

Worship in Difficult Times

Psalm 57

by Ed Steele

Few would disagree that worship is important when we face difficult times, but how can we do it? When everything seems to be caving in on us, or the news continues to get worse and worse, we know we need to look to the Father, but at times we seem almost frozen in our tracks. In Psalm 57, David gives us some help as we walk with him as he faces a life and death situation.

It is interesting that Psalm 57 was written to “Do Not Destroy” and although scholars are not exactly sure if this was a tune, a style or even an instrument, its choice is significant in that he is facing certain danger and chooses to write to “Do Not Destroy.” There is a plea even in the choice of tune or style. The song is a prayer, or perhaps it could be said the prayer is a song.

The introduction not only states that to *what* it was written, and *how* it was written, but in *what circumstances* David penned the psalm: fleeing from Saul and hiding in a cave. On at least two occasions David hid in caves while eluding Saul’s pursuit: I Samuel 21 and I Samuel 23. Both times he is delivered by God. In fact, this psalm is just one of many where David is crying out to God for help, but our focus will remain here for right now. That’s the basic context, let’s look at the heart of the song.

Before we understand how worship fits into the picture, we need to trace a progression that is found in the psalm. This is not to provide an in-depth study, but just to highlight the process of David’s prayersong:

He begins with a plea for mercy to God, because “in You I have taken shelter” [v. 1]

“I cry out for help” to God to deliver for enemies, to send love and faithfulness [v. 2]

“I am surrounded by lions,” he describes his circumstances [v. 4]

“I lie down among those who want to devour me,” more about his circumstances [v. 4]

A plea for God to rise up and show His splendor [v. 5]

“I am discouraged,” he describes his feelings [v. 6]

“I am determined,” action based on will, not emotion [v.7]

“I will sing and praise you,” he chooses to praise as an act of the will [v. 7]

“I will wake up at dawn,” he put his time of praise as a priority [v. 8]

“I will give you, thanks,” he chooses to thank God ‘in’ (not for) his circumstance [v. 9]

“I will sing praises to you,” praise and thanksgiving as a testimony [v. 9]

“For your loyal love...and faithfulness,” he focus changes on God’s nature and character [v.10]

He repeats his plea for God to rise up and show His splendor [v. 11]

Notice the progression: (1) *calling* to God for mercy in the midst of the difficulty, (2) *clarification* of the difficulty, (3) *admission* of personal feelings, (4) *choosing* to praise God as an act of will over emotion, (5) *giving thanks* “in” the situation [not for], (6) *focus* on God’s nature and character. His faith is implied in that he goes to God from the outset, but the process is also important because it can serve as a model for how to worship while facing difficult times.

Knowledge of the content is not enough, we must learn to apply what Scripture teaches if we are to experience true change and growth. So let’s apply what David did to deal with the situation. *First*, we need to go to God for His mercy; He is a merciful and loving God, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. David was hiding in a cave, but his confidence was not in the cave, but in God. Our going to Him first is that expression of faith that He is able to handle the situation. We *call* out to Him.

Secondly, we need to *clarify* the difficulty. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed by cloud of difficulties and need to literally list them out. Many times writing them out on paper helps put them in perspective and even clarify what the real issues are.

Thirdly, we must *admit* to ourselves and to God how we are feeling. The longer we are in the faith, there exists the temptation to avoid admitting that we are struggling with negative feelings, bitterness, hurt, pride, and even anger against God for allowing some things to happen. David is such a strong example in this area. Time and time again he pours out his deepest hurts and feelings toward God, Himself. How does God respond? Did God whip David into shape for saying such thing? No, God continued to reveal more and more of His nature and character. What David shows is an honesty before God that leads to greater trust, not an anger that pushes itself away from God. In addition to honesty before God, sometimes our pride prevents us from admitting to others that we are struggling with “feelings that we shouldn’t have.” However, being transparent about our feelings before others can be a very helpful tool so long as it does not slide into an excuse for wrong behavior.

Fourthly, perhaps one of the most difficult, is to **choose** to praise God by an act of will over our feelings. The fact is that we must live by faith, not by feelings. Some might say, “I don’t want to be hypocritical.” Point taken, but please allow me to give a personal example: I am not a “morning person,” however, as an act of the will I still get up at 5:00 am during the school year to get ready. Am I a hypocrite for getting up? No, it would be hypocritical if I said that I enjoy getting up, but acting on my will rather than my emotion does not make me a hypocrite. A mature Christian once told me to choose to act regardless how you feel and your feeling will eventually follow. I have found that to be true. We choose to praise God. Praise Him for His nature, His character, His works, list them out, say them out loud. Recall what He has done for you in the past, His salvation, protection, provision and His very presence in the past. Praising God in the way will lead to the next part as it did for David.

Fifthly, we begin to **give God thanks** “in” the situation. I Thess. 5:18 Paul says, “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.” Notice that Paul said “in,” not “for.” Tragedies by their very nature are not something we are thankful for, but we can still be grateful “in,” by an act of the will as we mediate on the goodness of the Lord and all that He has done in the past. Notice also that it is not a command to “feel thankful.” *Our feelings must not be the sole measure of our relationship with God.* As we enumerate back to God our gratitude for His countless blessings, our emotions will catch up to our minds, which will lead us to the last part of the process.

Sixthly, we **focus** on God and who He is. As we continue to rehearse in our hearts and minds the greatness of God and the glorious things He has done in Scripture, in the lives of others and in our own life, we begin to realize anew that God is in control, that we can trust Him, that the problems are real, but God is greater than our problems. As we continue in the process we realize that worship has transformed our perception of the difficulty and deepened our understanding of God.

Whether you are in the middle of a terrible situation now or face one next week, go back to some lessons taught by someone who was after “God’s own heart.” Realize how worshipping God can teach us how to respond in the darkest times.