

Psalm 57 “Crying in a Cave” **

Setting: David was hiding in a cave (1 Sam. 22:1-2; 24:1-3).

1. When you're in a cave it's easy to become self-absorbed.
2. When you're in a cave you have a wonderful opportunity to do what David did.

Main Idea: Rather than looking inward and becoming self-absorbed, in Psalm 57 David by God's help chose to look in four directions.

I. David looked up (1-3).

- A. He asks for mercy from God (1).
- B. He cries out to God (2-3).

II. David looked around (4-6).

- A. He sees his enemy (4).
- B. He sees God's glory (5).
- C. He sees his enemy's plot backfire (6).

III. David looked ahead (7-10).

- A. He prepared his heart (7a).
- B. He resolved to sing (7b).
- C. He resolved to awaken the coming days with praise (8).
- D. He resolved to praise the Lord among the nations (9-10).
 1. If you really appreciate God you don't hoard Him.
 2. If you really appreciate God, you do all you can to spread His fame.

IV. David looked beyond himself (11).

- A. What really matters in the world is God's reputation.
- B. What really matters in the world is God's plan.

Make It Personal: Am I living my life for the glory of God or for some other agenda?

When I was growing up on the farm my brother and I and a few others went on a search and find mission. Our neighbor, Mr. Grimes, an eighty-plus year old retired farmer, had told us a story from his youth. It was about a cave located in the hill across the ridge from our farm. “It was as big as a barn,” he told us. “I saw it myself,” he emphasized, “a huge underground room with a stream flowing through it.”

Since we lived just a mile or so from the Ohio Caverns, we began to conjure up images of stalactites and stalagmites in “our” cave, like the ones you can see in the tourist-filled caverns. Mr. Grimes told us where the entrance was, as best he could remember—he hadn't actually seen it in some sixty years. “It's over by that abandoned

farmhouse,” he explained. “The entrance is probably closed up by now, but if you can find the spot and unclog it, you’ll see the cave.”

We set out with shovels, flashlights, and rope, intent on accomplishing our mission. We found the old farmhouse without a hitch—it was abandoned and falling apart. And we searched the wooded area around the farmhouse, every indentation in the side of the hill. We even dug a few places, but to no avail. The mysterious cave would remain a mystery.

For us, not finding the cave was disappointing, but life went on. Sure it would have been nice to see, but I didn’t lose any sleep over not finding it.

That was not the case for a cave David wrote about in the Psalms. Finding it for David was no mere adventure. It was a case of survival. Why? He tells us in the introduction to Psalm 57.

Of David. When he had fled from Saul into the cave. David was running for his life because King Saul, his own father-in-law, was hunting for him to kill him. The reason? God had rejected disobedient Saul and chosen David to be Israel’s next king.

Setting: David was hiding in a cave (1 Sam. 22:1-2; 24:1-3).

David actually wrote two psalms about his experience in the cave, Psalm 57 and Psalm 142 (which we’ll ponder next time). It may well be the same cave 1 Chronicles 11:15 mentions, where years later David was forced to hide. On that occasion, he was king of Israel and on a mission against the Philistines, but got trapped in the cave. He longed for a drink of water from the well in his hometown of Bethlehem .

The heading indicates that Psalm 57 was...

For the director of music. In other words, although the psalm records what David cried to God from that cave, it was later placed in Israel’s music leader’s hands so that he might teach it to the rest of God’s people. The KJV calls him the “Chief Musician.” He’s referred to as “The Choirmaster” in the ESV. David taught Israel to sing.

It’s worth noting that 1 Chronicles 23:5 indicates that years later as king, David provided 4,000 Levites with musical instruments to praise the Lord! God wants His people to sing, to sing about Him and to Him, to sing about His dealings with His people all to the glory of His name. According to the heading, Psalm 57 was to be sung...

To the tune of “Do Not Destroy.” The KJV merely inserts the Hebrew word, *Altaschith*, which means “Do not destroy,” apparently indicating this was the tune for accompaniment. What a song title! It also appears in the superscription of Psalms 58, 59, and 75.

One commentator observes that this phrase, “Do not destroy,” seems to have been a popular saying or proverb that reflected what a vineyard keeper would say when the first clusters of the season were bad. “*Do not destroy it,*” he would say, for even though it hasn’t produced yet, the vine still has the blessing of life in it. Just wait a little longer.^[1]

That’s certainly exemplifies what David did, for although Saul was trying to kill him, when he had the chance to reciprocate, David didn’t. He refused to kill God’s anointed, King Saul. *Do not destroy.* God raised him up. God will take him down, in His time.

