

## MONSTERS IN OUR MIDST

### "FACING THE MONSTER OF LONELINESS"

#### PSALM 142:1-7

#### **This Week's Core Competency**

**Peace** – I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, others, and me. *Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Being alone in good times can be a great thing. Solitude can give rise to contemplation leading to peace, harmony, and intimacy with God. Being alone in bad times can be an awful thing. Isolation can give rise to fear leading to anxiety, discord, and detachment from God. When David found himself all alone and desperate, having no one to turn to, he turned to the LORD. David's prayer psalm is for all those who are lonely.

According to the superscription of Psalm 142, David wrote this psalm "when he was in the cave." The same superscription appears in Psalm 57 with the additional words: "When he had fled from Saul." The incident alluded to is perhaps the one recorded in 1 Samuel 22:1, 4 or the one recorded in 1 Samuel 24:1-21. It's impossible to know for sure since in both cases David doesn't appear to be alone; he has men with him. No matter, David likely had numerous brushes with "the law" of this sort involving Saul and his henchmen. One author writes: "As far as can be determined, David was a

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*Solitude begins with a time and place for God, and God alone.*

– Henri Nouwen

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young man of no more than 20 when he was forced to leave Saul's palace and his own home because of Saul's relentless determination to destroy him. Driven to the wilderness area of Judah, the logical place because of his familiarity with it from childhood, David lived out a 'Robin Hood' existence for nearly 10 years . . . The events of chapters 21-26 must then represent only a fraction of David's activity during this period" (Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament*, 450). Given Saul's relentless decade-long pursuit of him, David no doubt found himself alone and lonely on many occasions.

What can we do when we are engulfed by a desperate sense of loneliness that neither friendship nor love, neither marriage nor community can take away? According to one author, "Instead of running away from our loneliness and trying to forget or deny it, we have to protect it and turn it into a fruitful solitude. To live a spiritual life we must first find the courage to enter into the desert of our loneliness and to change it by gentle and persistent efforts into a garden of solitude. This requires not only courage but also a strong faith. As hard as it is to believe that the dry, desolate desert can yield endless varieties of flowers, it is equally hard to imagine that our loneliness is hiding unknown beauty. The movement from loneliness to solitude, however, is the beginning of any spiritual life because it is the movement from the restless senses to the restful spirit, from the outward reaching cravings to the inward-reaching search, from the fearful clinging to the fearless play" (Robert Durback, ed., *Seeds of Hope: A Henri Nouwen Reader*, 61-62).

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As obscure as Nouwen's words may sound at first, we see in Psalm 142 an example of what he was talking about. David transformed his loneliness into solitude when he declared by faith, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." And then prayed, "Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me . . . set me free from my prison." The difference between loneliness and solitude is simple yet profound. The first involves being alone; the second being alone *with God*. When David turned from his weakness to the Lord's strength, his bitter isolation morphed into sweet solitude in the Lord's presence. That solitude, in turn, led to praise and further intimacy with God. When life gives us the lemons of loneliness, we can turn them into the lemonade of solitude by doing what David did, by turning to the Lord who not only knows our way but also our way out.

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Psalm 142:1-7

A maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A prayer.

1 I cry aloud to the LORD;  
I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.  
2 I pour out my complaint before him;  
before him I tell my trouble.  
3 When my spirit grows faint within me,  
it is you who know my way.  
In the path where I walk  
men have hidden a snare for me.  
4 Look to my right and see;  
no one is concerned for me.  
I have no refuge;  
no one cares for my life.  
5 I cry to you, O LORD;  
I say, "You are my refuge,  
my portion in the land of the living."  
6 Listen to my cry,  
for I am in desperate need;  
rescue me from those who pursue me,  
for they are too strong for me.  
7 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.

### Cf., another translation

A well-written song by David, when he was in the cave; a prayer.

