

PSALM 142:1-7
HOW CAN I SURVIVE WHEN I AM SO LONELY?

“With my voice I cry out to the Lord;
with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord.
I pour out my complaint before him;
I tell my trouble before him.

“When my spirit faints within me,
you know my way!
In the path where I walk
they have hidden a trap for me.
Look to the right and see:
there is none who takes notice of me;
no refuge remains to me;
no one cares for my soul.

“I cry to you, O Lord;
I say, ‘You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living.’
Attend to my cry,
for I am brought very low!
Deliver me from my persecutors,
for they are too strong for me!
Bring me out of prison,
that I may give thanks to your name!
The righteous will surround me,
for you will deal bountifully with me.”¹

It has been said that an individual can live forty days without food, four days without water, four minutes without oxygen, and about four seconds without hope. We were created for fellowship; we long to share our lives with others who accept us as we are. Though all of us enjoy occasional times of solitude, and though some may choose to live utterly segregated from all social intercourse, we know intuitively that we were created for companionship. When we are deprived of fellowship, we grow melancholy, mournful, morose. The Psalmist had reached such a point; his situation was one in which he experienced utter loneliness. He had no friend to bear a portion of the sorrowful load. Pity the individual who stands alone against the world.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

HOW CAN I MAKE IT WHEN I'M SO LONELY?

Perhaps you have been in precisely such a situation. Perhaps you know someone who has hit the bottom because they are in a desperate situation. It is highly likely that each of us will one day face a situation where we believe ourselves bereft of friends, cast off by those to whom we would normally look for encouragement, believing ourselves utterly alone in the world. Undoubtedly, it will be beneficial, if not at this moment, then eventually, for each of us to prepare for that day, or to be prepared to lift others when they face that day. In order to equip the people of God for such an eventuality, I point you to the 142nd Psalm—A Maskil of David.

THE PSALMIST'S POSITION —

“With my voice I cry out to the Lord;
 with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord.
 I pour out my complaint before him;
 I tell my trouble before him.”

“No one cares for my soul.” Is that not a pitiful cry? It wasn't accurate, but it did seem that way at the time David wrote this Psalm. David spoke out of his feelings, and not out of his faith. If you are guided by feelings, you will similarly cry out. Each of us has cried out in precisely such despair at one time or another.

Few times are more distressing than to be in trouble and to be entirely alone! When we encounter troubles, it is almost inevitable that we will face our trials alone. Even if we have dear friends or family members to stand with us, we will still face the necessity of making decisions alone. David actually was alone at the time he wrote this Psalm—he was alone and in trouble. The title of the Psalm is unique among the final collection of Davidic Psalms included in the Book of Psalms.² This is the only Psalm that gives us the setting in this final collection.

We read that this Psalm is “A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer.” This is a companion Psalm to the 57th Psalm. The title of that Psalm notifies the reader that it is “A Mitkam of David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.” “Maskil” and “Mitkam” are thought to have been musical or liturgical terms instructing the singers how the Psalms were to be sung.

“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
 for in you my soul takes refuge;
 in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
 till the storms of destruction pass by.
 I cry out to God Most High,
 to God who fulfills his purpose for me.
 He will send from heaven and save me;
 he will put to shame him who tramples on me. Selah
 God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness!

² Psalm 138 – 145

HOW CAN I MAKE IT WHEN I'M SO LONELY?

“My soul is in the midst of lions;
I lie down amid fiery beasts—
the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.

“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!
Let your glory be over all the earth!

”They set a net for my steps;
my soul was bowed down.
They dug a pit in my way,
but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah.
My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast!
I will sing and make melody!
Awake, my glory!
Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn!
I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.
For your steadfast love is great to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.

“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!
Let your glory be over all the earth!”

[PSALM 57:1-11]

Whereas this 57th Psalm is bold and animated, the 142nd Psalm reveals the Psalmist's desperation. The former Psalm seems exultant—almost triumphant; whereas the Psalm before us in this message shows David when his faith is near collapse. The strain of being hated and hunted is almost too much, and there is a sense of desperation; the anxiety, the desolation, the despondency is almost palpable. Isolated by Saul's attempts to murder him, David's faith has been stretched to the breaking point, and he is near an eclipse of faith.

