

When You Feel Like You're Hidden All Alone in a Cave

Can the Lord hear you from deep within a cave, a darkened place where you are physically or emotionally cut off from others—a place so lonely and difficult you ask: “Does anyone even know I’m here?”

Psalm 142 is a psalm from such a cave.

The historical record of David’s life relates the two times he hid in a cave: at En Gedi when he sneaked up on the unsuspecting Saul and cut off a part of his clothes (1 Sam. 24:3) and in the cave of Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1). Psalm 57 was written from the En Gedi cave, and it carries a buoyant mood in comparison to the doleful tone of Psalm 142. At En Gedi, David’s men were with him, but at Adullam initially he was alone and in hiding for his life.

The kind of cave you’re in often determines the tone of the prayer you pray. This psalm fits best the cave of Adullam: an extended period of frightful depression, deep anxiety, desperation, and feelings of utter abandonment.

Cry for Help

Note the strong words. They express emotions borne out of intense personal crushing and affliction.

It’s a cry, not a prayer of routine words.

It’s a loud cry, testifying to the deep hurt involved.

The voice is lifted up. From within the recesses of the cave, the sound bounces off the walls, gathering intensity until it funnels out the open mouth of the cave on its journey heavenward. Although David is in the cave because of threatened danger, his cry indicates that his pain is greater

than his instinct to remain hidden.

The complaint is poured out to God. It is not the one-time cry of momentary discomfort, but the prolonged anguish of a person who sees no resolution and who has been greatly wronged.

Confidence in the Lord

Notice the yin and yang of the soul in trial: from pain to peace, and back to pain again. Momentarily, David's anguish is broken by the calming truth: "When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way" (v. 3); but a breath later he despairs anew: "I have no refuge; no one cares for my life" (v. 4). Peace and pain play against each other on the tennis court of the soul. Which one wins is determined by God's mercy and a person's trust in Him.

David never accepted defeat as God's last word. Having confessed that he had no refuge, he immediately corrects himself: "O Lord ... You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living" (v. 5).

Like David, you may have no human solution to your desperate need.

You cannot handle some things by yourself. So never boast about how strong you are. Never say within yourself, *I can handle anything*. You may later find yourself in a cave where God teaches you that you are not as strong as you think.

From the cave, David contemplates and contrasts his weakness with God's strength (v. 6).

Comfort for the Future

The psalm closes on an up note. David anticipates a future day of release from the cave when he'll look back and praise the Lord. No longer will he be alone, but he will be surrounded by others who similarly recognize God's great goodness.

An old spiritual says, "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen." In a very real sense, pain is always individual. Others may empathize with you—even share their own similar experiences—but only you can fully know your pain.

The good news is the Lord knows your weakness and that you need His strength. Some things are too strong for you. Unless the Lord frees you from your cave of need, despair, depression, illness—you will be forced to remain there.

Don't lose hope! These days in the cave will pass.

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