1 To the LORD I cry out;  
to the LORD I plead for mercy.  
2 I pour out my lament before him;  
I tell him about my troubles.  
3 Even when my strength leaves me,  
you watch my footsteps.  
In the path where I walk  
they have hidden a trap for me.  
4 Look to the right and see!  
No one cares about me.  
I have nowhere to run;  
no one is concerned about my life.  
5 I cry out to you, O LORD;  
I say, "You are my shelter,  
my security in the land of the living."  
6 Listen to my cry for help,  
for I am in serious trouble!  
Rescue me from those who chase me,  
for they are stronger than I am.  
7 Free me from prison,  
that I may give thanks to your name.  
Because of me the godly will assemble,  
for you will vindicate me. (NET)

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Circle "maskil" in the superscription to Ps 142.
- \* Underline "cry aloud" and "lift up my voice" in v. 1.
- \* Double underline "pour out" and "tell" in v. 2.
- \* Circle "complaint" in v. 2.
- \* Circle "spirit" in v. 3.
- \* Bracket "hidden a snare" in v. 3.
- \* Underline "refuge" in vv. 4, 5.
- \* Circle "portion" in v. 5.
- \* Box "for" indicating *reason* in v. 6.
- \* Bracket "pursue" in v. 6.
- \* Bracket "prison" in v. 7.
- \* Box "that" indicating *purpose* in v. 7.
- \* Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 7.

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## day 2

**EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. When was David "in the cave" (cf., Ps 57; see 1Sa 22, 24)?
2. What do you infer about the LORD from verses 1 and 2?
3. What three words would you use to describe David's emotional state depicted in verses 3-6?
4. What does the LORD know about David—and about you?
5. David has taken "refuge" in a cave. How can he say, "I have no refuge" in verse 4?
6. Then in verse 5 he claims that the LORD is his "refuge." How can he contradict his own words in verse 4?
7. He calls the LORD his "portion" in verse 5. What did he mean by that?
8. Identify David's *twofold* request in verses 6-7.
9. Explain the use of *purpose* in verse 7.
10. **Discussion:** Talk about what David expected to happen based on his concluding remarks in verse 7b.

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## day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Psalm 142 fits the description of a personal lament psalm. Psalms of this sort, which correspond roughly to desperate pleas for help in difficult circumstances, contain a number of elements: 1) an introductory cry to God; 2) a lament in which the psalmist describes his difficulty; 3) his confession of confidence in the LORD; 4) a petition containing his request for divine intervention; and 5) a concluding vow to praise God for answering his prayer. Psalm 142 contains all of these. One commentator gives it the fitting title, "Hemmed In," and about it writes, "The title in the text makes this a companion piece to Psalm 57 by the note, 'when he was in the cave'; and together the two psalms give us some idea of the fluctuating state of David's emotions in the ordeal . . . In the present psalm the strain of being hated and hunted is almost too much, and faith is at full stretch. But this faith is undefeated, and in the final words it is at last joined by hope" (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, TOTC, vol. 16, 509).

Psalm 142 is certainly David's psalm, and yet, it unquestionably belongs to everyone. That is the genius of the psalms; "they reveal all the religious feelings of the faithful—fears, doubts, and tragedies, as well as triumphs, joys and hopes" (779). None can deny that their timeless quality and far-reaching relevance give them a uniquely broad appeal. So broad that one writer can say, the "psalms are written not to express the recent experience of their composers but to help express the varied experiences of any worshiper who wishes to sing them" (Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, NIBC, 494-95). This psalm in particular is for anyone who feels lonely. Its refrains resonate with all those who are fatherless, friendless, jobless, penniless, homeless, helpless, hopeless, or defenseless and afraid. It is indubitably every person's psalm.

Verses 1 and 2 contain David's poignant opening cry. The use of *parallelism* evident in both charges them with emotion. "I lift up my voice" repeats "I cry aloud" in verse 1, just as "I tell" repeats "I pour out" and "my trouble" repeats "my complaint" in verse 2. That repetition channels David's earnestness as well as his desperation and directs any likeminded readers to consider their own relationship with God thus acting, in the words of one commentator, "as a kind of instruction to the would-be petitioners themselves" (494).

Verses 3-5 contain David's personal lament.