A miktam. One commentator suggests that the word should be translated ‘covering,’ as in covering the lips, and that this heading should be translated, “A silent prayer.”^[2]

Now the question... *Which cave?* 1 Samuel mentions at least two caves where David hid from Saul...

1 Samuel 22:1-2 “David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam . When his brothers and his father’s

household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.”

1 Samuel 24:1-3 “After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, ‘David is in the Desert of En Gedi.’ So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Craggs of the Wild Goats. He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave.”

So in 1 Samuel 22 David went into the cave at Adullam, while in 1 Samuel 24 he hid in a cave at En Gedi. We can't be sure which cave experience prompted David to write Psalm 57.

I've entitled this message, “Crying in a Cave.” That's exactly what David did in Psalm 57 & Psalm 142, *cry out to God*. Psalm 57:2—“I cry out to God Most High.” Psalm 142:1—“I cry aloud to the Lord.” Think about it...

1. *When you're in a cave it's easy to become self-absorbed.* “Why is this happening to me? What did I do to deserve this? When am I going to get out of here?!”

You don't have to be in an actual cave to be self-absorbed. A hospital bed can feel like a cave. So can a job with a hard to please boss. So can a tough marriage. When you feel penned in by hardship and disappointment, it's easy to become self-focused. But know this...

2. *When you're in a cave you have a wonderful opportunity to do what David did.* What did he do? Rather than looking inward and becoming self-consumed, in Psalm 57 David by God's help chose to look *outward* in four directions.^[3]

I. David looked up (1-3).

The entire psalm is God-centered. David refers to God twenty-one times in this psalm, either by name or pronoun.^[4] The first movement of the psalm is God-focused. David is in a cave, but rather than looking *inward*, he chooses to *look up*. In so doing he expresses two things to God.

A. He asks for mercy from God (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.”

The first words out of David's lips are to ask God for mercy. He doesn't ask God to treat him as he deserves. What he wants, indeed, what he knows he most needs is *God's mercy*. “Don't treat me as I deserve, Lord,” is his plea.

Also, please note that although David is in the cave, a cave he entered seeking protection from Saul and his forces, it's not the cave in which David trusts. He finds his real security under the shadow of God's wings. Charles Spurgeon offers this word picture, “The hawk flies across the sky, but this is no evil to the chicks when they are safely nestling beneath the hen.”^[5] “I will take *refuge* there,” David declares. “Until this storm passes I will find refuge under the shadow of Your wings.”

Don't miss that David affirms the storm will pass, and until it does he's going to find his security under God's wings of protection. After crying for mercy from God...

B. He cries out to God (2-3). “I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; *Selah* God sends his love and his faithfulness.”

What's true of God? David tells us several things here. First, he refers to Him as “God Most High,” using the name Abraham used after defeating the armies of the east (Gen. 14:22). When you cry out to God, there's none higher!

But He's not just high. He's also personally involved in our lives. He has a purpose for me, David says, and He is the One "who fulfills his purpose for me." The KJV says that God "performeth all things for me." Hear the conviction in David's voice. God has a purpose for my life and neither Saul nor his army nor anyone else can hinder God from fulfilling His good purpose in my life.

What's more, He intervenes in my life. How? According to verse 3, David says that God "sends His love and faithfulness from heaven." His *love*—He always has our good in mind and supplies what's necessary to bring that about. And His *faithfulness*—God who is dependable, reliable, and totally trustworthy, always gives us what we need exactly when we need it. And He does so, says David, to "save me" and to "rebuke my pursuers."

What should you do when you're in a cave? Like David, the first thing we need to do is to *look up*. Don't become *inward* focused. Go vertical. Ask God for His mercy and cry out to Him acknowledging the truth about Him, that He's faithful and loving, that He has a good plan for your life and will accomplish it. What did David do next?

II. David looked around (4-6).

This is important. When facing trouble the first thing we need to do is to *look up*, but the reason we look up isn't to escape reality. We live in a *real world*. God's presence makes a difference in the *real* world. So after he *looked up*, David proceeded to *look around*. And what did he see? Three things captured his attention.

A. He sees his enemy (4). "I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts— men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords."

