, especially how to pray in times of turmoil.

Charles Spurgeon observed, “Caves make good closets for prayer.” He then posed this insightful question, “Had David prayed as much in his palace as he did in his cave, he might never have fallen into the act which brought such misery upon his later days.”^[4]

I see four movements in the structure of this psalm. While crying in a cave in Psalm 142 David verbalized four thoughts which he expressed to God. Commentator Derek Kidner likewise outlined it into four parts: My plea (1-3a), my plight (3b-4), my portion (5-6a), and my prospect (6b-7). That’s very helpful. I believe we can learn from David here how to respond to our own ‘cave experiences.’

I. David tells us what he did (1-2).

“I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before

him I tell my trouble.”

I love the title that commentator Keil and Delitzsch ascribe to this psalm: “Cry Sent Forth From The Prison To The Best Of Friends.”^[5] That’s what David is doing here. He’s crying from a cave to the best of his friends, the LORD Himself! He uses God’s covenant name, *Yahweh*, the name by which God revealed Himself to His chosen people Israel when He redeemed them from bondage in Egypt .

And notice that David prays this prayer *out loud*. “I cry *aloud* to the LORD,” he says. “I lift up *my voice* to the LORD.” Literally, David actually repeats the phrase, “With my voice...with my voice.” Keil & Delitzsch offer this practical insight, “Audible prayer reacts soothingly, strengtheningly, and sanctifyingly upon the praying one.”^[6]

David began his prayer by expressing two things to Yahweh, the LORD...

A. He asked Yahweh for mercy. “I lift up my voice to Yahweh *for mercy*,” he says in verse 1.

I love America . We are so blessed to live in this wonderful country. Unfortunately, however, it’s easy for us to begin thinking that we *deserve* the good things we enjoy, that we deserve these *good* things because we are *good* people. And the reason we develop this high view of ourselves is because we create our own standard of goodness. Good people don’t ask for mercy—they don’t think they need it. They ask for their rights because that’s what they deserve.

David knows better. He doesn’t approach God demanding his rights (even though he has been severely wronged by his self-centered, paranoid king). What David wants, indeed, what David knows he needs is *mercy*. Saul is a sinner, for sure, but David knows he is one too, and as such he asks God for what he knows he needs, for God not to treat him as his sins deserve. He asked Yahweh for mercy. Then...

B. He told Yahweh his predicament. Verse 2 again, “I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble.”

The NIV’s “I pour out my complaint” may have a brazen sound to our psychologized ears, almost as if David is telling God he’s ticked off about his situation. But that’s not in the Hebrew meaning of the word he uses. To pour out one’s complaint might be rendered ‘my troubled thoughts.’^[7] Spurgeon offers this helpful distinction, “We may complain *to* God, but not *of* God.”^[8]

Well said. David isn’t insinuating that he’s been jipped by God. This isn’t, “God, You could have kept me out of this cave! Why didn’t You?!” No, this isn’t a complaint *of* God. David was in trouble, so he took his complaint *to* God. He told God about it.

Ponder that for a moment. The problems of life will either drive you *away from* God or *to* God. For David it was the latter. Take inventory of your life. Do you feel like you’re in a cave right now? Maybe it’s a financial strain. Perhaps it’s a relationship that feels like a noose around your neck. Whatever it is, you feel like you’re in a cave surrounded by walls with no way out. Here’s the question. Are your problems driving you *away from* God or *to* God?^[9]

John Peterson said it so well...

No one understands like Jesus, He’s a friend beyond compare;

Meet Him at the throne of mercy, He is waiting for you there.

No one understands like Jesus, When the days are dark and grim;

No one is so near, so dear as Jesus, Cast your every care on Him.^[10]

Psalm 142 begins with David telling us what he did—he asked Yahweh for mercy and told Yahweh his

predicament. Next...

II. David tells us how he felt (3-4).

“When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me. Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.”

God is omniscient. Contrary to the heretical teaching called “Open Theism” that is vogue in some circles these days, a new thought never enters God’s mind. God knows everything, *everything* (see Ps. 139:17-18).

“Then there’s no need to pray, right? If God already knows everything, prayer is unnecessary.” Not so. Granted, we don’t pray to inform God, but God wants us to commune with Him. He delights in hearing from His children, what they’re thinking, what they’re feeling, even what they’re wanting.