Staying one step ahead of Saul has left him weary and lonely. Physically and emotionally drained, he's overwhelmed and on the verge of giving up. If that weren't enough, he's all alone and has no one at his side. No one is concerned; no one cares. He can honestly say that he has "no refuge" because he has no one to turn to for help. His situation is desperate not to mention ironic. God anointed him king and deposed Saul, and yet he sits in a cave and Saul sits on a throne. Others may not know of this injustice, but the LORD knows David's way. What's more the LORD knows David's way out.

Verses 5-7a contain David's private petition. Recognizing that he has no other refuge, David takes refuge in the LORD. The LORD is his portion. When the land was divided among the twelve tribes, each received a portion. The Levites, however, did not receive a share. The LORD declared that he, himself, was their portion (Nu 18:20). One commentator explains: "The particular reference may be to the tribe of Levi whose inheritance was not a portion of the Promised Land but Yahweh himself (Dt 10:9). Thus they did not depend for their livelihood upon the cultivation of the soil but upon God" (A. A. Anderson, *Psalms 73-150*, NCBC, 924). David borrowed this imagery to make the point that the LORD was all he needed or wanted. Those in pursuit of him may have been strong, but David's LORD was stronger, so he petitioned him for two things. "Rescue me from those who pursue me," he asked, and "Set me free from my prison" (vv. 6, 7). "Prison" is no doubt a *metaphor* referring to the fact that he is a prisoner of his circumstances. The purpose behind his prayer is introduced by "that" and implies that he will praise the LORD among the righteous when his prayer is answered.

Verse 7b contains David's triumphant closing acclamation. In the words of one writer: "The resolution to the psalmist's despair will not only bring him to thanksgiving (v. 7a) but will also serve as an encouragement to the righteous community. The 'righteous', too, will hear the psalmist's thanksgiving and will be edified. The psalmist envisions the godly as crowding around him and listening to his thanksgiving for the great acts of God's deliverance" (Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, EBC, rev. ed., 5: 976). Moreover, the godly will make David's psalm their own.

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## The Message of the Passage

*Hemmed in and threatened, all alone and lonely, transform your bitter loneliness into sweet solitude by turning to the Lord who knows what you're facing and is stronger than your strongest foe.*

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God revealed to you . . .

–Write about how God wants you to change you . . .

–Write about how God wants to use you to change your world . . .

**“Facing the Monster of Loneliness”**

(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

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# notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

## *maskil*

"The [Heb] word is derived from a verb meaning 'to be prudent; to be wise.' Various options are: 'a contemplative song,' 'a song imparting moral wisdom,' or 'a skillful [i.e., well-written] song.' The term occurs in the superscriptions of Pss 32, 42, 44, 45, 52-55, 74, 78, 88, 89, and 142, as well as in Ps 47:7" (the NET Bible, 2<sup>tn</sup> on Ps 142 superscription).

## *In the cave*

"Psalm 57 is related to the incident at Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1-2) or at En Gedi (1 Sam 24) . . . Psalm 142, another passage that reports David's being in a cave, could refer to either of the above references as well" (Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 783).

## v. 1 *cry aloud*

Cf., "With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD" (ESV). "With my voice equals 'aloud.' His anguish must find relief in the earnest cry of supplication" (A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, SBB, 460). "The urgency of the prayer comes through at once in the repetition 'aloud . . . aloud' (RSV with my voice . . . with my voice). David, like Bartimaeus in the Gospels, knows the value of refusing to relapse into silence. That way lies despair" (Kidner, 510).

## v. 2 *complaint*

Cf., "my lament" (NET), "my worry" (NJB). "My complaint is not as petulant a word as in English, but might be rendered 'my troubled thoughts'" (510), which fits nicely with "my trouble" in the parallel line.

## v. 3 *my spirit*

Cf., "When I am overwhelmed" (NLT); "When I am ready to give up" (GNB); "Even when my strength leaves me" (NET). "Apparently under pressure he had lost his fight for his resistance was weakened" (Ross, 894). "The psalmist's adversity and prayers have brought him to the point of total exhaustion (cf. 76:12; 77:3; 143:4; Jnh 2:7). Nevertheless, even in this state of spiritual depression, he relies on his God, who knows his situation ('my way')" (VanGemeren, 975).

