

David: A Man After God's Own Heart, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: Hunted in the Wilderness: Trusting God Under Pressure

1 Samuel 22:1–5; Psalm 57

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson enters the long, difficult middle of David's story, the wilderness years between his anointing and his crowning. Historically, David has fled from Saul and become a fugitive. At the cave of Adullam he gathers a band of the distressed and the desperate, secures his parents' safety in Moab, and lives for years under constant threat. Psalm 57, written from a cave, gives us the interior of these years: real fear honestly named, refuge taken in God, concern for God's glory, and praise rising before deliverance comes. The doctrinal and spiritual stakes are the nature of refuge in God, the way God uses wilderness seasons to form His people, faith and worship in the midst of trouble, and trusting God when His promises and our circumstances appear to contradict one another.

The teacher should help the class take the wilderness seriously rather than rushing to the rescue. Many believers assume that hardship means they have left God's path, when in fact God repeatedly leads His chosen through the wilderness rather than around it. David's years on the run are not a detour from his calling; they are the forge in which God shapes the shepherd into a king. There is also a forward look here to Christ, who likewise endured rejection and suffering before His exaltation, so that David's pattern prepares the class to follow a Savior who was despised before He was glorified.

Aim at formation. Nearly everyone in the room is in some cave, or soon will be. The lesson invites them to make God their first refuge rather than their last resort, to keep caring for others when pressure tempts them to curve inward, to keep God's glory in view in their prayers, and to learn the difficult, beautiful discipline of singing in the dark. Press these home so that students leave equipped not to escape the wilderness but to trust God within it.

Question 1

Student Question:

In Psalm 57, surrounded by danger, David prays, "in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by" (v. 1). What does it mean to take refuge in God, and what does this teach us about where God's people are to turn when they are afraid and under pressure?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Psalm 57 opens with the central image: refuge. "In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge." The picture is of a small bird sheltering under a larger one, or, for an Israelite, of the wings of the

cherubim over the mercy seat. To take refuge in God is to run to Him as the safe place when everything else is dangerous, to hide ourselves in His protection and care.

The teacher should make clear that taking refuge is an active turning, not passive resignation. David does not merely endure; he deliberately runs to God. Refuge is something we take. In the moment of fear, the believer makes a choice about where to flee, and David flees to the LORD. This is the most basic instinct of faith under pressure.

Note that taking refuge in God does not deny the danger. David is honest about the lions and the spears all around him. Faith is not pretending the threat is not real; it is bringing the real threat to the real God and sheltering in Him. The teacher can free the class from the false idea that trust means denial. David trembles and takes refuge at the same time.

Apply it to where God's people are to turn when afraid. Our culture trains us to turn first to ourselves, our plans, our resources, our distractions. Scripture trains us to turn first to God. The teacher should help the class see refuge in God as the appointed and reliable response to fear, available in every cave.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The meaning of taking refuge in God under the shadow of His wings
- Refuge as an active turning to God, not passive resignation
- Honesty about danger held together with trust
- God as the appointed safe place for the fearful
- Turning first to God rather than to self under pressure

Discussion Prompts

- What does it actually mean to take refuge in God?
- How is taking refuge different from simply denying or ignoring the danger?
- Why do we so often turn to ourselves before we turn to God?

Question 2

Student Question:

David ran to God as his refuge rather than relying only on his own wits, weapons, or escape plans. When you are afraid or under pressure, where do you instinctively run first for safety and relief? What would it look like this week to make God your first refuge rather than your last resort?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question exposes our instinctive first move under pressure. The aim is honesty about where we actually run, because we all have a default refuge, and for most of us it is not God, at least not first.

Help students name their instinctive refuges: control and planning, food or screens or other numbing, the reassurance of other people, work, anxious rumination. These are not always wrong in themselves, but when they are our first and real refuge, they crowd out trust in God and leave us still afraid.

