

As we come to I Samuel 22, we find David hiding in a cave, and living on a day to day, just making it mode surrounded by troubles. His experience is mirrored in the lives of multiplied people across the world. When live reduces to being just in a survival mode.

“Survival mode” means knowing that life must go on, but you just couldn’t remember why. These times of just making one day at a time is often when slowly become a vicious swirl of getting up, going to work out of the home or in the home if you’re a mom; and dropping into bed exhausted at the end of the day.

And then to find out that after an entire month, you have fallen further behind in every area of life instead of moving forward. That’s the kind of life that I’m talking about and it’s not foreign to most of us. We know what it’s like; we know what it’s like when we feel trapped in a cave of troubles—troubles that just wouldn’t go away?¹

Endless Troubles

Now go back in your mind to 3,000 years ago and think of 400 tough men living in an actual cave under harrowing conditions—and then mix in time, heat, plus the fact they were all under great duress and also in danger from Saul who was hunting David—and you have the sights and smells of 1 Samuel 22:1-4. Open there with me again.

David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father’s house heard it, they went down there to him. 2 And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him. 3 Then David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, “Please let my father and mother come here with you, till I know what God will do for me.” 4 So he brought them before the king of Moab, and they dwelt with him all the time that David was in the stronghold.

After David fled from Gath and arrived in the cave of Adullam, it wasn’t long before he not only had to cope with his own problems but also those of hundreds of distressed men who had multiple troubles that just wouldn’t go away.

But living and working with these men in the “Cave of Troubles” was the Lord’s perfect plan to teach David lessons he could only learn when immersed in troubles. You see, these lessons were all necessary to well prepare David to serve God’s purposes as the next king of Israel.

David wrote more Psalms during these cave times time--than at any other time in his life. These **Cave Psalms** are **4, 13, 40, 57, 70, 141-142**—and are lessons on how to overcome the feelings of loneliness and abandonment when we are far from help, or away from home and feel unable to go on.

¹ 050918AM COR-20 WN-41; 051002AM COR-21 WN-42; 051016AM COR-23, WN-43

Overcoming Great Adversities

When God puts us in a place of constant troubles, and we respond properly, He will use those hard times to give us some of the greatest blessings and growth in our lives. For example, look at how these now famous people of the past faced their trials with a positive attitude and triumphed:

- Cripple him, and you have a Sir Walter Scott.
- Lock him in a prison cell, and you have a John Bunyan.
- Bury him in the snows of Valley Forge, and you have a George Washington.
- Raise him in abject poverty, and you have an Abraham Lincoln.
- Strike him down with infantile paralysis, and he becomes Franklin Roosevelt.
- Burn him so severely that the doctors say he'll never walk again, and you have a Glenn Cunningham who set the world's one-mile record in 1934.
- Deafen him, and you have a Ludwig von Beethoven.
- Have him or her born black in a society filled with racial discrimination, and you have a Booker T. Washington, and a George Washington Carver....
- Call him a slow learner, and write him off as uneducable, and you have an Albert Einstein.²

Now look at how David was learning to respond to God properly in his loneliness in hard times:

- Have him grow up as an overlooked and neglected last child, and you have *David the shepherd boy*.
- Have him accused by his brothers and slighted by his countrymen, and you have *David the giant-killer*.
- Have him on the run for his life, hiding in a cave surrounded by hundreds of emotional cripples, and you have *David the sweet Psalmist of Israel*.

Living in the “Cave of Troubled Men” was going to be an incredible crash course in learning to face life's struggles God's Way. This would prove to be the turning point in David's life—the time when his character was refined more than in any other era of his life!

David Lived with Troubled People

Listen to these extra details God provides us about the setting of the cave of Adullam. These specifics make us realize what an emotional and physical furnace of adversity David had entered.

*David therefore departed from there [Gath] and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And **everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented** gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him. Then David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, “Please let my father and mother come here with you, till I know what God will do for me.” So he brought them before the king of Moab, and they dwelt with him all the time that David was in the stronghold [mawstsood: as is Masada today] (1 Samuel 22:1-4).*

² Charles R. Swindoll, *The Quest for Character* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1987), p. 84

Adullam is a cave in the region between Hebron and Philistia (Gaza). It is located in the canyon formerly called Rephaim, which means “the Valley of Giants.” This is where Joshua, Caleb, and the other ten spies passed through as they spied out Canaan (the ten were “scared to death” of the giants).