Watch how David prays. Watch *what* David prays. Here he shares with the Lord exactly how he felt, three feelings.

A. He felt weak. Verse 3—“When my spirit grows *faint within me.*” David is low. The KJV uses the word ‘overwhelmed.’ David expressed it this way in Psalm 61:2, “From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

B. He felt vulnerable. Verse 3 again, “In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me.” Why would someone hide a snare? Because he’s intent on capturing something. That’s how David felt. He describes life as a walk down a path, but his path is full of hidden traps (we might say concealed minefields). The townspeople of Keilah betrayed him. The Ziphites were spying on him. Saul and his army are breathing down his neck. Every snapped twig alarms him. He’s feeling weak and vulnerable.

C. He felt alone. “*No one* is concerned for me,” he says in verse 4. “I have *no refuge; no one* cares for my life.” No one, no one, no one, he says.

Those words certainly depict David’s situation when he went to the cave of Adullam (in 1 Sam. 22:1). When he first got there, he was all alone after his narrow escape from Gath . But in time God brought his father’s household to him and eventually a band of some 400 loyal followers. In that cave God used people to encourage David.

It’s quite possible, however, that David penned this psalm while in the cave in Engedi, and if that’s the case he wasn’t alone. 1 Samuel 23:13 would indicate that at Engedi David was surrounded by 600 men who have declared their loyalty to him as their leader. How can this be? He’s not alone but he says he has no refuge, no one who cares for his life, no one who is concerned for him. In truth, one can be surrounded by people and still feel all alone.

When you’re trying to live for Christ in a world that hates Christ, you often feel alone. A Christian teen does at his public school. A Christian businessman does in the lunchroom. You may be the only Christian in your family and you know what it’s like at a family reunion, surrounded by people yet feeling all alone.

Keil & Delitzsch offers this helpful explanation: “The fact that David, although surrounded by a band of loyal subjects, confesses to having no true friend, is to be understood similarly to the language of Paul when he says in Phil. 2:20: ‘I have no man like-minded.’ All human love, since sin has taken possession of humanity, is more or less selfish, and all fellowship of faith and of love imperfect; and there are circumstances in life in which these dark sides make themselves felt overpoweringly, so that a man seems to himself to be perfectly isolated and turns all the more urgently to God, who alone is able to supply the soul’s want of some object to love, whose love is absolutely unselfish, and unchangeable, and unobscured, to whom the soul can confide without reserve whatever burdens it, and who not only honestly desires its good, but is able also to compass it in spite of every obstacle.” [\[11\]](#)

What a privilege we have, to be able to tell God what we feel! Are you feeling weak this morning, perhaps

vulnerable, maybe alone? Tell the Lord. He cares. But a word of caution is in order. Don't dwell on your feelings. David didn't. Yes, he came to grips with his feelings and expressed them to God, but then he moved on, as must we. To what? Notice the third movement of David's prayer.

III. David tells us what he knew (5-6).

"I cry to you, O LORD; I say, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.' Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me."

Notice that David is still crying. *I cry to you*, he says. But notice the content of his cry. He's pouring out to God an affirmation of what he knows. When life is full of unknowns it's vital to affirm what you *do know*. And what did David know? Two certainties. First he knew that...

A. He was desperate. Hear him in verse 6, "I am in desperate need," he says. "Rescue me...for they are too strong for me." David knows that his problem is bigger than he is, and he's not too proud to admit it. But he also knows this...

B. God is sufficient. "You are my refuge," he says to Yahweh. "You're my portion in the land of the living."

David doesn't say that God provided him with a refuge (such as this cave), but rather, that God Himself is his refuge.^[12] *You are my refuge.*

What's a refuge? Ironically, the Hebrew word translated 'refuge' (*machseh*) can also be translated 'cave.' For instance, in Psalm 104:18 it refers to the place where the rock badger lives, a crag, a hole of protection in the side of a hill. A refuge is a place of safety. It's where you go to get away from danger. It's where you can rest and let down your guard.

Your house is a refuge. It's where you go at the end of a busy day in a rat race world. But let's learn from David.

