

Trapped in a Cave? Draw Near to God

8/27/17- Pastor Randy

Psalm 57

*Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection.
I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by.
I cry out to God Most High, to God who will fulfill his purpose for me.
He will send help from heaven to rescue me, disgracing those who hound me.
My God will send forth his unfailing love and faithfulness.
I am surrounded by fierce lions who greedily devour human prey—
whose teeth pierce like spears and arrows, and whose tongues cut like swords.
Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens! May your glory shine over all the
earth. My enemies have set a trap for me. I am weary from distress.
They have dug a deep pit in my path, but they themselves have fallen into it.
My heart is confident in you, O God; my heart is confident.
No wonder I can sing your praises! Wake up, my heart!
Wake up, O lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn with my song.
I will thank you, Lord, among all the people.
I will sing your praises among the nations.
For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens.
Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens.
May your glory shine over all the earth.*

According to the title, David wrote Psalm 57 when he hid in a cave, fleeing for his life from King Saul. Psalm 57 was written by David before he became king. He had already been anointed to become king, and the people were ready to elevate him to the throne and this provoked the current king, Saul, to jealousy. His jealousy was so severe that he became consumed with pursuing David in order to kill Him. David ended up spending 8-9 years of his life on the run from Saul.

In Psalm 57 we have a model for us as to how we should respond when we are in danger; when we feel trapped, threatened, under attack.

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Have you ever felt trapped, threatened, harrassed? Trapped in a toxic, destructive relationship? Threatened or harassed by a former friend, boyfriend, girlfriend? Trapped in a dead-end job? Under attack by an employer or co-workers that just don't like you? Under threat because you were a whistleblower at work or a witness to a crime and somebody wants to shut you up? Trapped in your own home, harassed by neighbors?

Maybe the enemy that threatens to harm you is an illness or a disease. Maybe you feel like your trapped in a financial crisis that you can't envision a resolution to?

All of us have had, or will have "cave" experiences in life. Times where we encounter real threats to our well-being, health, and even our very lives.

The Psalm is divided into two parts. David begins with a prayer and then transitions from prayer to praise. His prayer consists of petition and declaration.

I. Prayer of Petition: *"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection."*

Petition is the word we use to describe prayers that express our desires or wants. When we petition God we are asking him to do something. David's life was threatened and he prayed that God would protect him.

In verse 2 David writes, "I cry out to God Most High". You can hear that cry in the words of the very first line of his prayer. These words are the cries of someone in distress. They are full of emotional intensity.

A. Prayer is pictured for us in scripture as a calling out and crying out to God.

Can we pray "silent" prayers? Of course. God knows our thoughts and there are times when it would be more appropriate to pray silently or quietly. However, prayer, as it is described for us in scripture, is almost always a "calling" out and "crying" out to God. In fact, God's people are defined as those who "call on the name of the Lord."

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*"Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not **call on** your name..." - Psalm 79:6*

*"To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who **call on** the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours..." - 1 Corinthians 1:2*

We don't need to call out, or cry out, to God with a loud voice in order to get His attention. Prayer does not need to be accompanied by emotional intensity in order to persuade God to respond. It is not something we do intentionally so much as it is something we do naturally. The sound produced by our vocal chords emanates from the strong passion for God in our soul. ***We call out and cry out to God loudly, because we feel our love for God and need for God deeply.***

B. Prayer is an expression of need.

David prayed honestly about his need. David needed protection. David was in danger. David was in distress. He was anxious, fearful. His prayer demonstrated that he needed divine intervention. His cave was not his ultimate source of protection. His 600 family members & companions that came to join him in his exile were not his ultimate source of protection. He needed God. David did not view the cave as his refuge until the danger passed by. He said I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings. The imagery is of God as a mother hen protecting her vulnerable chicks under her wings. David believed that he needed God to rescue him, but he also took steps to remove himself from the situation. When Saul attempted to pin David to the wall with a spear but missed, David didn't hand the spear back and say, "Try again". David fled. God expects us to be wise and remove ourselves from harm whenever possible, but David knew that his ability to protect himself was limited. He needed God.

C. Prayer is also an expression of trust and belief.

David not only petitioned God for what he needed, he also declared to God – and to those who would sing this prayer – that he trusted in Him to provide

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for his needs. Prayer, in the life of the individual Christian and the church, will only exist to the degree that the following are true:

- 1) Christians possess a strong sense of dependency upon God, and
- 2) Christians possess a strong faith and trust in God.

II. Prayer of Declaration: A prayer of declaration is an expression of our faith and confidence in God's faithfulness, love, justice and mercy, leading to a confidence that God will work all things for our good and His glory.

David did not deny reality but neither did he engage in self-pity or play the martyr. He expressed the reality of his situation: "I am in danger, I am being hounded, I am surrounded, I am distressed! BUT....

He also declared that God would deliver him! In his prayer he declared his faith that God would,

"fulfill his purpose for me"

"send help from heaven to rescue me"

"send forth his unfailing love and faithfulness."

Prayers of declaration are not expressed in order to inform God as to what he should do or because God needs to be reminded to keep His promises. They are not a means of manipulating God, as if we are using the power of suggestion on Him. We do not declare our faith that God is going to deliver, save, heal, or provide as a prayer technique that must be employed in order to secure his response. We are certainly not commanding God. What we are doing is simply expressing to God that we trust him; that we believe in His power to meet all our needs; that we believe He is willing to meet our needs because of His faithfulness and love for us. This does not mean they have no impact. Over and over again, in both the OT and the NT we find that God delights in those who trust in him and he responds to requests made in faith. Faith in God is pleasing to God.