Then call for a reordering. Making God our first refuge is a habit built by repeated choice: turning to Him in prayer at the first onset of fear, before we reach for our usual comforts. Invite each student to name their default refuge and one concrete way they will turn to God first this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying our instinctive first refuge under pressure
- How lesser refuges crowd out trust in God
- Making God our first refuge as a built habit
- Turning to God at the first onset of fear
- The difference between a last resort and a first refuge

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you instinctively run first when you are afraid?
- How has that refuge left you still anxious or unsatisfied?
- What is one way you could turn to God first this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

At the cave of Adullam, those in distress, in debt, and bitter in soul gathered to David, and he became their leader (1 Samuel 22:1–2). What does it reveal about God that He chose to build David's future out of broken and rejected people, and how does this shape our understanding of the kind of people God gathers and uses?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The scene at Adullam (22:1–2) is quietly astonishing. The men who gather to David are explicitly the distressed, the indebted, and the bitter in soul, the failures and the discontented of Saul's realm. Out of this unpromising company God will build the core of David's mighty men and his future kingdom. The teacher should let the class feel how unlikely this raw material is.

This reveals something deep about God's character and method. He delights to gather the broken and the rejected and to make something out of them. The pattern runs throughout Scripture and reaches its climax in the gospel, where Christ calls not the righteous but sinners, and where God chooses the weak and lowly things of the world (1 Corinthians 1:26–29). The kind of people God gathers tells us what kind of God He is.

Note that God does not gather these men because they are impressive but because they come. They are drawn to David in their need, and he receives them and forms them. There is great encouragement here for anyone who feels disqualified by failure, debt, or bitterness. The cave is exactly where God assembles His people, and He is not embarrassed by their condition.

Apply it to the church. The Lord's people are not a collection of the already-successful but a gathering of the rescued. The teacher can help the class see their own congregation in this light and receive both humility and hope: humility, because we came in our need; hope, because the God who built a kingdom from the cave is still in the business of making something of broken people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's delight in gathering the broken and rejected
- The unlikely raw material from which God builds
- The pattern fulfilled in Christ calling sinners, not the righteous
- God choosing the weak and lowly (1 Corinthians 1:26–29)
- The church as a gathering of the rescued, not the impressive
- Hope for those who feel disqualified by failure

Discussion Prompts

- What does it reveal about God that He built David's future from such people?
- How does this shape the way we see our own congregation?
- Why is this good news for anyone who feels disqualified?

Question 4

Student Question:

David, though hunted and afraid, still took thought for his aging parents and carried them to safety (22:3–4), and he led the desperate men who came to him. When you are under pressure, do you tend to curve inward and think only of yourself, or do you still see and serve others? How might God be calling you to care for someone even in the middle of your own hard season?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses on a real temptation of hard seasons: curving inward. Pressure tends to shrink our world to ourselves and our own survival. Yet David, hunted and afraid, still takes

thought for his parents (22:3–4) and shoulders responsibility for the desperate men who come to him.

The teacher should hold up this outward-facing love as both rebuke and invitation. It is striking that the man after God's own heart, even in crisis, keeps seeing and serving others. This is not because his pain is small but because his trust frees him from total self-absorption. Caring for others in our own hard season is itself an act of faith.

Then make it concrete. Most students can identify someone they have stopped seeing because their own pressure has filled the screen. Invite each person to name one other individual they could care for this week, even in the middle of their own difficulty, as David did. Often, serving another is part of how God sustains us in the cave.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to curve inward under pressure
- David's continued care for others even while hunted
- Outward love as an act of faith in hard seasons
- Serving others as part of how God sustains us
- Seeing the people our pressure tempts us to ignore

Discussion Prompts

- When you are under pressure, do you curve inward or still see others?
- Whom have you stopped noticing because your own difficulty fills the screen?
- Whom could you care for this week even in the middle of your hard season?

Question 5

Student Question:

Twice in Psalm 57 David prays, "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!" (vv. 5, 11). In the middle of his danger, his concern rises to God's glory. What does it teach us that David's prayer in crisis reaches beyond his own rescue to the exaltation of God, and how does keeping God's glory in view change the way we pray under pressure?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question draws attention to the refrain of Psalm 57 (vv. 5, 11): "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!" In the middle of mortal danger, David's prayer rises above his own rescue to the exaltation of God. This is theologically significant and easy to miss.

The teacher should help the class see what this reveals about David's heart. His deepest desire, even under threat, is that God be glorified. His own deliverance matters, and he prays for it

honestly, but it is not the highest thing. The glory of God towers over his personal need. This is the order the believer is called to share.

Note how this reorders prayer under pressure. When God's glory is our highest concern, our crises are set in a larger frame. We still ask for help, but we ask within a desire that, however things turn out, God be exalted. This guards prayer from collapsing into pure self-interest and anchors it in something steadier than our changing circumstances.

