

Summer in the Psalms: Exploring the “with God” Life Psalm 57

This Psalm was penned during one of the early crisis periods of David’s life. (We tend to focus on David’s victories and successes, and tend to forget that he had his share of crises and chaos...some of which was his own making...but not this particular one.)

David’s story is one worth being well acquainted with. We may be aware of the headlining times like the killing of Goliath or his sin with Bathsheba, but knowing the finer details of his story really helps to flesh out the picture of this highly important man of God. We are first introduced to David in I Samuel 16, and the Biblical text follows him through I Kings 2. (Technically, his name does show up at the end of Ruth in a genealogy, but without any real context.) David’s life is the stuff of legend and lore and would make a great Hollywood movie since it’s loaded with action, drama, and suspense. (Sadly, attempts of making movies based on David haven’t been done particularly well...but that’s not due to a lack of a good story.)

David was a unique and fascinating individual: he was a warrior and a poet/songwriter; he knew obscurity as well as the heights of fame and popularity; he was familiar with great joy and triumph as well as hardship and sadness. Psalm 57 gives a glimpse into some of the range of emotions and circumstances that was David’s life.

At the point when this Psalm was penned, David had already been appointed by God and anointed by Samuel the prophet (a way of demonstrating God’s appointing) to be the next king of Israel...even though the current king (Saul) was still on the throne. So you can imagine this caused a bit of tension to say the least. While the exact amount of time eludes us, it is estimated that David waited 15-20 years between first being anointed by Samuel and actually ascending the throne over Israel. And much of that time was on the run from king Saul as an outlaw and renegade. But David was not alone. He had a band of loyal followers (mighty warriors like himself) with him. I suspect that many citizens of Israel who happened to be loyal to Saul, considered David and his gang much like we consider a terrorist group.

David and his men were held up in a “cave” in En Gedi. The mental picture that we probably get when we hear that word likely doesn’t do justice to the actual scene. En Gedi was an oasis with springs and natural geological formations that would make it a formidable stronghold. (If you Google “En Gedi” and click “images” you’ll get a good picture of the area.)

Even though David had a posse of mighty warriors, he was nevertheless far outmanned. On top of this, David had a crisis of conscience. He did not feel that it was his place to take the life of king Saul. So even though the opportunity presented itself, and he could have ended his time on the run much quicker than it ended up being, David waited on the Lord, allowing God to prove Himself faithful, righteous, and just...regardless of the adversity David had to endure.

The opening line of the Psalm gives us an accurate picture of our true position before God...that is, we are always in need of His mercy. One of the chief characteristics of David that made him a

“man after God’s own heart” was that he readily recognized that position. A very popular prayer that Christians have prayed for centuries (perhaps going back as far as the Desert Fathers of the 5th century) that recognizes that same position is known as “The Jesus Prayer”: *“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”* (You’ll notice that it is similar to the prayer of the tax collector from Luke 18.) Righteous people of God have always understood their need for God’s mercy. When circumstances are tough, we tend to be more aware of that need, so the challenge, then, is to keep that in mind/focus even when things are going well.

In the second verse of this Psalm we also see David banking on God’s faithfulness to His promise/purpose. He was likely remembering his anointing by Samuel and holding fast to God fulfilling His plan.

In verses 4 and 6 we see that David was fully aware of the dangerous situation he was in. He did not see his situation through rose-colored glasses (as “religious” people often do). Lions, beasts, spears, arrows, swords, lying tongues, a spread net, a dug pit...this is descriptive language of the threatening and treacherous situation he was in.

A common misconception that people often have is that if God loves us, cares for us, is FOR us, then things should be smooth. This misunderstanding, then, can cause distress when situations/circumstances go south. It can cause people to question if God really cares for them, or maybe wonder if God is even real. What is important to remember is that part of God loving us, caring for us, being FOR us, is that God is ultimately concerned with our formation (becoming like Jesus). That being the case, few things form us, shape us, mold us like tough times. God allows us to go through them because He has a much bigger purpose in mind than our temporary comfort in any given situation.

David saw past the precarious situation he found himself in. As he turned his eyes to God (which is always a good way to gain perspective), he knew that life was bigger than his situation, that there was much more going on than his circumstances might lead him to believe. His heart was anchored to a God who was much bigger than the current conditions. *“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.”* (verses 5 & 11)

This picture/vision of God exalted over all is what made David’s heart steadfast, confident, and even celebratory. It is what inspired worship even in the midst of hardship. David understood that God was with him and for him. May we live with that same confidence and security, and be moved by that same vision and desire.

Q. What word, line, phrase or stanza stands out to you from Psalm 57 (or for that matter, any Psalm from this week in the devotional guide?)

Q. This Psalm is considered a Psalm of “lament”, coming from a grievous situation. Share a lamentable time/experience from your life? How did you deal with it? How did it end? (Or perhaps it’s still going on.)

- Q. As you go about your day to day life, how aware are you of your need for God's mercy? (Explain)**
- Q. In the sermon the point was made that, like David with his mighty men, we too need community to help us get through tough times. Share the benefits of Christian community that you have experienced (through good or bad times).**
- Q. David found himself in a situation where he could have taken matters into his own hands and killed king Saul rather easily. But he chose not to, giving room for God to work in the situation and in his life. When have you, perhaps regrettably, taken matters into your own hands? What was the result?**
- Q. Describe a time when you waited on God to act in a situation/circumstance you found yourself in.**
- Q. Describe a time when you worshiped, celebrated, exalted God despite the challenging and distressful situation you were in (or, perhaps, when you found it tough to do so).**
- Q. When we find ourselves in tough times we have a choice to make: are we going to allow God to use the experience to form us as He desires, or are we going to harden our hearts because we don't like the unpleasantness of the situation? Thinking over the course of your life, describe how you've faced such a choice (or, perhaps, you're in the midst of such a choice).**
- Q. David had a strong sense of God's purpose for him which kept him motivated and gave him perspective through adversity. How would you describe God's purpose for you? (Be as specific as you can.) How does that affect the decisions you make?**