David compares Saul and his army to ferocious lions—we saw him use the same image last week in Psalm 7:2 ("Deliver me from all who pursue me or they will tear me like a lion"). But it's not just the physical danger alone that David feels. It's the slander of their tongues. Remember, Saul was spreading horrible falsehoods about David to convince the citizens of Israel to aid him in David's capture (1 Sam. 23:22). They've got tongues like spears, arrows, and swords, David says.

In his classic book, *The Treasury of David*, Charles Spurgeon writes, "Malicious men carry a whole armory in their mouths; they have not harmless mouths, whose teeth grind their own food as in a mill, but their jaws are as mischievous as if every tooth were a javelin or an arrow. They have no molars, all their teeth are canine, and their nature is canine, leonine, wolfish, devilish. As for that busy member the tongue, in the case of the malicious, it is a two-edged, keen, cutting, killing sword."[\[6\]](#)

When David looked around himself to assess his situation, that's what he saw first, a vicious enemy that reminded him of the lion he faced as a boy protecting his flock. Except this lion could talk, and what came out of his mouth was ruining his reputation.

At that point, David saw something else, not by sight but by faith.

B. He sees God's glory (5). "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth." This is a prayer of faith. Let's examine it word by word...

Be exalted, David says. God *is* exalted in heaven, but David is saying, "O God, *be* what you *are*!" *Be exalted*. *Be exalted above* the heavens. David wants God to assume center stage, the top seat in the house of the universe.

Let your glory be over the earth. The Hebrew word for "glory" is *kabowd* which means "attributing high status to a person." At its root *kabowd* means "weightiness" or "heavy." If we were discussing a subject and you said, "Wow, that's *heavy*!" you would mean that you were having trouble getting your mind around that subject because it was too big or too complex. God *is heavy*—you cannot get your mind around Him and figure Him out. Synonyms for "glory" include "substantial, taken seriously, splendor." We might use the phrase "take seriously." God is glorified when He is *taken seriously*, when His reputation is upheld, when His honor is recognized.

O God, let your glory (your weightiness, your significance) be over *all the earth*, David prays. Not just in this cave, not just in this country of Israel, but may You be taken seriously, may You be weighty, may Your glory be over all person and place on planet earth!

David is actually going to repeat verse 5 to conclude the psalm in verse 11, so we'll have more to say about its implications in a moment. But for now, notice how David's perspective is changing. He's not thinking about the four walls of his cave any more. He's thinking beyond his circumstances to what he wants God to do, not for David but for *God*, and not just in his *cave* but in *all the earth*. Do what will bring You glory, O God, in all the earth!

What a difference it makes when we take our eyes off of ourselves and begin to contemplate God's glory! Derek Kidner observes, "The fight had almost gone out of David (6a), perhaps until he prayed the God-centered prayer of verse 5."^[7]

As David continues to look around he sees something else...

C. He sees his enemy's plot backfire (6). "They spread a net for my feet—I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path— but they have fallen into it themselves. *Selah*"

That's exactly what happened in the cave at En Gedi, according to 1 Samuel 24. Saul was hunting David, digging a pit for him, as it were. But Saul ended up falling into the pit when he went into the cave, not knowing David was there. And were it not for David's mercy, Saul would have perished on the spot.^[8]

First, David *looked up*. Next he *looked around*. Thirdly...

III. David looked ahead (7-10).

"My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies."^[9]

Notice the future tense verbs—"I *will* sing...I *will* awaken the dawn...I *will* praise you..." and so on. Though in a cave, David is making plans for the future. He's looking ahead. Let's take a careful look at four of David's activities mentioned here.

A. He prepared his heart (7a). We might expect David to say, "My heart is *shaking*." But rather he says, "My heart is *steadfast*." And repeats it, "My heart is *steadfast*." The word 'steadfast' refers to something that is steady or well prepared.^[10] The KJV says, "My heart is *fixed*."

David settled something early on in his life. Life was about *God*, not self but *God*. Have you settled that issue? Until we do, we live roller coaster lives.

Alexander Maclaren preached a sermon on this verse titled, "The Fixed Heart" in which he offered these insightful and convicting words:

"For a fixed heart I must have a fixed determination and not mere fluctuating and soon broken intention. I must have a steadfast affection, and not merely a fluttering love that, like some butterfly, lights now on this, now on that sweet flower, but which has a flight straight as a carrier pigeon to its cot, which shall bear me direct to God. And I must have a continuous realization of my dependence upon God and of God's sweet sufficiency going with me all through the dusty day...."