Apply it directly. The teacher can invite the class to notice how their own crisis-prayers tend to shrink to pleas for relief, and to learn from David to lift their eyes to God's greatness. A prayer that wants God exalted is a prayer already being answered, whatever happens to the immediate trouble.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's glory rising above personal rescue in David's prayer
- The right ordering of desires: God exalted above our relief
- How keeping God's glory in view reframes our crises
- Prayer guarded from collapsing into pure self-interest
- Wanting God exalted whatever the outcome

Discussion Prompts

- What does it reveal that David prays for God's glory in the middle of danger?
- How does keeping God's glory in view change the way we pray under pressure?
- What would it look like to want God exalted more than your problem solved?

Question 6

Student Question:

It is easy, in a hard season, for our prayers to shrink down to nothing but pleas for our own relief. How could lifting your eyes to God's greatness and glory, as David does, reshape the way you pray about your current pressures? What might it look like to want God exalted even more than you want your problem solved?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question applies David's God-centered prayer to the student's own pressures. The aim is to help students notice the shrinking of their prayers under stress and to lift their eyes higher.

Help the class recognize the difference between crying out for relief, which is good and biblical, and a prayer life that has become nothing but pleas for relief. David did both: he asked for mercy and he wanted God exalted. The teacher should commend honest petition while inviting students to enlarge their prayers.

Then call for a practice. What would it look like this week to begin a prayer about a current pressure with God's greatness and glory, before turning to the request? Invite each student to try praying as David did, wanting God exalted even more than they want their problem solved.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Noticing how our prayers shrink under stress
- The difference between crying for relief and praying only for relief
- Honest petition held together with desire for God's glory
- Enlarging our prayers to begin with God's greatness
- Wanting God exalted above our own comfort

Discussion Prompts

- How have your prayers shrunk down under your current pressures?
- How might lifting your eyes to God's glory reshape those prayers?
- What would it look like to pray this week for God to be exalted in your trouble?

Question 7

Student Question:

Psalm 57 moves from "be merciful to me" and a description of surrounding lions to "my heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody!" (vv. 1–4, 7). What does this movement from fear to settled praise, while the danger is still present, teach us about the nature of faith and worship in the midst of trouble?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question traces the remarkable movement within Psalm 57. The psalm begins with a plea for mercy and a vivid picture of surrounding lions whose teeth are spears and arrows. Then, with the danger still unremoved, it turns: "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody!" David moves from fear to settled praise before anything in his situation has changed.

The teacher should highlight the timing, because it is the whole point. David does not wait until the storm passes to sing; he sings in the cave. This is the nature of faith and worship in trouble. It is not the absence of fear but praise offered in the teeth of it, grounded not in improved circumstances but in the unchanging character of God.

Explore how this movement happens. David rehearses who God is: His steadfast love and faithfulness that reach to the heavens (v. 10). As he fixes his gaze on God rather than on the lions, his heart steadies. Worship is not denial of the danger; it is the deliberate redirection of attention from the threat to the God who is greater than the threat, and that redirection settles the heart.

Apply it as a learnable discipline. Many believers assume praise must wait for deliverance. David teaches otherwise. The teacher should help the class see that worship in the middle of trouble is both possible and steady, and that it is often the very thing that carries us through the cave.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship offered in the midst of trouble, before deliverance
- Faith as praise in the teeth of fear, not its absence
- Steadiness grounded in God's character, not changed circumstances
- Redirecting attention from the threat to God
- Rehearsing God's steadfast love and faithfulness
- Worship as a discipline that carries us through the cave

Discussion Prompts

- What is significant about David singing while the danger is still present?
- How does fixing our gaze on God steady a fearful heart?
- Why do we so often wait for deliverance before we will worship?

Question 8

Student Question:

David sang before the storm passed, not after. Where in your life are you waiting to praise God until your circumstances improve? What would change if, like David, you chose to worship God in the middle of the trouble rather than only on the other side of it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the song in the cave into the student's life. Many believers are, in effect, postponing worship: waiting until the diagnosis is good, the relationship is mended, the season eases, before they will truly praise. The teacher should gently surface this delay.

Help students see what is lost in the waiting. Postponed praise often means God is functionally absent from us in exactly the seasons we most need Him, and it tethers our worship to our circumstances rather than to His worth. David refused that tether.