Psalm 57 progresses from petition - David describing his need and requesting God's help - to declaration - David declaring his faith in God's response - to praise and thanksgiving in verses 7-11.

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One of the benefits of David's declarative prayer is that it has reinforced his confidence and hope in God's deliverance so that he could write, "My heart is confident in you."

Have you ever experienced a crisis of confidence? The loss of confidence has a negative impact on our ability to make decisions, our ability to focus, and our relationships. Confidence is important, but our confidence must be rooted in God, more than it is ourselves. David's heart was confident in God, not in himself. We don't need to increase our self-confidence but our God confidence. We don't need to be more self-assured, we need to be more assured of God's power and love.

David's declarative prayers resulted in a renewed God-confidence, which in turn produced a spirit of joy and thanksgiving. Now that he had his God-confidence renewed, it was time for him to stir himself up and praise God. David has been weary from his fear and distress, but now he knows he must shake himself and wake himself to praise God according to what he believes His God will do for him and through him. He writes,

*"No wonder I can sing your praises! Wake up, my heart!
Wake up, O lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn with my song".*

The cry of prayer has now become a cry of praise. His loud cry for mercy has now become an even louder cry of thanksgiving. He says he is going to sing praises so loud that he will wake up the dawn. Instead of waiting for the sun to wake him up, he is going praise so loud that he wakes the sun up.

David is now praising God in anticipation of the future. Fear of the future has been replaced. Now he is looking forward to the future. He has been secluded. He has had to flee from His people, but he is going to praise God before not only his own people, but before all the nations. How prophetic are these statements?! There are millions of people all over the world who have read these words and sung these words of praise by David. David had no idea the extent to which his words would come true!

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Psalm 57 teaches us something very important about praise. Praise needs to be expressed even before we receive the answer to our petition. David didn't wait until after Saul's death to praise God. He didn't wait until his life was no longer in danger. He didn't wait until the promise that he would be king was fulfilled. David needed to praise God in his cave just as much as he needed to praise God in the palace. Those who don't recognize that God is worthy of praise when they face the danger and darkness of the cave, won't praise Him when they are in the safety of their home or even if they end up in the palace. David drew near to God in the one of the lowest points of his life, feeling trapped, unable to move about freely, hiding in a cave. In the cave, a place of darkness, danger and discomfort, he turned to God and was protected from destruction. In the palace, the place of comfort, he turned away from God and caused destruction. The point is this: The hard places in life, our "cave" moments, when we feel trapped and our back is against the wall, can be those moments when God does his greatest work in our hearts, stripping away all of our self-confidence and self-satisfaction so that he can develop a profound, deep trust and intimacy with him.

The moments when you feel least like praising God are the moments when you need to praise Him the most. When it gets darker, sing louder.

In 2000 I was admitted to the hospital due to an episode of atrial fibrillation. The cardiologist who treated me decided to keep me in, even though my heart had returned to a normal rhythm and I thought I should have been able to go home. For the next two days he ran a series of tests and prescribed three different meds. The meds and the stress of the whole ordeal messed me up. I came home emotionally and physically drained. The day I arrived home I was resting on the couch when Christine returned home from taking our 6-yr old to the doctor. He had been experiencing recurring swollen glands and a low grade fever. The doctor tested him for mono and a host of other things but all the tests came back negative. Christine had the unpleasant task of informing me, as I lay on the couch, that the doctor was concerned and

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wanted to send us to Syracuse University Hospital's pediatric oncology unit to have Evan tested for possible lymphoma! In my weakened condition, I allowed anxiety to get the best of me. Anxiety and fear caused me to interpret the message that Evan should be tested for lymphoma as if Evan had been diagnosed with lymphoma. Not only did I interpret a test as a diagnosis, I also interpreted a diagnosis as a prognosis. My fear and anxiety didn't result in an optimistic interpretation of the prognosis. Anxiety influences us to interpret situations in an overly pessimistic manner. I interpreted the fact that we were scheduling Evan to be examined at the pediatric oncology unit for possible cancer as if he actually had cancer and as if his life was in imminent danger.

Beware of the harmful power of anxiety and fear. Anxiety and fear have the power to cause us to experience the emotional torment and grief associated with real tragedy and real loss, without us ever actually experiencing the tragedy and loss. A loss or tragedy that only exists in our imagination, does not make it any less painful. Sadly, it is a pain that is unwarranted and unnecessary.

One particular song ministered to me in that season, and as I sang it in praise to God it became my weapon against anxiety and fear. It is called "For every Mountain" by Kurt Carr.

I've got so much to thank God for
So many wonderful blessings and so many open doors
A brand new mercy
Along with each new day
That's why I praise You
And for this I give You praise

For waking me up this morning
That's why I praise You

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For starting me on my way
That's why I praise You
For letting me see the sunshine of a brand new day
A brand new mercy along with each new day
That's why I praise You
For this I give You praise

You're Jehovah Jireh
That's why I praise You
You've been my provider
That's why I praise You
So many times You met my need, So many times You rescued me
That's why I praise You
I wanna thank You for the blessings You give to me each day
That's why I praise You
For this I give You praise

For every mountain You brought me over
For every trial you've seen me through
For every blessing
Hallelujah, for this I give You praise

The answer is to respond like David responded. When trapped in the darkness, danger, and distress of a cave-like experience:

1. Draw near to God with your petition. Stick to the facts!
2. Draw near to God in declarative prayer. Confess to God your trust in him.
3. Draw near to God with praise and thanksgiving. Remind yourself of his faithfulness and unfailing love in the past. Praise him in the present for his goodness to you in the future. Conclude your praise as David did by saying, *Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens. May your glory shine over all the earth.*

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