

Christ our Refuge: Living and Working with a Tough Crowd Psalm 57

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Every day, most of us leave from home to study or work with a group of people by nature hostile to what we are in Christ. And an equally large number of us return home from work or school to live with a similarly hostile crowd. How do we make it? David shows us!

In Psalm 57, David was called to live with a tough crowd. They were with him morning, noon, and night. He couldn't escape them. It would have been easier to just walk away from the whole situation, but that was not God's plan.

God's Word affirms four truths this morning.

Life is hard, pain is real, suffering is unavoidable and weariness with life is normal.

That is what David found, and that is what most people who are honest will tell you.

*Job 5:7 Yet man is **born to trouble**, As the sparks fly upward.*

*Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "**We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.**"*

*2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and **all** who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will suffer** 9lit. 'will be pursued by) **persecution**.*

1 Peter 4:12-14 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial (#4451 purosos roasting in fire) which is to try (#3986 peirosomos tempt) you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: ¹³But rejoice (present active imperative) inasmuch as ye are partakers (#2841 koinoneo verb of fellowship koinonia) of Christ's sufferings (pathema from pathos feelings); that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. ¹⁴If ye be reproached (#3679 oneidizo throw in teeth) for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of

glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

So what are we to do when our personal troubles intersect with our work or school life? The answer is found in God's Word.

Look at the introduction to Psalm 57. Where is David? Yes, entering the cave.

Now look at Psalm 142. Where is he now? Living in the cave.

Remember that these two Psalms are the turning point in David's life. These are the crucible where we see his character refined more than any other place.

Our world is so much like David's. God called David to minister in a cave of troubles. He was to minister while in this cave, and he was to minister to those who were with him in the cave. Desperate, debt laden and distressed men were all around—David was their captain.

Has God called you to minister in a cave of troubles? Well let me ask you—do you work somewhere? Then you are surrounded by troubled people. Are you married? Then you have the potential for troubles. Do you have children? Then again—you are open to troubles.

Each of us is called to minister and to do so no matter what troubles surround us. And to go beyond just existing, hanging on, and enduring—we are to minister to those around us who are troubled.

When God puts us into a place where we face constant troubles, and it is not because of any willful disobedience on our part—what good can it do.

Caves of troubles, hard times that won't go away—are the places of some of the greatest blessings and growth in our lives.

From history we can see the way that some faced their troubles and triumphed. Here are just a few from history:

Cripple him, and you have a Sir Walter Scott.

Lock him in a prison cell, and you have a John Bunyan.

Bury him in the snows of Valley Forge, and you have a George Washington.

Raise him in abject poverty and you have an Abraham Lincoln.

Strike him down with infantile paralysis, and he becomes Franklin Roosevelt.

Burn him so severely that the doctors say he'll never walk again, and you have a Glenn Cunningham who set the world's one-mile record in 1934.

Deafen him and you have a Ludwig van Beethoven.

Have him or her born black in a society filled with racial discrimination, and you have a Booker T. Washington, and a George Washington Carver....

Call him a slow learner, and write him off as uneducable, and you have an Albert

Einstein.¹

The same is true in God's Word. Capture him and send him off as a POW in a far off land and you have a Daniel.

Now for David whose life we are observing—have him grow up as the last child, overlooked and neglected—and you have *David the shepherd boy*.

Have him accused and rejected by his brothers and slighted by his countrymen—and you have *David the giant killer*.

Have him on the run for his life, hiding in a cave surrounded by hundreds of emotional porcupines—and you have David the sweet Psalmist of Israel.

David goes on to the most fruitful years of his life with an unbroken string of spiritual and material triumphs. He rises to the highest levels of leadership, worship, and heritage. What an incredible time of his life. And all that seems to start right here in Psalm 57. So this is a crucial Psalm for our spiritual nurture and development.

Please stand as we read this Psalm.

Now, go back three thousand years ago, into the harsh conditions of the cave of Adullam we can start to see the emotional and physical furnace of adversity and affliction that David had entered.

David wrote down how God helped him to minister to these desperate men. The group that came to live and work around him were so representative of what the culture around us is all about. They were distressed, drowned by debt, and discontented with life. Isn't that an apt description of an average American these days? And as we find in Psalm 57, David was able to minister to them.

David also learned how to not get his life and emotions dragged down by those around him. As we read these verses note the emotional condition of everyone that joined up with David. They were a very needy group. And in all their need, they invaded the life of someone just coming out of the pits. It was just the right recipe for a relapse by David into despair and a return into the pits. But the good news is—that didn't happen, and the reason why is just what we are going to learn from God's Word.

This psalm brings us to another delightful cluster of psalms (56–60) known as the *michtam* psalms. What does *michtam* mean? It speaks of that which is substantial, or enduring, or fixed. *Michtam* literally means "engraved" or "permanent." So these *michtam* psalms have to do with that which is permanent and enduring, that which is substantial and lasting.

