



LESSON 3: "NOBODY KNOWS THE TROUBLE I'VE SEEN. . . " PSALM 142 & 143

BACKGROUND

The author of these two Psalms is **David**. David was king of Israel 1010-970 B.C. He was Israel's greatest king, who wholeheartedly loved God. David defeated Israel's enemies, expanded the nation's borders, and established Jerusalem as its political and religious center. His military, political and religious innovations initiated Israel's golden age and unified the Hebrew people as never before.

But when **Psalms 142 and 143** were written, the former shepherd boy and not-yet-king was running for his life! Although God had anointed David as the next king (**1 Samuel 16**), King Saul, the present king who lost the right to pass the throne to an heir because of his disobedience, was hunting David down with the intention of killing him.

Young David was introduced into the royal court as a harpist, whose music soothed the moody King Saul. After defeating the giant Philistine, Goliath, David was given military command and married one of Saul's daughters. David proved

so successful that Saul became jealous. Forced to flee, David had to live in the wilderness, hiding in caves for a long period of time (**1 Samuel 18-24**). Even though David had opportunity to kill Saul, he refused to even fight him because Saul was still God's chosen king.

David waited patiently for God's timing to be king, but he often cried out to God in deep emotional and physical distress because of the life he was forced to live. The title of **Psalm 142** says it was written when David "was in a cave."

These Psalms are **Songs of Lament**. To *lament* is to express sorrow, regret, annoyance or disappointment over something. A **Psalm of Lament** is an expression of grief before God where we hear the strong, emotional words of sufferers. Laments are written by real people, in very difficult situations. These godly sufferers know that God will not be angry with their honesty, for even when they "vent" to God, they believe, that in the end, he will come through for them!

DISCUSSION STARTER

- If God kept a complaint box, what grievance would you put in it?

PREPARATION

1. Before you read **Psalm 142 & 143**, ask the **Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth** (John 16:13). Since these Psalms were written by David, his prayer from **Psalm 119:18** would be appropriate:
Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law.
2. Read **Psalm 142** and **143** slowly and thoughtfully in at least two translations. As you read and reread, mark any words or phrases that you like.
3. Give these Psalms a short **title** (like I did in the title to this lesson).

QUESTIONS

4. Even though these two Psalms were written at different times and perhaps in different circumstances, how are they similar? Note any words, phrases, or requests that you see in both prayers.

5. What tone is set for these prayers by David's use of the word "cry" or "plea." (142:1, 5; 143:1)

6. How did David describe his circumstances (his predicament)? (142:3, 4, 6; 143:3, 9, 11)

 - ♥ When was the last time you felt overwhelmed by your circumstances? How did you handle it?
 - ♥ What does it mean to have someone set a *trap* or *snare* for you? (142:3) Has this ever happened to you? What did you do?
 - ♥ Have you ever felt like David did in 142:4? Why is this experience so painful?

7. How did David describe his emotions (how he feels)? (142:3, 6, 7; 143:3, 4, 6, 7)

 - ♥ Did God know David's situation and what David was feeling? Was it necessary for David to be so emotional?
 - ♥ Who benefits from this emotional outcry? God or David? Explain your answer.
 - ♥ How do you think David felt after he prayed this prayer? How do you think God felt?
 - ♥ Which of David's emotions do you most identify with? Why?

8. What specific things did David want God to do for him? (142:6, 7; 143:1, 2, 7-12)

- ♥ Do you think God is offended or pleased by David's directness? Why?
 - ♥ Do you think we should tell God what we want him to do or would it be better to say, "Whatever You want?" Why?
 - ♥ Which of the above did Jesus do when he was overwhelmed? (**Mark 14:32-36**)
9. What reasons or arguments does David give God in order to get him to act on his behalf? (**142:3, 6; 143:3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12**)

- ♥ Is it necessary to "build a case" with God to convince him to intervene? Why or why not?
10. Even though David is direct and forceful with God, how does he view himself in relationship to God? (**143:2, 6, 10, 12**)

11. What is it about God's character that makes David confident that God will act on his behalf? (**142:3, 5; 143:1, 8, 10, 11, 12**)

- ♥ How confident are you that God will answer your cries for help? How could you become more confident?

12. How does David express trust that God will rescue him? (**142:7; 143:8**)

- ♥ How will you respond and what will you do the next time you receive God's help and deliverance?

13. What is David doing in **143:5**? Why does he do this and how does it help him in his situation?

14. Is there a difference between telling God your trouble (**142:2**), and complaining to others? Which is better and why?

- ♥ What do these Psalms teach us about God?

- ♥ If you are in a hard time right now (or when a hard time comes in the future), how can you use what you have learned from these Psalms to better deal with your situation?

RESPONSE

Because David prayed this way in his distress, we too, have permission to: 1) **Cry out** to God and **ask God** to listen; 2) **Tell God** what we honestly **feel**; 3) **Tell God** what we **desire him to do**; 4) **Give God reasons** to act; and 5) **Express our trust** by expecting God to act and by **telling God how we will react** or **what we will do** when he comes through!

I believe the exercises on this page can be very meaningful if you will give them some time and effort.
You will not be asked to share these exercises with anyone unless you want to!

15. What is something you are struggling with right now in our life? What disappointment, frustration, distress or disillusionment causes you "heartache"? What do you need to cry out to God about? Whether your disappointment is big or small, write a letter to God, using the above principles David used when he cried out to God. Let your heart "vent." God can take it!

16. Now write a letter to yourself from God! What would God say in answer to the prayer you wrote him? Don't worry whether or not these are God's actual words to you. On the basis of what is in your heart and what you know about God, what do you think God would say to you? (A primary way that God speaks to us is to put thoughts into our minds. Remember our prayer, "Holy Spirit, think through me until your thoughts become my thoughts.") As you write this letter, it might be helpful to see, with the "eyes of your heart", Jesus sitting with you. (*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith . . . Hebrews 12:2.*) You can use this page to write your letter.