Refresh your memory of events that led to this situation. God had appointed Saul King of Israel, but Saul proved incapable of obedience to God. Thus, the LORD was compelled to remove him from his exalted position. God, through Samuel, sought out and appointed David to be King. David was the loyal subject of and lieutenant to Saul. It was David who defeated Goliath and led the armies of Israel in their successful defence of the homeland.

HOW CAN I MAKE IT WHEN I'M SO LONELY?

Despite his loyal service to the king, Saul recognised David's natural leadership of the armies as a threat to his own continued reign. Therefore, he determined to kill the young man. David fled from Saul—first to Gath, the home of the Philistine champion Goliath, and then into the wilderness. Without provision, without followers, without friends—David was utterly alone. It would have been the early months after fleeing for his life that David wrote these two Psalms. Neither family nor friends were with him at this time as he was hiding in the cave of Adullam.

Eventually, discontented men, and especially his own family members, would seek him out; but for the moment, David was alone. There is no question but that he felt deserted. What did it matter that God had anointed him king? What did it matter that Samuel championed him? What did it matter that he had served Saul with distinction? All that his allegiance and devotion to Saul had gained for him was terror and trouble.

David cried out to the LORD. His cry was both aloud and earnestly from his heart. It is one thing when we are beset by trials and we groan inwardly. It is quite another when we cry aloud. This is the essence of David's opening words. Twice he emphasises that he cries out aloud: "with my voice I cry out to the LORD; and "with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD."

I'm speaking to people who pray. I know you pray. We pray at church. We pray in our homes with our family gathered about us. Perhaps we pray as we read the Word. No doubt we pray at various times throughout the day as we become aware of needs, either for ourselves or for others. However, I suspect that few of us can say that we pray aloud, save when we are in a prayer meeting. Few of us know what it is to pray fervently. However, when we are in trouble, when we are assailed by evil people, we become very fervent in our pleas to God. When there is no one to help but God, we grow very focused in our petitions to the Living God.

I would have you see that David is in distress, but he knows where to turn. He did address the immediate danger by fleeing from the enraged king, but when at last he was safe, he poured out his fears and sorrows before the LORD; he told all his trouble to the True and Living God. The LORD was not caught by surprise; He knew David's situation better than David. Similarly, when circumstances threaten you and you are compelled to cry out for relief, know that God knows where you are and that He knows who you are, if you are His child.

What was not apparent—indeed, could not have been apparent at the time—was that God was preparing David for the work he would do during the remainder of his life. As he poured out his heart, he was learning the God is a reliable provider and that He hears the cry of His child. It was because he went through these stressful times that David could counsel:

"Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us. Selah"

[PSALM 62:8]

Just so, when you pass through deep waters, God is refining you as pure gold. When the trial is past, you will glorify Him and encourage others because of what you experienced.

HOW CAN I MAKE IT WHEN I'M SO LONELY?

There are some truths that must be stressed for our benefit as we consider this Psalm. Despite his sense of isolation, I note that David was prepared to go to the one source that could help. ***David sought the LORD.*** Had he received the counsel of so many of the wise counsellors of this present day, he would have sought out a champion to defend him. Undoubtedly, some would have advised him to plead with Samuel. Perhaps they would have advised that he turn to Jonathan, or appeal to his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, asking that they plead for his life. He might have been counselled to gather an army for an offensive against the king and his might.

However, Samuel already was conducting his ministry at the peril of his life because of the madness of the king; any appeal to him would only place him in jeopardy. Jonathan and Michal, though Saul's children, would be placed in an untenable position. Jonathan had hazarded his life because of David [see 1 SAMUEL 20:24-34] and Michal had lied once because she feared for her life [see 1 SAMUEL 19:11-17]. To organise rebellion would deny the sovereignty of the LORD who appointed him king. David could not do that—not if he would maintain integrity.