The cave became David’s headquarters, but living conditions were so gross that he appealed to the Moabite king to let his parents live in Moab until things settled down in his life.³ The original group of around 400 distraught refugees gradually expanded as a growing number continued to come for comfort and to follow David. By 1 Samuel 23:13, about 600 had joined him.

Have you ever had to spend most of your waking hours working around a group of people that might be considered tough to get along with? If so, through God’s eyes watching David we enter a laboratory of hard feelings, bad attitudes, stress, and every type of dysfunctional person you could imagine, all in one small, close area.

And it was here in a blast furnace of temptations, evil influences, and emotional exhaustion that God chooses to shape David’s life. David faced a constant uphill climb, as he learned to live God’s way in the midst of hundreds of troubled people.

God’s Word explains in detail the three types of men came to him for help:

1. **Men in distress came to David.** The words David used to describe the condition of these deeply stressed men reveal just how much they were suffering.

The first Hebrew word for those in “*distress*” (Strong’s #4689 - *matsowq*) means “squished and trapped and unable to escape.” Here is an expansion on what that word means from other parts of the Old Testament:

- “*Distressed*” is used for being “at the end of your rope,” feeling that “death is knocking at your door,” and “no hope or help is possible” (Deuteronomy 28:53-57).
- “*Distressed*” is also a condition of deep sadness that can happen to even very strong believers like Ezra: *Trouble and **anguish** have overtaken me, yet Your commandments are my delights* (Psalm 119:143).
- “*Distressed*,” in ordinary use, stands for an unusually hopeless condition when people do things they would never do at any other time, but are willing to do because they are in such distress, such as when Jeremiah said: ... “*I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.*” *But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not* (Jeremiah 19:9.)

Satan tries to persuade God’s children to permanently despair, feel abandoned, and eventually give up. But David discovered that his soul would be kept safely in the arms of the Lord when he fled to Him for refuge:

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

³ David had Moabite blood from his great-grandmother Ruth, so he sought help from the king of Moab who probably had problems with King Saul as well.

Working with A Tough Crowd

2. **Men in debt came to David.** The Hebrew word for those in “debt” (Strong’s #5378 – *nasha*) means “money lent at usury.” It describes those who are hopelessly in debt.

In Saul’s day, many men in debt were in danger of being sold into slavery. But before they could be taken away, they ran off and joined up with David; that is the context of 1 Samuel 22:1-2. David could accept these indebted men, and encourage them, but as far as we know he never paid any of their debts.

Most Americans are constantly confronted with indebtedness; we are surrounded by the pressures our debt-driven society heaps upon us. Competition, rivalry, discontentment, pride, and greed all combine to make Americans work long hours and multiple jobs, and yet still not have all they want.

As a nation we are increasingly flooded with overwhelming debt, and the toll of the mental, physical, and emotional pressures and stresses is mounting daily.

3. **Men who were discontented came to David.** The Hebrew word for “*discontented*” (Strong’s #4751 – *mar*) means “bitter.” It is actually the word for “bitterness of the soul.”

Everyone who came to David had some poison of bitterness ravaging their soul, and so they were discontented with life. They had wanted to make an honest living but saw the injustice of Saul’s reign, saw the way things were going, and one day simply dropped their tools, left it all, and joined up with David.

Today, many millions of bitterly discontented people—not only in our land but also around the world—wake up daily longing for change. They feel hopelessly unable to have and do what they yearn for. As a result, they spend their days wanting to be somewhere else, to do something else, or to have something else. Day after day, they are living with growing discontentment and desperation as they watch time quickly pass them by.

A Prescription for Dealing with Stress

Now we turn to Psalm 57.

David was called by God to live and work with this crowd of cantankerous, needy men who had invaded his life—one who himself had just come out of living life in the pits. And they were with him morning, noon, and night—he couldn’t escape them! This was a perfect recipe for a relapse into despair and a subsequent return to the pits. It would have been much easier to merely walk away from the whole situation, but that was not the Lord’s plan for him. David needed to learn that life is hard, pain is real, suffering is unavoidable, and weariness with life is normal.