1. *Make sure Yahweh is your refuge.* He can be your refuge because He is sufficient, but to experience the refuge He offers you must go to Him. You must place yourself under His protective care.

David did this over and over in the psalms. He and the other psalm-writers talked a lot about God being their *refuge*. For instance...

Psalm 57:1 "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed."

Psalm 62:6-7 "He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge."

Psalm 91:9 "If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the LORD, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent."

Have you ever twisted your ankle? Last week Sherry did, both ankles in fact. I remember once coming down on another player's foot in a basketball game and feeling my ankle twist sideways. In the recovery process your ankle feels weak. In fact, it hurts to put pressure on it. But in time, you know what you must do. You must put your weight on that foot again.

In order to experience God's sufficiency you must choose to put your trust in God, to put your weight on Him, to make Him *your refuge*. But there's another very practical step that David took, and so must we to experience the sufficiency of God.

2. *Make sure Yahweh is your portion.* "You are...my portion," David told the Lord in verse 5. The Hebrew

word for ‘portion’ (*chalaq*) is from a word meaning ‘divide,’ as in ‘dividing up an inheritance.’ Once an inheritance is ‘divided up’ the various ‘parts’ become the possession of the recipients of the inheritance. God gave Israel an inheritance, the Promised Land. David’s portion as a member of the tribe of Judah was a parcel of land near Bethlehem .

But due to Saul’s aggression, David had fled from his portion. He wasn’t enjoying it any longer. So he found his joy somewhere else. Here David affirms that God Himself is his portion.

Do you delight in God because of what He gives you, or do you truly delight in God *period*? To say that God is your portion is to say, “God, You are *enough*. You are *all I want*.” Can you say that?

It’s one thing to love God when He gives you good health, but is He sufficient if He, for His own good reasons, takes away your good health? He was for David. For Asaph, too, who made this confession in Psalm 73:26, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

Picture two people for a moment. We’ll call the first Larry and the second Barry. Larry announces at the church prayer meeting, “God is good,” right after he gets the job promotion he’s wanted. Barry, at the same prayer meeting says, “God is good” right after he lost his job due to company cutbacks. Larry calls his friends to share a praise when his child makes the honor roll. Barry doesn’t call anybody, but he faithfully serves in church even though he has a prodigal child who’s breaking his heart. Larry sings songs in church on Sunday. Barry, on the other hand, sings hymns to God from his hospital room right after the doctor told him he’s got cancer.

Now answer this. Who is making the Lord his refuge and portion, Larry or Barry? Is Larry? Maybe, but you really can’t tell for sure because anybody can talk about the Lord’s goodness when life is pleasant. But there’s no doubt about Barry, is there? We see God in his life even when life is hard because God is *enough* for Barry. God is sufficient. Barry knows it and Barry *shows* it.

Let’s look at how the psalm ends. In Psalm 142 David tells us what he did, how he felt, what he knew, and finally...

IV. David tells us what he wanted (7).

“Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.” David says he wanted three things...

A. He desired to be set free. “See me free from my prison,” he says to God. He wants out of his cave! It’s okay to ask for deliverance from problems. But notice *why* David asked for it, as a means to something...

B. He desired to praise Yahweh’s name. “Set me free from my prison, *that* I may praise your name.” There’s what David intended to do if God set him free, *praise* Him.

Here’s a good question to ask yourself before you ask God for His help. “Why do I want God to deliver me from my problem situation?” There are two possible, gut level answers. The first is so I can get on with life, with *my agenda*. But the other is what David models for us, so I can see *God’s agenda* fulfilled in my life in ways that will bring even *greater honor* to Him. But David didn’t stop there. He wanted thirdly...

C. He desired to see Yahweh’s people gather together. “Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.” David knows God has chosen him for a purpose, to serve Him by serving His people as their next king. And from inside the cave, he’s longing for the day when the rest of God’s people, his fellow Israelites, will gather around him and praise God’s goodness by which He sustained and delivered David.

You can tell a lot about a person by listening to what they say they miss while on a bed of affliction. “I miss my work. I can’t wait to get back in the saddle.” Those words reveal something, not necessarily bad either. So do these,

“I can’t wait to get back out on the golf course.” And so do these, “When I get back on my feet again, I can’t wait to see my church family.”

