

# PSALM 142

A Maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A Prayer.

<sup>1</sup> With my voice I cry to the LORD;  
with my voice I make supplication to the LORD.

<sup>2</sup> I pour out my complaint before God;  
I tell my trouble before God.

<sup>3</sup> When my spirit is faint,  
you know my way.

In the path where I walk  
they have hidden a trap for me.

<sup>4</sup> Look on my right hand and see—  
there is no one who takes notice of me;  
no refuge remains to me;  
no one cares for me.

<sup>5</sup> I cry to you, O LORD;  
I say, 'You are my refuge,  
my portion in the land of the living.'

<sup>6</sup> Give heed to my cry,  
for I am brought very low.

Save me from my persecutors,  
for they are too strong for me.

<sup>7</sup> Bring me out of prison,  
so that I may give thanks to your name.  
The righteous will surround me,  
for you will deal bountifully with me.

What is the situation to which this psalm would offer some inspiration, hope, comfort and empowerment? The heading of the psalm gives us a clue. In his early year before he was officially declared king, David was on the run as the sitting king (Saul) wanted to kill him. David and his band of men were constantly needing to keep one step ahead of Saul and his army.

At one point, Saul hears about a cave where David and his men often hide. He chooses three thousand of his best warriors and goes to hunt for David. Once they come to the place, they can't find David. Saul and his men have a rest and Saul takes some time to be by himself. David and his men see him from their hiding place and while everyone is asleep, David goes and cuts off a piece of Saul's clothing. In the morning when Saul and his men begin to ready themselves to leave, David comes out and shows Saul what he has done. He could have killed him but spared him because he has respect for the king even though he is an enemy. Saul is so humbled

and shamed by this act that he confesses that David is more worthy to be king than him. Saul tried to kill him but David spared his life in return. It's a beautiful story found in 1 Samuel 24.

OK, but how would knowing this story provide helpful context for how to read and benefit from this psalm spiritually?

First of all, the psalmist, like David, is cultivating an intimate, heart-felt and honest talking relationship with God. The power of prayer and the growth of faith, hope and love within us cannot happen if we do not develop a comfortable familiarity engaging God with all that is in our heart.

Second, the psalmist is asking for deliverance not revenge. Like David with Saul, the psalmist is not seeking to make his persecutors pay, but rather finding a way to get out of a bad situation. Healing and hoped for reconciliation is the path, not retaliation.

Third, even as the psalmist expresses a self-pitying-poor-me attitude, as well as a helplessness and hopelessness early in the psalm, by the end, faith and hope for deliverance arises and the mention of the "righteous" who will "surround" the psalmist is also an indication of the way forward. God meets us through others, even as God meets us deep in our hearts through prayer. We need to find God in community and among friends as much as in our alone time. Others who are true (righteous) remind us not only that we matter, but that there is strength, courage, perseverance and resilience in us. By caring for us they also remind us that God is with us and has not forgotten us.

Like David in the biblical story, the psalmist goes through a journey. They die to their sense of aloneness, self-pity and helplessness, and they rise up to new faith and hope that God is with them and will not forsake them. There is new faith and hope that they will make it, and there will be those around them who will support them and be there for them. Do you have such faith and hope in your time of trouble? How do you emerge out of your "poor-me" state of being? Who are those "righteous" people in your life?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for revealing yourself to us again and again. Whenever we are down on ourselves or down on others, when we feel alone and abandoned, weak and miserable, you reach down and pull us up, shake us off and show us how we are not alone. As we call on you we feel your flow in and through us rising up in us as faith, hope, and also the tenderness and tenacity of love. You show us your face in the beauty of the righteous all around us. Thank you. Amen.

