

## #2: Cave Principles, Practices, and Perspectives: Psalms 34, 57, 142

Written by Bob Stone

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Let me begin by asking you two questions. **What** **prison do you think the author is referring to in the following verse**, **and what might that have to do with us**?

In good Bible study we ask

- what does it say
- what does it mean
- what does it say to me

So the second question is really important. Why in the world do we study a passage like this?

Set me free from my prison that I may praise Your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of Your goodness to me.

These are David's words, as you probably have surmised. [The last time we saw him](#), we were looking at scripture in 1 Samuel: 20-21, and that time he had lost his place of honor in the king's household. We didn't talk about this, but he had lost his wife. He had lost the ability to relate to his closest friends because of being ostracized from the king's household. He had lost his dignity and he was left alone in a cave.

Psalm 142, verse 7 is the one quoted here, one that we'll coin "from the Cave Psalms." The titles for Psalms 34, 57 and 142 indicate where that terminology comes from.

Psalm 34 is titled, "of David, when he pretended to be insane before Abimelech who drove him away and he left." In order to keep from being killed, David had this award winning act, feigning crazy... slobbering on his beard, scratching on the door... and the king thought he was crazy and said "get him out of here". That's what

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he needed to save his life. Psalm 57 also says,  
"Of David when he fled from Saul into the cave."  
Psalm 142 is titled,  
"Of David when he was in the cave."

So here David was in a very low state. His life was in danger; he probably didn't have a lot of food, except maybe a few crusts of bread left over from the holy bread he was given. He was isolated, lonely. Listen to the anguish of his soul as he relates his condition to his God. It really is a masterpiece of honesty and of faith.

Ps. 142: 1-3a. I cry aloud to the Lord. I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy. [Lord don't give me what I deserve, give me mercy.]  
I pour out my complaint before Him; before Him I tell my trouble. When my spirit grows faint within me, it is You who know my way.

That's a wonderful verse!

Ps. 142: 3b-7. In the path where I walk, men have hidden a snare for me. Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. I cry to you, O Lord, I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise Your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of Your goodness to me.

Do you hear his loneliness? Do you hear his desperation? If you listen closely, you can see and hear his weakness, but you can also hear his faith, his hope.

Now, if you look at all of the cave psalms, you'll find that three components are found in all of them: cave principles, cave practices, and cave perspectives. All are very important for us to fully apprehend what David is going through.

## Cave Principles

### Caves reveal our true need and God's care.

If we stop whining long enough and look to God in our circumstance, we discover His care and also our need. So caves not only reveal our needs but also reveal God. They reveal the things that may have been in our lives for some time but only surface under the pressure, the loneliness, and the stark conditions of the cave.

Have mercy on me oh God, have mercy on me for in You my soul takes refuge.

This word "refuge" is such a wonderful word. It means "protective place, a place of security, a place of secrecy." If we attach the cave to God, we begin to see that they also are representations of God's care ("under the shadow of Your wings") until the disaster has passed. It's a remarkable moment when you begin to see God and His care in the stretching moments.

### Caves enable God's purposes to be seen more clearly.

Caves not only reveal our need and God's care; they help us to see and remember how God has helped us in the past, and to restate our expectation for the future. God's purposes are ultimately seen, but not initially. Sometimes when you first find yourself in that dark, damp condition, you don't think there is any good in it at all. Eventually, however, as you begin to remember and to recall, you begin to see God's purposes more clearly.

Ps. 57:2 I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills His purpose for me.

Rom. 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose.

### Caves make visible God's provision, God's protection and God's presence.

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Now that's a mouthful, but it's seen in Psalm 57:3.

He sends from heaven and saves me

That is his provision

Rebuking those who hotly pursue me

God's protection

and then we have this little word in the middle of verse 3—*Selah*—which is probably an indication for the harps to play a little interlude.

God sends His love and His faithfulness

Then we see God's presence.

It's a wonderful thing to, in a cave, begin to look for God; to see what he is doing through it. Sometimes, as we're going to see in a moment, we have to participate in certain practices for that to happen.

### **Cave Practices**

**Honestly state our condition to God.**

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Sometimes we don't state our condition at all. We stuff it; we don't think about it, try to ignore it, hope it will go away if we don't say it. But that doesn't help. Sometimes we *under state* our condition. "Oh yes, I'm in financial ruin, my wife has left me, my three kids have run away, but I think I'm going to be okay, it's just a normal day."

Other times we overstate our condition. Something difficult is going on, and we add everything we've ever gone through in our lives as if it's going on at the same time. The best thing for us is to accurately and honestly state what in reality is happening. God wants us to say it, to ask for His help. We have not because we ask not; if we don't say it, begin to be honest with ourselves and state our condition, then the solution is not readily available to us. Psychologically, spiritually, and even physically, it's important for us to be honest with God.

It's clearly stated in Psalm 32:3, "When I kept silent my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long." We can even hurt ourselves physically by keeping these things in.

### **Seek God's glory above all things.**

Look again at Psalm 57, verses 5 and 11.

Be exalted oh God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth.

