

Lesson 4 A Prayer of Distress Psalm 57

Purpose: To learn to call on God in times of distress.

Distress: (n.) extreme anxiety, sorrow, pain, or danger; (v.) to cause (someone) anxiety, sorrow, or pain.

Synonyms: anguish, suffering, pain, agony, ache, affliction, discomfort, heartache, heartbreak, misery, despair, unhappiness.

Our need for God's presence and care in our lives is a daily reality. We do not always experience this reality, however. As C. S. Lewis wrote in *A Grief Observed*, sometimes "life is so good," we may be "tempted to forget our need of him." But there are times in our lives when we are acutely aware of our need of God. In times of distress, when we are threatened with loss or harm or even with death, we remember our need of God and we turn to Him with great urgency.

Some people feel that they cannot bring their troubles to God. I have often heard people say, "I can't turn to God when I am in distress if I haven't been talking with Him all along." And I have heard other people say, "I can't bother God with this, there are many people hurting more than I am." But, God invites talking with Him when we are in distress. Repeatedly, in Scripture, God says to us, "Call on me in the day of trouble and I will answer you."

Group Discussion. Which of the pictures of God described above do you relate to and why?

Personal Reflection. In times of distress do you generally seek out other people or do you withdraw? Explain what you do, and discuss why you might choose these particular behaviors.

This psalm invites us to call on God. The title and the introduction to this psalm suggest that it was written by David when he fled into a cave to hide from King Saul who wanted to kill him. **Read Psalm 57.**

Note from the ESV Study Bible: Psalm 57. This is another individual lament, based on an event in David's life (probably **1 Sam. 22:1**, but possibly **1 Sam. 24:3**). **Psalm 142** is likewise from one of these passages.

Psalm 57 arose from Saul's persecution of David. The psalm has two sections, each ended by the refrain (**vv. 5, 11**), and each mentioning God's "steadfast love and faithfulness" (**vv. 3, 10**, drawing on **Exodus 34:6**). In the first section (**Ps. 57:1-5**), the dominant strain is cheerful confidence amid danger, while in the second section (**vv. 6-11**), the accent is on the expectation of victory, and thus God's vindication. The faithful who sing this hymn can identify with David's confidence in the presence of serious dangers, and can look through those dangers to seek God's honor.

Discussion:

1. Describe the picture of God's comfort David paints in **verse 1**.

- a. David paints a picture of God's comfort as taking refuge in the shadow of God's wings. This can be seen as a chick hiding under his mother's wing or the image of an eagle sheltering her young with her wings. It is a picture of being very close to God.
 - b. It is a picture of being protected and intimately loved. It is also a picture of the hen putting itself between the chick and his aggressor, protecting him with her own life.
2. What images come to your mind when you think of the experience of being comforted?
 - a. Someone sitting by the bedside of a person that is ill. An image of somebody hugging a person that has just lost a loved one.
 - b. An older sibling stepping up to help a younger or smaller brother or sister.
 - c. Standing near someone as a doctor shares information that is not pleasant.
3. In his time of distress David cries out to God (**v. 2**). What does it mean to "cry out" to God?
 - a. "Crying out" to God is an instinctive, heartfelt, urgent, desperate call for help. When we "cry out," there is no time for face-saving measures or for pretense. When we "cry out," we reveal ourselves; we are real.
 - b. Eugene Peterson in his book, *Answering God* says that, "This is the language of prayer: men and women calling out their trouble—pain, guilt, doubt, despair—to God. Their lives are threatened. If they don't get help, they will be dead, or diminished to some critical degree. The language of prayer is forged in the crucible of trouble. When we can't help ourselves and call for help, when we don't like where we are and want out, when we don't like who we are and want a change, we use primal language, and this language becomes the root language of prayer."
4. What metaphor does David use in **verse 4** to describe the danger he finds himself in?
 - a. David uses the metaphor of his soul being among lions being set on fire. He also describes his situation as being among men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue as a sharp sword.
5. What feelings do these images evoke?
 - a. These images evoke feelings of fear, despair, distress, hopelessness, and trouble.
6. How does God intervene for David in his time of distress (**vv. 2-3, 6**)?
 - a. God intervenes by sending help from heaven, and saving (delivering) him from the reproach of them that would swallow him up. David even states his foes falls into the pit they have dug for him themselves.
 - b. God is able to turn our situations around. He can fight our battles for us.

7. David responds to God's care in **verse 7** by saying that his heart is steadfast (fixed). What is the significance of this response?
- To be steadfast is to be deeply committed to another person. Sometimes it is difficult to remain steadfast. But to remain faithful to God will strengthen our confidence in God.
 - By David stating that his heart is steadfast or fixed he means that his faith is firm in God. This steadfast faith leads him to sing and give praise to God.
 - In some situations, the best defense is to simply be quiet and praise God. In times of great suffering, don't turn inward to self-pity or outward to revenge, but upward to God.
8. David also responds with praise to God. Paraphrase the words of praise David offers to God (**vv. 5, 9-11**).
- David exalts God, he praises God. He says that he will praise God among the people. He says that he will sing unto God among the nations. He says God's mercy and truth are great and reach unto the heavens and the clouds.
9. **First Samuel 24** tells the story behind this psalm. Read **24:1-7** and **16-20**. How did God take care of David in this time of great distress?
- Saul, who was a madman by this time, took three thousand of his finest fighting men with him to hunt down David and his men. It must have seemed like an impossible situation for David and his men. But God protected David in an unexpected way.
 - Saul was relieving himself in a dark cave where David hid. God took Saul away from his three thousand men and put him in a vulnerable situation with David. God can turn situations around.
10. Hopefully, most of our times of distress will not be as dramatic as this story from David's life. However, any time of distress is a time when our awareness of our need of God may be heightened. Think of a time when you were in distress. Were you able to cry out to God for help at that time? Why or why not?
11. What was your experience of God like during that time?
12. How might this psalm encourage you in times of distress?

Prayer: Spend some time asking for God's help with the distress you are experiencing in your life today.

Now or Later

Take some time to write about a time when God intervened for you when you were in distress. Write a prayer or a poem thanking God for His help in your time of distress..

Homework: A Prayer of Gratitude. Read **Psalm 65**