Spurgeon offers this thought, “To be exiled from the godly is worse than imprisonment, hence David makes it one point of his release that he would be restored to church fellowship.”^[13] The psalmist put it this way in Psalm 116:12-14: “How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.” (see also Psalm 22:25-26)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God’s intent is to use our cave experiences for our good and for the good of others watching us, all to the praise of His name. To borrow Paul’s language in 2 Corinthians 1, God’s agenda isn’t to make us *comfortable*, but rather to *comfort* us so we can *comfort* others (2 Cor. 1:3-6)!

Did you notice the change that’s occurred in David? He’s still in the cave, but his tune has changed. David began the psalm with *crying* but ends with thoughts of *singing*. His prayer turned into praise.

But there’s something else happening in that cave, something we *must* see.

Take another look: What do we see in this cave experience?

If we’re willing, we can learn about two essential subjects...

1. *This psalm teaches us about Christ.* That’s true of the entire Old Testament, for sure. It all points to Christ. Every page in some way functions as an arrow that’s flying towards a target, and the target is God’s Anointed One.

At His baptism Jesus made a staggering claim, announcing that He had come to *fulfill all righteousness* (Matt. 3:15). Later He elaborated, stating He had not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets (a designation for the entire Old Testament) but to *fulfill them* (Matt. 5:17). I take that to mean, at least in part, that Christ fulfilled what David experienced in Psalm 142.

Hebrews 2:17 puts it this way, “For this reason *he had to be made like his brothers in every way*, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God...” Christ became a man, just like David. And Christ experienced what men experience, including cave experiences like David’s.

So look again. Do you see Christ in Psalm 142? Like David, Christ was hunted down like a criminal and could say, “In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me (3).” And like David (only more so, for sure) Christ felt the pain of total alienation and could cry out, “Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life (4).” And though men forsook Him, Christ, like David, could hold on to this certainty, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living (5).” No wonder His final words were, “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46),” for although the hands of men killed Him, He knew He was safe in His Father’s hands!

And after dying Jesus Christ was placed in the tomb, His ultimate cave experience. There His body lay, alone, in the dark, to the human eye *defeated*. But hear His cry! Hear Him as He says with David and in fulfillment of David’s words and experience, “Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name (7a).”

And why would our Savior ask for this? What did He envision as the result of His Father’s intervention and His own triumph over the grave? Why did He want to leave that cave, that tomb next to Gethsemane? For this reason, the very same reason David shared at the conclusion of his psalm, “*Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me (7b).*” Yes, Jesus had His people in mind, “the righteous,” the ones He died and rose again to *make righteous* (Rom. 3:22-24; 6:3-4). Here’s why the Savior did what He did, so that “the righteous would gather about him.”

That’s what’s happening this morning, beloved. When believers gather on the Lord’s Day, we are *gathering about*

Him and praising the Father for His goodness expressed to and through His Son.

Are you part of the gathering? Granted, you are here today but did you come to gather *about Him*? Is He the reason you are here, to express your appreciation to Him through singing and giving, to get to know Him better through studying His Word? Make sure He is.

Yes, Psalm 142 teaches us about Christ. But that's not all. One final subject...

2. *This psalm teaches us about our desperate need for Christ.* "Listen to my cry for I am in desperate need." That's what David told the Lord because He knew it was true. Now make David's cry in verse 6 your own, for it's true for you and me, too.

*I need Thee, O I need Thee;
Every hour I need Thee;
O bless me now, my Savior,
I come to Thee.^[14]*

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

^[1] Derek Kidner, p. 473.

^[2] Keil & Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 368.

^[3] We find this label also in Psalms 86, 90, & 102.

^[4] Charles Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, p. 323.

^[5] Keil & Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 367.

^[6] Keil & Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 369.

^[7] Derek Kidner, p. 473.

^[8] Spurgeon, p. 324.

^[9] I found this helpful observation in *Daily Walk*, Vol. 30, Number 6, June 2007, *Walk Thru the Bible Ministries*.

^[10] John Peterson, "No One Understands Like Jesus"

^[11] Keil & Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 370.

^[12] The word 'refuge' here is not the same Hebrew word as in verse 4.

^[13] Spurgeon, p. 326.

^[14] Annie S. Hawks, *I Need Thee Every Hour*