"Ah, brethren! How unlike the broken, interrupted, divergent lines that we draw! ...Is our average Christianity fairly represented by such words as these of my text? Do they not rather make us burn with shame when we think that a man who lived in the twilight of God's revelation, and was weighed upon by distresses such as wrung this psalm out

of him, should have poured out this resolve, which we who live in the sunlight and are flooded with blessings find it hard to echo with sincerity and truth?

“Fixed hearts are rare among the Christians of this day.”[\[11\]](#)

Maclaren died in 1910, almost one hundred years ago, but if fixed hearts were rare in churches then, what can be said about them today? Americans in general have the attention span of a thirty minute television program. If it takes longer than five minutes to fix a broken appliance, we throw it away and get a new one. We do the same with broken marriages. *Fixed hearts?* That’s a foreign concept to modern man. And those of us who call ourselves ‘Christian’ breathe the same air.

How many promises have you made to God in your life? “I’m going to start going to church consistently. I promise!” “I’m going to read Your Word every day, I promise!” “I’m going to use the gifts You’ve entrusted to me to serve You in the local church. Promise!” And yet as we look back we see a trail of *broken* promises.

What’s needed? A *fixed* heart, a *steadfast* heart. Where does that come from? It comes *from God*. And it comes to those who spend daily time alone with God meditating on His Word. There is no other way.

If you didn’t eat food for a week, you’d grow weak and eventually die. If you neglect your spiritual food, God’s Word, you will grow weak in your spiritual resolve. In the cave David prepared his heart. Secondly...

B. He resolved to sing (7b). “I *will* sing and make music,” he declares to God and to himself. Praise is a choice. It’s an activity I choose to engage in. I don’t need to feel like praising God to begin doing so. Yet having begun, my feelings will eventually catch up with my voice. The Holy Spirit actually enables us to praise (Eph. 5:18-20) which means we can praise God at all times and in all circumstances, even when we’re in a cave.

Listen to David’s resolve and make it your own. I’m not going to let my circumstances determine when I praise God. I may be in a church or a cave, it matters not. I may be with encouraging friends or be threatened by a foolish king. I *will* sing!

Let me encourage you. Don’t just come to church. Come with a prepared heart and a resolve to sing! Is not our God worthy of heartfelt praise? Yes![\[12\]](#) But not just on Sunday. Notice David’s next resolve...

C. He resolved to awaken the coming days with praise (8). “Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.” Isn’t it interesting that David exhorts his soul to *awake*? It’s good to talk to yourself. If you’re feeling like *not* doing something that God wants you to do, have a talk with yourself. Tell yourself, *Wake up! It’s time to get busy obeying God!*

“But I don’t feel like it,” your flesh may respond. And if so, keep talking to yourself, saying, “It doesn’t matter how I feel. In Christ I am an over-comer! So I am going to obey God, and God commands me to praise and thank Him *in all circumstances*. So *wake up!* Begin the day with praise!”

I can’t overemphasize this. David doesn’t react to the new day. He *takes* it! How do you start your day? You say, “Well, I’m not a morning person.” That’s okay. God can raise the dead so surely His grace is sufficient to raise your slumbering body!

Right here’s a practical aid to waking up God’s way. Do what David did. *Sing songs of praise. Make music to God*. In other words, resolve to waken your day with praise.

Here’s a suggestion. I’ve learned that to do this I must plan for it ahead of time. I actually use 3x5 cards, one for each day of the week, to plan what I’m going to pray for in the morning, what attribute of God I’m going to meditate on, what song I’m going to sing, and so on. I’m too tired when I first begin my day to think straight, but God is worthy of praise and I don’t want to miss the opportunity to give it to Him!

But let’s not just praise God by ourselves. Notice David’s next resolve...

D. He resolved to praise the Lord among the nations (9-10). Verse 9—“I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples.”

That’s a staggering announcement. David says he plans to praise God *among the nations*, that is, *among the Gentiles*, the *non-Jews*. “The ordinary Jew would never wish the Gentile dogs to hear Jehovah’s name, except to tremble at it,” observes Charles Spurgeon. “But this grace-taught Psalmist has a missionary spirit, and would spread the praise and fame of his God.”^[13]

Let this sink in...

1. *If you really appreciate God you don’t hoard Him.* That is, you don’t keep Him to yourself. You don’t view Him as your own little God. No!

