

Small Group Guide

Prayers from the Cave -- Psalm 142

INTRODUCTION FOR GROUP LEADERS

This session explores Psalm 142, a prayer David wrote while hiding in a cave, and how its structure can guide us through our own experiences of isolation, loneliness, betrayal, and despair. The sermon walked through a three-part movement in David's prayer: pouring out our emotions, processing the facts, and pleading for help. Use this guide to help your group engage honestly with these themes and with God.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Isolation and loneliness are not rare experiences -- in a broken world, they are inevitable. The question is not if we will face cave-like moments, but how we will face them.
 - The Latin phrase "incurvatus in se" -- curved in on oneself -- describes what happens when pain causes us to turn inward. Psalm 142 gently opens us back up so we can see God and find hope.
 - David's prayer in Psalm 142 moves through three distinct phases: pouring out emotion, processing the facts, and pleading for help. Together these movements take us from "it's all about me" to "it's all about God."
 - God is already in the cave with us. He is not waiting for us to get ourselves together before he shows up. He meets us in our most desperate moments.
 - Jesus himself experienced cave-like suffering -- in Gethsemane, on the cross, and in the tomb. He hears our prayers with the solidarity of one who has suffered deeply.
 - God does some of his most profound, life-changing work in the cave. Christian maturity, character, and healing are often formed in the darkest places.
 - The cave can become, like the Ark of the Covenant, the place of God's most profound presence and glory.
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening -- Getting Into the Conversation

1. The sermon opened with three stories: a college student whose dorm room felt like a cave of sadness, a pastor feeling alone in a new and disorienting land, and a high school student betrayed by a friend right in front of her. Which of these stories resonated with you most, and why?
 2. Have you ever experienced a cave-like moment -- a time of deep isolation, loneliness, betrayal, or despair? Without going further than you are comfortable sharing, what did that season feel like?
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Digging Deeper -- Engaging the Sermon Content

3. Pastor Milissa described "incurvatus in se" -- being curved in on oneself -- as what happens when we are in pain. What does that posture look like in your own life? What habits or behaviours tend to keep you curved inward rather than opening up to God?
4. Psalm 142 begins with David saying he cries out, lifts up his voice, and pours out his complaint to God -- before he even gets to the details of his trouble. Why do you think it is important to pour out raw emotion to God before trying to analyze or explain a situation? Does this come naturally to you, or is it a struggle?
5. The sermon pointed out that David names the grim reality of his situation plainly -- not exaggerating it, but also not minimizing it. He says there is no one at his right hand, no one concerned for him, no refuge. Why is it important to name reality honestly with God rather than either catastrophizing or pretending everything is fine?
6. David's plea shifts from "I cry, I lift up, I pour out" to "listen to me, rescue me, set me free." The sermon noted these are bold, direct requests -- not timid suggestions. What does it take to pray that boldly? What gets in the way of praying with that kind of confidence?
7. Pastor Milissa said that when we live under the illusion that we are in control and can save ourselves, we push God out of the cave -- and that God will respect our wishes and not force himself on us. Do you agree with this? What does it look like practically to admit weakness and desperation to God rather than holding him at arm's length?
8. The image of the Ark of the Covenant -- with cherubim wings spread over the place of God's most profound presence -- was connected to David's words in Psalm 57

about taking refuge in the shadow of God's wings. How does this image change the way you think about being in a dark or difficult place?

9. The sermon connected David's cave experience to Jesus in Gethsemane and in the tomb, noting that God did his most spectacular work in a cave when he raised Jesus from the dead. How does knowing that Jesus suffered in cave-like places change how you relate to him when you are in your own cave?
 10. Pastor Milissa closed with this observation: sometimes when we come out of the cave, the situation is the same, but everything is different because we have changed through the encounter with God. Have you ever experienced this -- where your circumstances did not change but you came out transformed? What happened?
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Reflection Questions -- More Personal

11. Pastor Milissa asked the congregation: have you brought God into your cave? Not just a trusted friend or a therapist, but God himself? Is there a cave -- past or present -- where you have not yet done this? What has held you back?
 12. The sermon suggested that the most mature Christians can look back on their darkest moments with genuine gratitude because that is where they had their most profound encounters with the living God. Does that feel true to your experience, or does it feel out of reach right now? Talk about that honestly.
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PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This week, consider putting one or more of these into practice:

1. **Pray Psalm 142 out loud.** Find a quiet, private place and use the psalm as a template for your own prayer. Start by pouring out your raw emotion without filtering it. Then name the facts of your situation plainly. Finally, make a bold, direct plea for what you need from God. Write down what surfaces during this time.
2. **Identify your cave.** If you are currently in a cave-like season, name it specifically. Write it down. Then ask yourself: have I brought God into this cave, or have I been trying to manage it on my own? Take one concrete step this week to invite God in.
3. **Check in on someone in a cave.** Think of someone in your life who might be experiencing isolation, loneliness, betrayal, or despair -- like John, Jeff, or Jane from the sermon. Reach out to them this week. You do not have to have answers. Simply showing up matters.

4. **Memorize a phrase from the Psalm.** Choose one line from Psalm 142 that speaks directly to where you are right now and commit it to memory this week. Let it become your prayer when words feel hard to find.
 5. **Journal your cave story.** If you have come through a difficult season in the past, take time this week to write about it. Where did you see God in it? How did you change? Consider sharing that story with someone who is currently in their own cave.
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CLOSING PRAYER

Close your group time by praying Psalm 142 together. You may choose to have one person read it aloud slowly while others pray silently, or you may invite group members to read it in sections. After the reading, allow a few moments of silence, then invite anyone who feels comfortable to pray aloud for someone in the group who is in a cave right now.