



“This is the Story...”

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Week 16: Do Not Destroy

Psalm 57

Intro Video: <https://youtu.be/2PfNvWeBKtU>

Review the big story: God created the cosmos and humans and called it all good. We were created to live in harmony, but sometimes we miss the mark. All of humanity missed the mark, and they had to live with the consequences, but God stuck with them and continued to love them. Then God called a family to be a blessing to the whole earth. Like the humans before them, the generations of this family often missed the mark, but God was faithful. When the people became slaves in Egypt, God raised up Moses to be their leader. God performed many signs and wonders, and delivered them from slavery. In the wilderness, they learned to be a people of God, trusting in God’s provision, living out God’s commandments, and wrestling with the law in shalom community. As they prepared to go into the promised land, they were given the *shema*, words of love to keep with their whole beings. God gave the people a new leader, Joshua, and through miraculous works brought the people into the promised land. Once there, they had to learn again how to be God’s people. They missed the mark a lot, and God sent judges to guide them. Ordinary people showed creativity and steadfast love in the way they continued the story of the people of God. God called a young boy, Samuel to be a bridge between the people and God. As the people demanded a king, Samuel would become the prophet who anointed kings.

- **Key verses:** Psalm 57:1; Psalm 57:7

Tell the story: The people of Israel looked around, and saw that everyone else had a king. They wanted one, too. They were warned that kings would oppress them, but they demanded it anyway. So God worked through Samuel to anoint kings to lead the people. First came Saul, then David, who would be the most famous king of Israel. David missed the mark a lot, but he was called the “man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). This doesn’t mean that David behaved like God. It means that David’s worship of God was blameless (remember that phrase from the Noah story?). We know that David played the lyre and sang, and some of the Psalms are attributed to him. This week’s scripture is a psalm that has been connected to a story in 1 Samuel 22. The changing of power from Saul to David was not peaceful or easy, and in this story, David is hiding from Saul in a cave.

- Read Psalm 57

Prime the pump:

- **Contextual Reading:** This psalm is connected to a story in 1 Samuel 22. Consider reading this story (which really begins a few chapters earlier) to understand the psalm in a deeper way.
- **Things to notice:**
 - The first line of the Psalm repeats itself. Imagine hiding from something you feared and repeating this line. Another translation is, “Grant me grace, God, grant me grace.” It’s almost a mantra, something we repeat to help center ourselves. A repeated prayer.
 - Psalms usually have a transition point where they come back to trust in God. In this psalm, that happens at verse 7. Notice the mirroring with verse 1.
 - Verse one talks about taking shelter in the shadow of God’s wings. This kind of parental protection is common in scripture.
 - There’s a lot of “steadfast” going on in here! These are not all the same Hebrew words - some are *hesed*, the word we learned about in the Ruth and Naomi story. Some are more

literally translated as “firm.” But all imply something unwavering. Notice all these words in the psalm - maybe count them or list them out in some way.

- **Background information about the psalms:**

- The Hebrew term for “psalm” is *mizmor*, which means “something sung.” But the name of the book of Psalms in the Jewish tradition is *Tehilim*, which means “Praises.”
- Like modern poetry, the psalms are meant to be read in all kinds of ways! Some of them are acrostics (in Hebrew, each line begins with the next letter of the alphabet). Many are chiasms, which means they’re written kind of like a palindrome. Whatever is in the middle of that chiasm is often the most important part. Chiastic structure is actually found in many places in the Bible, and once you start looking for chiasms it’s hard to stop! If you’re intrigued, [look up more about it!](#)
- When you see a psalm that says “of David,” that “of” can also be translated “for.” We don’t know definitively who wrote each Psalm, but these descriptions do help us understand their inspiration. Like our modern music, these psalms probably developed over time. They were produced by many different poets over probably 500 years.
- Robert Alter summarizes the purpose of the Psalms like this: “...the psalm was a multifaceted poetic form serving many different purposes, some cultic and others not, and it played a vital role in the life of the Israelite community and of individuals within that community throughout the biblical period.” (*Alter, Robert. 2019. The Hebrew Bible, vol. 3: The Writings. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, pg. 8.*)
- The psalmic tradition is similar to the literature of the cultures that surrounded the people of God. We can hear echoes of those cultures in our Psalms. For example, the warrior-god is similar to the Canaanite Baal. Knowing this could be cause for discomfort - or we can look at our own worship and its intermingling with the culture, and see that this has long been a part of our evolving worship.

- **Conversation starters:**

- This prayer intermingles cries and supplications to God, complaining, descriptions of entrapment, trust, fear, declarations of what God will do, ill-wishes for enemies - all of this in one poetic and brief prayer. If you used this psalm as inspiration or guide, what might your prayer be in your present situation?
- The psalm ends with perspective. God is big, so much bigger than present circumstances. What would happen if this kind of perspective was woven into your prayer life in this time, in this place?
- Read verse 8. This lovely poetry talks about awakening creation with music. Maybe you want to try this...

Microsong: “Do Not Destroy” (Listen: https://youtu.be/06Rt19W_Rwc)

God gives them a prophet; they ask for a king. Still God loves us; Can a mother forget her children? Do not destroy...

In this cave I cry to You; You will send and save me. In the shade of Your wings I hide until destruction passes by.

So send out your generous love. My soul is here among the hungry lions. Wake up my soul, wake up, it’s early! Above it all, O God, place your love and glory.

Wake up my song, wake up, it’s early! Above it all, O God, place your love and glory.

Sing the big song: (Listen: <https://youtu.be/cTo4ETkzZbM>)

This is the story of how it all began. God made matter, and chaos shattered.

Eve and Adam, they tried to hide. The world got violent and God replied with a mark and flood and a rainbow sign, God’s love written on skin and sky,

And then God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, ohhh ooohhh

A mother and her favorite son wrestle for the blessing, another son becomes a slave, the land is saved from famine.

God’s family grows. Egypt oppresses. They groan to God and God sends Moses.

Ten strange signs say “Please release them!” By the sea God saves them. Ahhhhhhhhhh.

The people complain and God rains bread. Daily food and ten new rules.
Five sisters come and ask for land. God says "Yes, amend the law!"
*Moses says, "In your new life across the Jordan, love God with your whole heart and with all your
being, and your strength, now listen: God is One, only God. God is One, only God!"*
Cross over Jordan, stories and stones. Circuits and shouts and the walls come down.
God sends judges like Deborah and the land has rest.
Ruth's worth more than seven sons; Redeem the lost with steadfast love.
Corruption in the temple, and God sends Samuel.
God gives them a prophet, They ask for a king.
God loves every one of us, it's true. And God loves the universe.

Go do your household project!