Then call for a step. What would it look like to worship this week in the middle of an unresolved trouble, by singing, by giving thanks, by rehearsing God's faithfulness aloud? Invite each student to name one area where they have been waiting to praise and one way they will worship before the storm passes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tendency to postpone worship until circumstances improve
- What is lost when praise is tethered to our circumstances

- Worshiping God for His worth, not only for our relief
- Choosing to praise in the middle of unresolved trouble
- Thanksgiving and rehearsing God's faithfulness as practices

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you waiting to praise God until your circumstances improve?
- What is lost when your worship depends on your situation?
- How could you worship God this week in the middle of the trouble?

Question 9

Student Question:

David spent years living under God's promise that he would be king while his circumstances flatly contradicted it, hunted and homeless instead of crowned. These wilderness years were written down for our instruction, and they point us toward the One who also endured rejection and suffering before His exaltation. How do David's wilderness years help us trust God when His promises and our present circumstances seem to contradict each other, and how does this prepare us to follow a Savior who was despised and rejected before He was glorified?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it addresses one of the hardest tensions in the life of faith: the gap between God's promise and our present reality. David has been anointed king, yet he is living as a hunted fugitive. The promise says throne; the circumstances say cave. The teacher should name this tension plainly, because many believers live in it.

First, draw the timeless lesson. David's wilderness years teach that the apparent contradiction between God's promise and our circumstances is not evidence that the promise has failed; it is often the very path by which God brings the promise to pass. These years were not wasted. They formed in David the character a king would need and taught him to depend on God rather than on himself. God frequently fulfills His promises through, not around, seasons that seem to deny them. This is written for our instruction (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11), to teach us to trust the Promiser when we cannot see the fulfillment.

Second, lift the class's eyes to Christ, and do so with care. David, the anointed one who suffered rejection before he reigned, points forward to great David's greater Son. Jesus too was the Anointed King who endured being despised and rejected, a man of sorrows (Isaiah 53:3), before He was exalted. The pattern of suffering before glory runs from David to Christ and then to all who follow Christ, who share in His sufferings now and in His glory to come. The teacher should present this as the shape of the gospel itself: the cross before the crown.

Be careful not to turn this into a promise that every earthly hope will be granted on our timetable. The promise to David was specific and was kept in God's way and time. The

application for us is not that God guarantees our preferred outcomes but that He can be trusted to keep His true promises, and that the road to them often runs through the wilderness. Help the class hold fast to God's faithfulness precisely when their circumstances seem to argue against it, following a Savior who walked the same road of suffering before glory.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tension between God's promise and present circumstances
- Apparent contradiction as often the path of fulfillment, not its failure
- The wilderness as God's formative, not wasted, season
- These accounts written for our instruction (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11)
- David's suffering-before-reigning pointing to Christ (Isaiah 53:3)
- The gospel pattern of the cross before the crown
- Trusting the Promiser without presuming on our preferred outcomes

Discussion Prompts

- How do David's wilderness years help us trust God when promise and circumstance seem to contradict?
- In what way does David's suffering before reigning point us to Christ?
- How does following a Savior who suffered before His glory reshape how we view our hard seasons?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across both passages, at the cave, the gathered outcasts, and the song in the dark. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through David's wilderness years. What is the single truth about trusting God under pressure that you most need to carry into the cave you are in this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the lesson and turns it toward response. The class has entered the cave with David, watched God gather the broken, heard the prayer that wanted God exalted, and listened to the song in the dark. Now the aim is one specific, personal step of trust.

Encourage concreteness. One student may need to make God their first refuge; another to keep serving in the middle of their own trouble; another to enlarge their prayers; another to worship before the storm passes; another simply to keep trusting a promise their circumstances seem to deny. The point is one real thing carried into the week.

Close by lifting the class's eyes to Christ, who walked the wilderness road before them and walks it with them now. We are not alone in our caves. The God who sustained David, and who raised

the rejected Christ to glory, is forming us through our own hard seasons. Send the class out not longing merely to escape the cave but trusting the God who is at work within it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from the cave to a specific step of trust
- Naming one concrete way to trust God under pressure
- Christ present with us in our wilderness
- Letting one truth take hold this week
- Suffering as the place of formation, not abandonment

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this lesson is God pressing on you most directly?
- What is one specific way you will trust God in your cave this week?
- How does it steady you that Christ walked this road before you and walks it with you now?