How did God teach David to conquer his problems and at the same time minister to the needs of these desperate men? The Holy Spirit came upon him to write down the secret to overcoming afflictions while not letting your own life and emotions be dragged down by others who are also suffering.

Please listen as I read Psalm 57. Note the emotional condition of everyone who joined up with David and how he responded. This was a crucial psalm for his spiritual nurture and development, just as it is

for us.

Psalm 57

To the Chief Musician. Set to “Do Not Destroy.” A Michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave.

- ¹ *Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me!
For my soul trusts in You;
And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge,
Until these calamities have passed by.*
- ² *I will cry out to God Most High,
To God who performs all things for me.*
- ³ *He shall send from heaven and save me;
He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. Selah
God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.*
- ⁴ *My soul is among lions;
I lie among the sons of men
Who are set on fire,
Whose teeth are spears and arrows,
And their tongue a sharp sword.*
- ⁵ *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory be above all the earth.*
- ⁶ *They have prepared a net for my steps;
My soul is bowed down;
They have dug a pit before me;
Into the midst of it they themselves have fallen. Selah*
- ⁷ *My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and give praise.*
- ⁸ *Awake, my glory!
Awake, lute and harp!
I will awaken the dawn.*
- ⁹ *I will praise You, O LORD, among the peoples;
I will sing to You among the nations.*
- ¹⁰ *For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens,
And Your truth unto the clouds.*
- ¹¹ *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory be above all the earth.*

Psalm 57 is one of five Psalms (56-60) grouped together, and called by the term “Michtam”. The Hebrew word Michtam means engraved or permanent, and this title suggests that the lessons learned in this most challenging time in David’s life stayed with him. These truths were chiseled into his heart, mind, and life.

In Psalm 57:7 when David says, ‘My heart is fixed,’ that is a *michtam*.⁴ Here’s the full verse: *My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and give praise.* (NKJV).

David’s heart, now steadfast, led him to confidently say:

- “I’m not going back to trying to rescue myself like I did in Gath—and miserably failed.” (Psalm 34)
- “I’m not going back to refusing to look at You and feeling abandoned—as I suffered during those long dark days.” (Psalm 13)
- “I’m not going back to wallowing in the mud of my sin and despair—living in the pits of life.” (Psalms 40 and 70)
- “My heart is fixed—because I am holding on to You, I can now also minister to others when surrounded by troubles.” (Psalm 57:7)

The Hebrew word translated “steadfast” (NKJV, NAS, ESV, NIV) or “fixed” in the KJV, is the Hebrew word #3559 pronounced *kuwn*. A study of this word through the Old Testament is a perfect picture of what the Lord wants to accomplish in us through our hard times, whatever form they take.

God Wants Steadfast Hearts

A heart to minister while engulfed in hard times is a heart that is “fixed.” Fixed on what? Look at the other times this Hebrew word *kuwn* is used:

A heart to minister is ...

1. **a heart prepared to seek God’s Word:** ... *Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel* (Ezra 7:10).
2. **a life ordered by God’s Word:** *The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way* (Psalm 37:23).
3. **a way established by God’s Word:** *He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps* (Psalm 40:2).
4. **a spirit renewed by God’s Word:** *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me* (Psalm 51:10).
5. **emotions anchored by God’s Word:** *He will not be afraid of evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD* (Psalm 112:7).
6. **a walk directed by God’s Word:** *Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me* (Psalm 119:133).
7. **a mind guarded by God’s Word:** *Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will*

⁴McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

be established (Proverbs 16:3).

8. **a heart guided by God's Word:** *A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps* (Proverbs 16:9).

Having a heart to minister in the lonely cave times of our lives is the key to living triumphantly! Look again at all that God offers us in such times:

- a heart prepared;
- a life ordered;
- a way established;
- a spirit renewed;
- emotions anchored;
- a walk directed;
- a mind guarded; and
- a heart guided.

Isn't *that* worth whatever it takes to get it?

In the midst of all his tribulation, David didn't relapse into despair and a return to the pits! He had finally learned what we need to learn: life in a cave of troubles is not merely something physical—like “The air conditioning doesn't work,” or “Gas costs are sky high!” or “Oh, no! Now the car has broken down!” No, David came to grips with the fact there is another dimension that the world in general doesn't see: living in a cave of troubles is an ongoing spiritual battle.

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