2. *If you really appreciate God, you do all you can to spread His fame.*

It’s worth noting that in Romans 15:9 Paul picks up this thought (also expressed in Psalm 18:49), saying this prophecy had been fulfilled. There Paul is appealing for unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians on these grounds, as stated in Romans 15:8, “For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs.” And in the very next verse Paul quotes the psalmist (Rom. 15:9), “So that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: ‘Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.’”^[14]

Last week I saw an article in the newspaper explaining that something new has come to Israel, something big, it said. *Baseball!* They’re playing professional baseball in Israel, with hot dogs and peanuts and cracker jacks even, all kosher of course! And that fact that they’re playing baseball in Israel made news in America.

Now that may be “big” news by some people’s estimation, but here is BIG news by anyone’s estimation. Listen to David in verse 10—“For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies.”

God is a loving and faithful God and His love and faithfulness are great! He provided a way for sinners to be forgiven of their sins. In David’s day it was by offering sacrificial lambs. But that was just a picture of what was ahead...

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son (John 3:16).”

“God demonstrated His love for us in this. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).”

Now that’s news worth celebrating and spreading! God’s Son died in the place of sinners and now God forgives and gives eternal life to any sinner who will accept His Son, Jesus Christ, as personal Savior and Lord.

Rather than being inward and self-consumed in the cave, by God’s grace David looked up, looked around, and looked ahead. We can sum it up by the following...

IV. David looked beyond himself (11).

“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.” David finishes the psalm by repeating the chorus. Why the repetition? Because this is big.

A. What really matters in the world is God’s reputation. “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.” Derek Kidner comments, “It is easy to overlook the breadth of this vision, forgetting that the shelter of a cave and the withdrawal of the enemy would have satisfied most men in the hard-pressed situation of David. But his thoughts had already soared ‘above the heavens’ (5); and his *Lord* was no local ruler.”^[15]

David isn't thinking about himself at the end of the song. He's looking beyond himself. He's fixed His gaze upon God. He longs to see God's reputation advance. He knows *that* is what really matters in the world. And this...

B. What really matters in the world is God's plan. God's plan is to make His name *weighty* in all the earth. And that is David's closing plea, "Let your glory be over all the earth."

My friends, missions exists because God is worthy of worship and exaltation in places where He is not yet receiving it. That's why we must not remain in self-pity in our caves. That's why we must look beyond ourselves. So that God who is worthy of glory will receive glory in all the earth.

And so we send our children around the world. And so we give our money to support missions. And so we pray as our Lord taught us, "Cause Your kingdom to come and Your will to be done, as in heaven *so on earth!*"

That's God's plan, my friend. He is forming a people for His glory, a people from every nation on earth. Psalm 86:9 reveals, "All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name."

And so the psalm ends, with David still in the cave but his heart fixed on the glory of God. As Eric Lane observes, "So once again David's life takes on the pattern of Christ's: this time not in terms of his sufferings but of his glorious reign."^[16] It's worth noting that some churches use Psalm 57 on Easter morning, for the One who was in the midst of hateful lions (verse 4) is now exalted above the heavens (verse 11).^[17]

There's a question we need to ask ourselves...

Make It Personal: Am I living my life for the glory of God or for some other agenda?

Oh my friend, don't waste your life. Don't waste your cave experience. Look up. Look around. Look ahead. Look beyond yourself. Live to make God weighty in the world!

**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] Tate, p. 77.

^[2] D. Kidner, p. 38.

^[3] W. VanGemeren says the psalm has two parts: lament (1-4) and thanksgiving (6-10) with a refrain repeated after both parts (in verses 5 and 11).

^[4] Observation by James Boice, p. 475.

^[5] C. Spurgeon, p. 476.

^[6] C. Spurgeon, p. 476.

^[7] D. Kidner, p. 206.

^[8] This is quite a picture. David portrays his enemy as a pride of lions outside the cave. But inside the cave he lies down and sleeps, for God is his refuge and protector. Daniel lived later than David and faced lions, real ones. And God protected him, as He did David. Here's how He did it according to Daniel 6:22, "My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight..."

[\[9\]](#) Verses 7-11 appear again in Psalm 108.

[\[10\]](#) Kidner, p. 207.

[\[11\]](#) Quoted in James Boice, pp. 478-9.

[\[12\]](#) Dead men don't sing. That's true of dead men in cemeteries. That's also true of spiritually dead men and women in churches.

[\[13\]](#) C. Spurgeon, p. 478.

[\[14\]](#) Observation by Eric Lane , p. 259.

[\[15\]](#) D. Kidner, p. 207.

[\[16\]](#) Eric Lane , p. 259.

[\[17\]](#) Tate, p. 81.