I believe this is the primary reaction to cave dwelling, the highest and most helpful thing we can do. In fact, that's how the Lord's Prayer begins,

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name.

In other words, "May Your name receive the glory that it is due." And then the Lord's Prayer goes on to honestly state our need, our condition. So these two go together.

### **Be steadfast and focused.**

Again, in Psalm 57:7,

My heart is steadfast oh God, my heart is steadfast.

What often happens is that we allow our condition to be diffused by looking at and considering too many issues, too many concerns. We should focus on the primary issues in our lives.

Sometimes my life looks like a plate of spaghetti, with all the issues entwined. It's overwhelming, so I just take one piece of spaghetti out at a time and look at it. Now that's a weird way to eat spaghetti, but it sure helps me! When trying to process our lives, if we try to handle it all together we can get confused. Being steadfast and focused, then, is what we see the psalmist doing here.

### **Speak to ourselves about praise and then do it.**

The last part of Psalm 57:7b-11 says,

I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth.

The psalmist was great at speaking to himself and then responding back. In this particular instance, you see that he is speaking not only to himself; he is speaking to the instruments around him!

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I will sing and make music. Awake my soul!

Fifteen years ago I was in the deepest depression of my lifetime. I was driving down I-5, and I hadn't praised God for over a month. I turned on Christian radio, and there was a song I knew. Without thinking too much about it, I began to praise God. In the midst of that, something broke within me. I found out that the depression—which was frozen rage for me—really needed to have some release, and the beginning point of that was beginning to speak to myself and beginning to praise God.

### **Recall God's attributes.**

I encourage people in a little process I call "planting a garden of praise," to think of the attributes of God and attach a scripture to it. Memorize both the attribute and the verse and then say it back to God. Psalm 57 is one of those psalms that wonderfully notes His characteristics, His attributes, in the form of praise.

For great is your love reaching to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.

## **Cave Perspectives**

These are some general observations about caves.

### **Caves are universally visited.**

We talked about Psalm 34:19 last time: A righteous man may have many troubles. That's a promise. We could say, "A righteous man will have many troubles," because 1 Peter 1 says not to think it strange that you have troubles in your life. It's going to happen, and it's not going to make sense.

I got a call one day last year. Three daughters were visiting with their husbands here. The husbands had gone to a meeting, and the three girls had gone for a drive. They were

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returning to where their husbands were, and just about 500 yards before they were going to turn into the spot, a truck turned over in front of them. Apparently a man had had a heart attack, and the car plowed into them. They were seriously hurt, one very seriously. It left them, of course, with questions in their minds, and I went to talk to them and pray with them.

I didn't have any answers. I don't have answers other than, "Let's find God in the midst of this circumstance. Let's not try to understand it totally at this point, but let's look for God. Let's ask for His help, His assistance, because He is here. He is near." Caves are universally visited, and we don't always know the reason. Sometimes it's our sin. Sometimes it's someone else's sin. Sometimes we haven't the slightest idea.

### **Caves will make us and break us.**

The Lord is close to the broken hearted, and he saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalms 34:18.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, oh God You will not despise. Psalms 51:17

See, it's in the cave, under pressure that sometimes our strengths become weaknesses and our weaknesses strengths. David was noted as a man of great trickery and cunning. He was able to act his way out of circumstances, able because of his trickery to win some military victories. But that strength, if undisciplined, could become a weakness; and later in his life that sense of trickery led him to adultery and also to murder. So the cave experience, the stretching moment is designed to reveal weaknesses so that they can be dealt with, and to hone strengths so that they don't become weaknesses. Weakness also reminds us to rely on God that we might be strong. Caves will make us and they will break us, and that's all for our good.

### **Cave disciplines need to be maintained.**

Disciplines begun in the cave so we can survive, need to continue so we can grow. We all know what this is like; we find ourselves in tough spots, so we begin to pray even if we haven't prayed for awhile. We begin to read our Bibles searching for answers, and to talk to one another. We might even fast during a season of trial and trouble, but then we get

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on the other side of it and it doesn't continue.

Disciplines introduced in the caves should continue so that we can grow. Tragically, we often justify our lack of involvement in spiritual health habits, when *Jesus Himself* found it necessary to participate in regular periods of solitude, of fasting of prayer, of study. If it was necessary for Him to maintain the course—He who was perfect, God in human flesh—what does that say about us? Sometimes we forget the richness of the cave. The wonderful relationship that's developed in that crucible can be taken into the rest of our lives so that we can continue to grow.

I read an old article from a couple of years ago on PTL founder Jim Bakker. (PTL was a television program that's now defunct.) Bakker had a good deal of pressure on him, having to raise a million dollars every couple of days to stay on the air. He developed messages that were based on the "health and wealth gospel," designed to get folks to give to the ministry.

When he went to jail after being indicted for fraud, Jim Bakker began to read his Bible and discovered that the messages he had preached on the air had been borrowed from other people. He hadn't bothered to see them in context, and he began to read those passages and discovered that the Bible didn't say those things at all. He totally changed his theology and his understanding, and then also said this:

"The whole Bible is built around knowing Christ and the fellowship of His suffering. Those kinds of things don't preach very well, but I found through the fellowship of His suffering my time in prison became not a time of loneliness, though it was terribly lonely, but a time of solitude. It became a time where I walked closer with Christ than I ever had."

