

CALL OUT

A STUDY OF THE PSALMS

MY FORTRESS

Although it appears earlier in our psalm than our passage, David calls out to God as “*my rock and my fortress*” (31:3). West of the Dead Sea a mesa rises 1400’ called “*Masada*” (meaning “mighty rock” or “fortress”). Until Jesus’ day, the sky-high plateau could only be reached by “The Serpent’s Path,” named for its many switchbacks enabling committed hikers to traverse the near-vertical climb. This towering stone pillar served as an impregnable fortress.

David ran *to* Masada when running *from* King Saul. Indeed, that’s the likely context of this Psalm. Likewise, in 70 AD, when the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, the Jews fled for their lives and headed straight for Masada. There, fewer than 1,000 unarmed Jews held off 15,000 fully-armed Roman soldiers for 3 years.

What a great picture of God! No wonder David calls God his “fortress.” Today’s passage, like this entire Psalm, weaves five thoughts throughout: 1) God’s nature, 2) David’s situation, 3) David’s trust, 4) God’s work and, 5) David’s praise and thanksgiving.

Although this psalm offers many lessons, we’re going to look specifically at David’s situation and his ability to praise and thank God through it. This is an encouragement and challenge for us as we cry out to God, our Fortress, for rescue.

PSALM 31:9–13, 21–24

⁹ Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. ¹⁰ For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.

¹¹ Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. ¹² I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. ¹³ For I hear the whispering of many— terror on every side!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

²¹ Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city. ²² I had said in my alarm, “I am cut off from your sight.” But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help.

²³ Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. ²⁴ Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“I fell for the lies that they sold me. A mirage that left my spirits broken. Now I need You to show me I’m not on my own. I’m tired of wandering alone. I hear Your voice call me home.”

We are always desperate. Sometimes, however, we don’t feel desperate. Our desperation should drive us *to*, and not away *from*, the Lord. Our helplessness is only shameful when it doesn’t motivate us to run to the Lord. Scan the QR code as a reminder of God’s goodness in our desperation.



DISCUSSION

What was your most challenging/fun climb or hike you’ve ever done? Where was it and why?

ICEBREAKER

1. ID some symptoms of David’s overwhelming stress. (9-10)

2. How did David’s feelings compare with the truth? (22)

3. What 3 commands does David issue next? To whom? (23)

4. What does God desire for us when he proves faithful in another’s life? (23-24)

OBSERVATION

5. What habits and practices can you establish *now* to prepare for difficult circumstances *later*?

APPLICATION

The past two weeks have dealt with deep grief and sadness. David shows us what it looks like to cry out to God truthfully and emotionally. Perhaps praying to God like this is unfamiliar. If you need help to pray, talk to your Coach today.

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STUDY NOTES

LEARNING TO LOSE

Famed NFL coach, Vince Lombardi, said, “Winning isn’t everything, but the will to win is everything.” One of the greatest lessons sports teaches is how to lose. Sometimes you pour out everything you got and then some—and you still come up short. However, there’s a massive difference between losing and *being* a loser. You may get defeated, but you don’t have to *live* defeated. Taking an “L” can motivate you to train harder, study more, and get better. Some of the greatest athletes of all-time began their journey to sports immortality through a significant loss.

What truly matters is how a person responds when they get knocked down. It’s true in sports, but it’s also true in life. For many of us, the Covid-19 pandemic knocked us down. We lost loved ones due to the pandemic. 2021 will probably go down as the worst year of my life—and that’s probably true for some of you as well. It felt like a constant series of blows knocking us down. God has promised us an ultimate victory in Christ, but do we have the will to get up and live like it’s true? Do we have the will to follow our Rescuer, knowing it may create more enemies, more battles, and more heartache along the way?

This Week’s passage resembles last Week, but different in important ways. Last Week, David’s battle appeared internal, possibly because of his own sin. This Week, David’s enemies are external. Last Week, he needed a Helper. This Week, he needs a Rescuer.

GOD RESCUES BELIEVERS TO OFFER HOPE

This psalm spilled out of David as a likely result of his distress from being chased by King Saul. Saul’s jealousy of David put him in danger on numerous occasions. Through it all, David held a great respect and affection for Saul (and especially his son, Jonathan.) This may be why, rather than anger and rage, David distressed. He cried out, ***“Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.”***

David has cried so much his “eye has wasted away.” He had other physical symptoms from his grief. The great warrior, David, lost his strength—perhaps collapsing from distress. David refers to

his “iniquity,” but it’s hard to tell if this is a confession of sin, or another reference to his circumstances. Either way, two things are true no matter what: David was a sinner and he was in terrible circumstances. We simply aren’t sure if his current circumstances resulted from his sin. In either case, he physically reacted to his distress.

King Saul wanted David dead because God had chosen David as the next king and had blessed him greatly. This opposition ostracized David like a leper in his community. He became ***“a reproach.”*** Those who saw him fled. He was ***“forgotten like one who is dead.”***

Even in the midst of rejection and scheming, David kept his focus on God and what he had done. ***“Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city. I had said in my alarm, ‘I am cut off from your sight.’ But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help.”*** As we discussed last Week, God’s past faithfulness comforted David in his current circumstance.

In the middle of his distress and agony, David shared the wisdom gleaned through suffering— ***“Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride.”*** Although David had lost in a big way, this is what the will to win looks like. He knows the Lord’s character and trusts God to see him through to victory while his enemies are defeated.

CALL OUT TO GOD AS YOUR RESCUER

It’s accurate to say that David’s circumstances were a direct result of his faithfulness toward the Lord. Had David been unfaithful, he may have avoided all of this. In fact, on at least one occasion, that’s what David did. He learned, however, that the cost of faithless disobedience was much higher than faithful obedience.

Sometimes, like with the pandemic, we face terrible external circumstances that aren’t a result of anything we did. Sometimes our circumstances result from sin and the consequences we face from disobedience. Other times, in complete obedience to what God is calling us to do, we might walk through some of the toughest days of our lives. Like we previously read in Psalm 23, sometimes God takes us through valleys on the way to green pastures. Don’t confuse “good” with “easy.” Instead, trust God as your rescuer knowing that hard days may lead to great victories. As David said, ***“Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!”***