How often have we heard the resignation of God's people when facing difficulties. We say, "There is nothing left but to pray." Nothing left? Prayer should have been the first thing! Too often we attempt to work out our difficulties, applying our best thoughts and struggling silently against overwhelming odds until at last our strength is exhausted and we are near defeat. At last turn to prayer! We need to train ourselves to pray first.

Again, ***David refused to be put off by what seemed to be studied ignorance from God.*** Like Bartimaeus, David refused to be quiet. You recall how that this blind beggar, hearing that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by began to cry out, saying "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" When those about him attempted to silence him, he "cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'" At last, the Master responded to his loud and insistent cries, restoring his sight as he asked [MARK 10:46-52]. In a similar manner, David refuses to be silent, but continues to cry out for relief from his distress.

Jesus taught His followers, "Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who searches finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" [MATTHEW 7:7,8].³ Dear people, never forget that faith gives a double knock at heaven's door.

Note also that ***David is honest before the LORD God.*** His plea is not marked with flowery language; no stilted phraseology that contaminates much of what is called prayer in modern ecclesiastical life is evident in this prayer. There is nothing but brutal honesty in David's plea. Look at his challenge to God in the fourth verse:

"Look to the right and see:
there is none who takes notice of me;
no refuge remains to me;
no one cares for my soul."

³ **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2003)

HOW CAN I MAKE IT WHEN I'M SO LONELY?

“God, are you looking? Can you see that there is no one to help? Have you noticed that I have nowhere to turn?”

This is audacious praying! It reveals a freedom before the Lord that is breath taking! David is not disrespectful. There is no rudeness in this presentation. He is pouring out his troubled thoughts. The word “complaint” is not petulant, but an acknowledgement that the Psalmist is grappling with conflicting thoughts. He knows the position to which he has been assigned, but he sees the difficulties facing him. He is honestly grappling with conflicting conditions. There is no mask left to cover his prayer; this is just raw honesty.

THE PSALMIST’S CONDITION —

“When my spirit faints within me,
you know my way!
In the path where I walk
they have hidden a trap for me.
Look to the right and see:
there is none who takes notice of me;
no refuge remains to me;
no one cares for my soul.”

David’s situation is desperate from the human perspective. Frankly, if we didn’t know how the story ended, most of us would say that his situation was hopeless. An angry monarch determined to kill him, the entire army charged with killing him, deprived of familiar support networks—the prospects of his survival were questionable, at best. David speaks candidly, as we saw moments ago. He is addressing God in blunt language. This is not an academic recitation of how he feels; he is revealing raw, unvarnished pain as he shouts out his frustration and fear to God. Listen to his description of his condition.

He begins by saying that his spirit faints within him. However, he states this in order to say, “God, I’m not telling you something you didn’t know!” It is a bold statement to the LORD. This is in actuality a charge against the LORD; he wonders why, since the LORD knows what is happening, nothing is being done! David’s statement in this third verse is the cry of the disciples when waves threatened to sink their barque, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing” [MARK 4:38]? It is the wounded cry of Martha who tacitly accuses the Master when she asks, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone” [LUKE 10:40]? It is Elijah’s troubled prayer that implies he has been deserted by the Living God to his enemies when he says, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away” [1 KINGS 19:10]. It is my cry when I feel that I am standing alone for the cause of Christ. It is your cry when you have tried to do right and you felt all alone.

HOW CAN I MAKE IT WHEN I'M SO LONELY?

“God, there are traps all about me. The path I’m trying to walk is laced with traps.” This particular complaint is echoed in the 57th Psalm, written soon after the Psalm before us. The 57th Psalm speaks of David’s enemies setting a net for his feet—of digging a pit in his way. However, that Psalm, written sometime after this one before us, exults in God’s deliverance, for those who dug the pit intended to trap David became ensnared in the trap they had prepared. At the time he wrote the words of the Psalm before us, all he knew for certain was that his enemies sought to trip him up. David is stating his realistic fear that one misstep and he will be destroyed. The Psalmist is presenting his very real fear that the path before him is fraught with danger. Therefore, his statement is a tacit plea for help.