## v. 3 *my way*

"The 'way' may signify here the present adversity or 'the way out' of adversity. The second is more likely in the light of 143:7-8 (cf. 32:8). This also agrees with the contrast between 'my spirit' and the emphatic use of 'you,' appropriately rendered 'it is you' in the NIV" (975). Of course, the first is also true. "The Psalmist interrupts the account of his danger with the assertion that he is not telling God of it for His information; He is aware of it all, but his troubled heart is eased when he thus unburdens it" (Cohen, 460). "Just how timely was the conviction that God knew David's way (3a) is now doubly clear. First, verse 3b shows the perils of the path ahead; he can be thankful that it holds no problem for God. Then verse 4 reveals the friendless state of David, whom no-one cares to know so he feels. Mercifully again, God knows and cares" (Kidner, 510).

## v. 3 *hidden a snare*

Or "set a trap" (NET, GNT, ESV, NJB); "cf. the same hunting image as in the preceding psalms, 140:5; 141:9-10" (Broyles, 495).

## v. 4 *right*

"The 'right' signifies the place where one's witness or legal council [sic] stood (16:8; 109:31; 110:5; 121:5). He [David] has no one to defend him against the adversaries" (VanGemeren, 976).

## v. 4 *refuge*

Lit., "a place of refuge perishes from me;" cf., "There is no escape for me" (NASB); "I have nowhere to run" (NET); "No one will help me" (NLT); "[there is] no one to protect me" (GNT).

## v. 5 *portion*

"Claiming Yahweh as **my portion in the land of the living** is particularly associated with the Levites (Num 18:20)" (Broyles, 495), who received no allotment of land in Canaan. "The LORD said to Aaron, 'You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.'" David is claiming that "God was his Portion, his allotment, all he had (cf., 16:5; 73:26; 119:57); cf., "you are all I want" (GNT).

## v. 7 *prison*

"The actual petitions for God's intervention are two. One or both of them must be metaphoric, for if taken literally their images are incompatible. The first reflects feelings of being chased (**Rescue me from those who pursue me**), and the second feelings of confinement (**Set me free from my prison**, cf. 143:11b in Hb.). Most likely, the first is to be taken literally and the second taken metaphorically (see Kidner, 511).

### Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Feelings of loneliness in a child can happen for many reasons. She may have not been invited to a party that most of her friends are attending. A move to a new neighborhood or school can prompt loneliness. Sometimes a busy family schedule can leave everyone feeling isolated and out of touch. In our story next week, kids will learn that David was hiding in a cave when he wrote Psalm 142. He was there because people he trusted had turned their backs on him. He was hiding in fear and all alone. David's response to the situation was to cry out to God. He knew that men might desert him but God never would. What a valuable lesson for our children to learn early on in their lives! God is always with us! When it seems like no one cares or we think we have been left out - God is there - always! There are many people in our community who need to hear that message of hope. Have a discussion at dinner this week about who those people might be. A nursing home resident. A neighbor who is a single mom. A new kid at school. A family who has recently moved into your neighborhood. Make a plan to bless that person in a special way. Pray that God would make you sensitive to lonely people around you and that you would have the courage to tell them that God is always there!

#### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Psalm 142:1-7

1. Who did David cry out to when he was in trouble?
2. According to verse 4, who cares about David?
3. What does David call God in verse 5?

#### What Do You Think

1. After reading this Psalm, what one word would you use to describe how David felt?
2. Has there ever been a time when you felt that way? When?
3. Did David make a good choice by praying when he felt so bad?

#### What R U Going To Do

Make a point this week to look for kids in your school who may be lonely. Is there a new kid in your class? Is there someone who sits alone at lunch or during recess? Reach out to that person this week. Even a kind smile and friendly word will help!

### MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Peace: I live without worry because things are good between God, others, and me.

Memory Verse

Psalm 142:2 *I cry to you, O Lord; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."*

### KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC \_\_\_\_ and Verse \_\_\_\_\_. Family completed **Say** \_\_\_\_\_ **Think** \_\_\_\_\_ **Do** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.  
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

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**Wendy Hollabaugh** (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).