Today Bakker works in the streets of L.A. volunteering as a staff member at what's called the Dream Center, which enables the poor to be helped. So his life has been altered, but the disciplines that began in the cave (prison) are those that should continue so that he can grow.

**Cave experiences need to be written down and/or shared.**

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That's certainly what we see the psalms all about. That's what David is doing, and I believe— [as we shared last time](#) —that in the midst of it, even before we're through it, we should begin to share what God is doing in our lives.

### **Caves reveal our friends and our enemies.**

It's interesting to me that friends, true friends, and true enemies all take initiative. When enemies see you down, they will capitalize on the moment and, seeing weakness, move in for the kill. True friends, on the other hand, will take the initiative to move in; they won't wait for you to ask but will take the initiative to step into the circumstance. They'll find a sensitive way to communicate, connect, write a word, make a provision; they'll do something. They'll pray a prayer, move into the circumstance; and often, in the crucible (the cave), you discover your true friends.

I Samuel 21:1:

David left Gath and escaped to the cave at Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or in discouragement gathered around him and he became their leader. About 400 men were with him.

That doesn't look like a very exciting group of people with whom to build an army. They were in distress, in debt and discontented, but came in in a moment when David needed friends. They got there for various reasons, but the friendships that were forged in the cave will be able to grow in spite of the differences or stretching circumstances because the cave creates a bond, a relationship. No matter the circumstances after that, they are tight; they are together.

Last year I had to go to a seminar in Oakland. When we got down there, I found out that we were going to the School of Urban Mission. We went to what looked like a bombed-out area. The neighborhoods were less than attractive; it was a difficult place to be, but in the midst of this was The School of Urban Mission. It was great! They had these guys stand up and give testimonies. The idea behind the school is they take guys out of the ghetto, the inner city (if they agree to go back to the streets and start churches and work in Christian ministries), and train them with two years of intensive study. They're involved 8 to 10 hours, sometimes 20, on the street weekly.

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Robert stood up to give his testimony. Two years before he had been selling drugs, and the Lord had saved his life and radically transformed him. It was exciting to hear his testimony! Then the president of the New Orleans school stood up, looked at Robert and said, "Robert, I'd take a bullet for you." At first I thought, "Well, so much macho stuff..."

Then he explained, New Orleans has 400 murders a year. Six of the pastors in the last year have been shot in their churches, and these are guys who are on the streets. In 1999 they saw one guy shot 35 times from 50 yards away.

Now that's a little out of my comfort zone! I'm not used to that. When he said, "I'd take a bullet for you," he meant it! I noticed the camaraderie, the friendship and fellowship formed in that cave-like crucible. You could reach out and touch it, it was that intense and that wonderful at the same time. The first thing these folks did is to put that passage on the screen. All those who were in distress or in debt or in discouragement gathered around him and he became their leader. That was their team: those in distress, in debt and discontented. God formed what became the soldiers, the leaders, the friends of David that would take him into his kingship, all out of the cave. I'm impressed.

Let me share with you one more story from Jim Bakker's interview. He says,

"When I transferred to my last prison, Franklin Graham, [Billy Graham's son] said he wanted to help me out when I got out with a job, a house to live in and a car. It was my fifth Christmas in prison. I thought it over and said 'Franklin, you can't do this. I will hurt you. The Grahams don't need my baggage.' He looked at me and said 'Jim, you were my friend in the past and you are my friend now. If anyone doesn't like it I'm looking for a fight.' So when I got out of prison, the Grahams sponsored me and paid for a house for me to live in and gave me a car to drive. The first Sunday out Ruth Graham called the halfway house I was living at the Salvation Army and asked permission for me to go to Montreit Presbyterian Church with her that Sunday morning. When I got there the pastor welcomed me and sat me with the Graham family. There were like two whole rows of them. I think every Graham aunt and uncle and cousin were (sic) there. The organ began playing and the place was filled except for a seat next to me. Then the doors opened and in walked Ruth Graham. She walked down that aisle and sat next to inmate 07407058. I had only been out of prison 48 hours but she told the world that morning that Jim Baker was her friend."

In the crucible, in the difficult moment, our friends are revealed.

## **Conclusion**

### **We need safe places**

because in the caves we find a place of refuge.

### **We need still times**

where we can be honest with God and state our conditions and seek his glory; times when we're steadfast, when we speak to ourselves about praise and do it. We need to recall God's attributes of love and faithfulness. We need still times!

### **We need special friends.**

So back to the first verse that we started with. David said in Psalm 42, verse 7:

Set me free from my prison. . . .

No Dave, your prison is in fact a place of refuge. There you are going to discover God's wings will cover you.

. . .that I may praise your name . . .

No, you don't need to escape to praise, you can begin to praise God now.

. . . Then the righteous will gather about me because of Your goodness.

No, I'm not going to send the righteous. I'm going to send 400 men in debt, discontented and in distress, and you're going to build an army and some friendships, and you're going to build

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the kingdom. That's what the cave can mean to all of us.