Boldly he confronts the LORD, in effect saying, “If You hadn’t noticed, I am all alone, God!” Listen, again, as he addresses the LORD.

“Look to the right and see:
there is none who takes notice of me;
no refuge remains to me;
no one cares for my soul.”

Normally, a leader would have a trusted colleague at the right hand. We use such an expression when we speak of a “right hand man.” Honoured guests were seated on the right, as were friends and colleagues who had shared combat. Before and behind were enemies; and there were no friends to stand with him. He was in the cave alone; there was nobody at his right hand.

Nobody? When David penned these lines, is it possible that he remembered what he had written before?

“I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.”

[PSALM 16:8]

When he wrote these words, David was testifying that he was aware of the LORD’s presence and that he trusted in the protection of the Living God. It is one thing to say that we trust the Lord; it is another to trust the Lord. Many of us, dare I say most of us, are much like the little girl who called for her daddy to come read to her in her bedroom. It was obvious that she was frightened, and the father, knowing that the child needed rest reminded her that the Lord was watching over her. “But, daddy,” said the little child, “I want someone I can feel.” In a similar manner, we know that the Lord is always with us, but we want a friend to stand with us in the difficult time— we long to have tangible evidence of His presence.

I frequently ask that God would give a sign of His favour to my children. Likewise, for many of you, when I call your name before the Lord, I ask that He might give you a tangible evidence of His love. I learned to pray thusly from the Psalm in which David asks the LORD:

HOW CAN I MAKE IT WHEN I'M SO LONELY?

“Show me a sign of your favour,
that those who hate me may see and be put to shame
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.”

[PSALM 86:17]

It is one thing to know that God loves us and is with us because of His promises; it is quite another to have tangible evidence of His love and of His presence. I pray, as David prayed, that the LORD my God would bless me with open evidence of His goodness; I ask this so that “those who hate me may see and be put to shame.”

THE PSALMIST'S CONVICTION —

“I cry to you, O Lord;
I say, ‘You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living.’
Attend to my cry,
for I am brought very low!
Deliver me from my persecutors,
for they are too strong for me!
Bring me out of prison,
that I may give thanks to your name!
The righteous will surround me,
for you will deal bountifully with me.”

I wondered aloud whether David remembered the words that he wrote in that 16th Psalm. Undoubtedly he did remember what he had testified in earlier days as the remainder of the text makes clear. Looking up in his distress, David speaks in faith of four aspects of God's character—he sees the LORD as his Refuge, as his Portion, as his Saviour, and as his Liberator. What he confessed concerning the True and Living God could be the confession of each Christian who listens to the message today.

David testified, ***God is my refuge!*** In an earlier verse David had bewailed, “No refuge remains for me!” However, in the fifth verse he testifies, “You (O LORD) are my refuge.” David, refusing to live by feelings, looks up and says by faith, “You (O LORD) are my refuge.” God was, for the Psalmist, a safe haven from the assaults against his life. The LORD was, for David, a harbour to shelter him from the storms that assailed his life. The Living God was a refuge from the very enemies that had hidden a trap for him.

In the companion Psalm to which I have alluded several times, David describes his enemies as “fiery beasts,” adversaries who “set a net” and who “dug a pit” hoping to capture him [PSALM 57:1-7]. Nevertheless, David testified of God,

HOW CAN I MAKE IT WHEN I'M SO LONELY?

“In You my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge,
till the storms of destruction pass by.”

[PSALM 57:1]

God is our refuge from enemies, and God is our refuge from judgement. As sinners, we are under sentence of death, living under God's wrath. There is only one way to escape the wrath of God, and that is to hide ourselves in God Himself. Of course, God offers us this refuge as we place our faith in Christ Jesus the Son of God. This is the meaning of the old hymn:

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.”

Trusting the sacrifice of Christ the Lord because of our sin, we are sheltered from the wrath of God. Jesus the Master has received in Himself the sentence that we deserved, and we who trust Him shall never face judgement. This is the meaning of Jesus' promise, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life” [JOHN 5:24].

