

David: A Man After God's Own Heart

Lesson 4: Hunted in the Wilderness: Trusting God Under Pressure -- 1

Samuel 22:1–5; Psalm 57

There is a long, hard stretch in David's story that we tend to skip past on our way to the throne, and it is the stretch where nothing seems to be working. The giant-killer, the anointed king, the hero of the song, is now a fugitive hiding in a cave. He has no palace, no army worth the name, no security, and a king with the resources of a nation hunting him from cave to cave like an animal. The man God chose is sleeping on stone, listening for footsteps in the dark, wondering how long this will last and whether it will end with a spear after all.

And then a strange thing happens at the cave of Adullam. People start showing up. Not generals and noblemen, but the broken ones: everyone in distress, everyone in debt, everyone bitter in soul. The losers and the leftovers of Saul's kingdom find their way to David in the dark, about four hundred of them, and he becomes their captain. God is building David's future kingdom out of the very people the world had thrown away, and He is doing it in a cave. David's first concern, tellingly, is not for himself but for his aging parents, whom he carries to safety in Moab. Even on the run, the man after God's own heart is thinking of others.

It is out of seasons like this that Psalm 57 was born. The heading tells us David wrote it when he fled from Saul into a cave, and you can hear both the terror and the trust in it. "Be merciful to me, O God," it begins, "for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by." He is surrounded by lions, he says, by men whose teeth are spears and arrows. And yet, right in the middle of the danger, the song lifts: "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody!" The hunted man is singing in the cave.

Most of us know something about the wilderness. It may not be a literal cave, but there are seasons when the promises feel far off and the pressure is close, when we are waiting on a God who seems slow, hemmed in by circumstances we cannot control. The question those seasons ask is not whether we can escape them but what we will do inside them. David shows us. He does not pretend the danger away, and he does not collapse under it. He takes refuge in the shadow of God's wings, he keeps caring for others, and he finds, somehow, that he can sing. This lesson is about learning to trust God under pressure, in the cave, before the deliverance comes.

Group Discussion: We often imagine that if we are truly following God, our path will go smoothly, yet David spent years as a hunted fugitive after he was anointed king. Why do you think God so often leads His people through long, hard "wilderness" seasons rather than around them? What might He be doing in those seasons that He could not do any other way?

Personal Reflection: Think about a “cave” you have been in, or are in now, a season of pressure, waiting, fear, or seeming setback. When you were there, what did you do with your fear: did you mostly try to manage it alone, or did you take refuge in God? Where are you tempted to believe that a hard season means God has forgotten you?

Read 1 Samuel 22:1–5; Psalm 57

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?

9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 142, another cave psalm, "I cry to the LORD... you are my refuge"; Psalm 34:17–19, the LORD near to the brokenhearted, the righteous afflicted yet delivered; Romans 5:3–5, suffering producing endurance, character, and hope; James 1:2–4, trials testing faith to produce steadfastness; Isaiah 53:3, the Servant despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, before His exaltation