My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise [Ps.

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *The Quest for Character*, Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1987 p. 84

57:7].

David is saying—

- I'm not going back to trying to rescue myself like I did in Gath (Psalm 34) and miserably failed.
- I'm not going back to refusing to look at You and feeling abandoned (Psalm 13) and suffering through those long dark days.
- I'm not going back to laying in the mud of my sin and despair (Psalm 40, 70) in the pits of life.

No, my heart is fixed. I am holding on from now on to You! Here is how I will minister when surrounded by troubles.

The word David uses gives us a perfect picture of what the Lord of our life wants to accomplish in us through the caves of trouble we endure.

A heart to minister in a cave of troubles is a heart that is "fixed". Fixed on what? Look at the other times this Hebrew word **kuwn** is used. A heart to minister is--

A heart prepared to seek God's Word. *Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had **prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord**, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. [like Ezra's]*

A life ordered by God's Word. *Psalm 37:23 The **steps** of a good man are **ordered by the Lord**, And He delights in his way.*

A way established by God's Word. *Psalm 40:2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And **established my steps**.*

A spirit renewed by God's Word. *Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And **renew a steadfast spirit within me**.*

Emotions anchored by God's Word. *Psalm 112:7 He will not be afraid of evil tidings; **His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord**.*

A walk directed by God's Word. *Psalm 119:133 **Direct my steps by Your word**, And let no iniquity have dominion over me.*

A mind guarded by God's Word. *Proverbs 16:3 Commit your works to the Lord, And **your thoughts will be established**.*

A heart guided by God's Word. *Proverbs 16:9 A man's heart plans his way, But **the Lord directs his steps**.*

That is the key to living triumphantly through the caves of life. Can I repeat what God

has offered us?

A heart prepared; A life ordered; A way established; A spirit renewed; Emotions anchored ; A walk directed ; A mind guarded ; and a heart guided! That is worth all the trouble it took for David to get it.

From this cave time David goes on to the most fruitful years of his life with an unbroken string of spiritual and material triumphs. He rises to the highest levels of leadership, worship, and heritage. What an incredible time of his life.

And all that seems to start right here in Psalm 57. So this is a crucial Psalm for our spiritual nurture and development.

So let's go to the place where David learned to live in the midst of troubled people. Three types of men came: those who were in distress, those who were in debt, and those who were discontented. Here are four lessons we can trace from this Psalm. They parallel the situation in life we face in an unexpected breakdown of our car.

1. **When Troubles come—David pulls over and calls for help from the Lord.**

HIS HOPE IS IN THE LORD. (v. 1-3) In his earlier life we see David in great distress. David's problems in I Samuel 24 are the backdrop as he searches for strength in Psalm 57. He finds it in God Himself. Remember, he is in a weak time in life. This is when depression often hits.

*Psalm 57: 1-3 Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, **Until these calamities have passed by.** 2 I will cry out to God Most High, To God who performs all things for me. 3 He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. **God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.***

So what is my plan when trying to minister? When troubles come we first must cry out to the Lord, put in a call.

2. **Then David waits for the Tow Truck.** HIS STRENGTH COMES FROM THE LORD. (v. 1-11) Note that David talks about God seven times, That is a complete set. He is saying that God is enough. God and God alone is enough. He knew, and trusted, and rested in—the God who is enough!

*Psalm 57: 1-11 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. 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. I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts -- men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. Be exalted, **O God,** above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. 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 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. Be exalted, **O God**, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. (NIV)*

3. **Sitting in the waiting room he grows.** HIS DISCOVERIES ARE NOW ABOUT THE LORD. (v. 1, 5, 7, 11) For emphasis, note how David doubles three aspects of God's nature.

- This is what David finds: God is Gracious, God is Steadfast, God is Praise Worthy.
- With this truth to hold onto, he testifies that it works. And he gets his focus off his troubles. He went beyond his cave world and onto Lord!!

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 57:5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. And in v.7 My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. And in v. 11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. (NIV)

4. **Finally David drives off from the situation deeply blessed for the hard time.** HIS FOCUS IS ON THE LORD. (v. 5, 11) Finally David gets God's perspective that lifts him above the storm of Saul's murderous pursuit, above the din of hundreds of needy and desperate men—and into the peaceful calm around the Throne of God! More than any self pity or gloom, he clings to the Lord.

When we are at our depths—God is inviting us to His heights!

*Psalm 57:4-5, 10-11 I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts— men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. 5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. 10 For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; **your faithfulness reaches to the skies**. 11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.*

As a New Testament writer Paul reminds us:

Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God

has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

End with # 43 Great is Thy Faithfulness