David also testified, *God is my portion!*

“I cry to you, O Lord;
I say, ‘You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living.’”

We often see the writers of Holy Writ testifying in times of distress, “The LORD is my portion.”⁴ To the priests of Israel, the LORD said, “You shall have no inheritance in [the] land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel” [NUMBERS 18:20]. Likewise, the Psalmist has testified:

“The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup.”

[PSALM 16:5]

The one who possesses God is richer than the wealthiest person in this dying world. Possessing Christ, you possess life and all that is associated with life. Recall Jesus' words, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” [MATTHEW 6:21].

The Psalmist also testified, *God is my Saviour!* Because God is his Saviour, David cries, “Deliver me from my persecutors!” Those who were too strong for him, and who were even then seeking his life, were relentless in their mad pursuit. Thus, he was compelled to look to God to be his deliverer, for he knew he could not deliver himself.

⁴ E.g., LAMENTATIONS 3:24; PSALM 73:26; PSALM 119:57

HOW CAN I MAKE IT WHEN I'M SO LONELY?

Undoubtedly we each need a Saviour, one who will deliver us from the penalty of sin. However, if we have Christ the Lord, we are delivered from the power of sin as we resort to Him. At last, we shall be delivered from the presence of sin at His coming again for His people. Satan is a defeated foe, and all those who endeavour to do evil shall be removed as a threat to God's holy people. Even now, the child of God can rest secure in the knowledge that he is immortal until his labour is complete. So long as I do the Lord's work in the Lord's strength, I shall be delivered from the evil designs of wicked people. Whether wicked individuals have surreptitiously insinuated themselves among the people of God, or whether they are openly blasphemous individuals who disregard God and His righteousness, all alike shall be neutralised should they endeavour to harm God's servant who looks to Him.

Finally, David testifies, ***God is my liberator!*** "Bring me out of my prison," David pleads. It is not merely that he wants freedom, but he seeks liberty to give thanks to God's Name. He was imprisoned in the Cave of Adullam, shut up by the threats of Saul and his henchmen. He sought liberation so that he could again serve God and praise His Name.

Perhaps it is that despite being a child of the Living God you are shut up in a prison of bitterness, a prison of fear, a prison of uncontrolled desire—you cannot serve God as you want because you are incarcerated. Christ the Lord has promised freedom. Recall the Apostle's word to the Galatians who were even then in retreat from the freedom they had known in Christ. Paul warned, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" [GALATIANS 5:1]. That cautionary statement is akin to one which he pens soon after this first when he writes, "You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" [GALATIANS 5:13].

Tragically, it is possible that you are outside of Christ. In that instance, you are a prisoner of the wicked one. What is worse, you are unaware of your captivity. The Word of God exposes your condition as being enmeshed within the snare of the devil. The Word of God is quite blunt in stating that you have been captured to do the devil's will [see 2 TIMOTHY 2:25, 26]. I would not deliberately insult you, but I would speak the truth in love. If you have not received the gift of life in Christ the Lord, your mind has been blinded by Satan to keep you from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ [see 2 CORINTHIANS 4:4].

I pray that you will find freedom; and you can have that freedom in Jesus the Master. Lost friend, He will give you life even as He sets you free from all condemnation. Whereas your condition now is that you have no hope and are without God in the world [see EPHESIANS 2:12], Christ Jesus offers hope and access to the Father. The Son of God gave His life as a sacrifice because of your sin. Though He gave His life in your place, you must know that He was raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father. Now, He is pledged to receive all who come to Him in Faith, giving them life and freeing them from condemnation.

The Word of God is very clear in presenting life in Jesus the Lord. In His Word we read, "If you openly confess, 'Jesus is my Master,' believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with God and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

HOW CAN I MAKE IT WHEN I'M SO LONELY?

That assurance is made more secure for you by the divine pledge that promises, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved" [see **ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

Christian, despite your occasional feelings of loneliness, you know that you have a friend that sticks closer than a brother [**PROVERBS 18:24**]. Of course, I'm speaking of Jesus the Saviour. May God enrich your life with courage and with divine hope as you walk with the Master. Amen.