

A PSALM TO CALM OUR FEARS

Psalm 27

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Psalm 27 is another one of the psalms of David. All have been psalms of David except Psalm 1. “The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD. Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, ‘Seek his face!’ Your face, LORD, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior. Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me. Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence. I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD” (Psalm 27:1-4, NIV).

I’ve called this psalm “A Psalm To Calm Our Fears.” It certainly ranks with Psalm 23 as one of the great psalms of comfort and assurance. It has the power of language and metaphor that Psalm

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23 has. It's a little longer than Psalm 23, therefore not used as frequently when we're going through difficulty. But certainly it ought to act as a companion, side by side, with Psalm 23 whenever we are facing situations that are difficult for us or fear that are very strong in our life. As you notice by reading the first three verses if you look closely the words "fear" or "afraid" are mentioned three times, suggesting that the mood and tenor of the psalm is one that is coming to a person that is surrounded by things that are bigger than their natural ability to deal with.

We can pretty much identify that what David is particularly afraid of at that moment is a military move against him, whether it was from an external enemy or whether it was from civil strife.

We're not told since the psalm itself never links itself with any particular event in David's life.

It's not sufficient that we just know what David's fears are. It is important that we also look at our own and understand them and use this psalm as a help and a bulwark to our spirit in a time when we are afraid. Can you identify what your pressing fears are? Maybe they are perennial things that cause you fear.

We ought not to confuse our identity as a person with what particular things we're doing or what particular role that we have. Does somebody who has all the hoopla and has been in the leadership role in the body of Christ have greater standing with God than a person who quietly was and is? Our earthly values often get so cockeyed. The confusion of our roles with our personhood. I suspect that's one of my fears in life that if my role somehow diminishes then my personhood will not have value.

My concern is not so much a military situation like David's. I don't know what your areas of fear are. Maybe you face a lot more frightening than mine. It helps me when I look at fears to come back to a psalm like this, which breathes such assurance and confidence. The phrase "though my father and mother forsake me" (verse 10) maybe some of you had different experiences, but for

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me it's almost unthinkable that my mother or father would forsake me. If that's the case, how much more does this give us security?

This is a sit-on-God's-lap-and-snuggle-up kind of a psalm. It says when you're afraid you need to get to a safe place. For me as a kid a safe place was my mother's lap. As an adult I've got to find a safe place where I can snuggle up and have more than a safe place than is simply human relational security. But a safe place that is in God. This psalm is saying here is an opportunity to snuggle up and be secure in a cold day, a rainy time, a difficult moment.

Psalm 27 is a psalm for the home crowd. We need to get into it and hear God pulling for us saying, "You can make it!" The psalm itself is divided into two parts. There is a definite change between verse 6 and verse 7. There's a break in thought between 6 and 7. The first part of the psalm, verses 1–6, differs from the second part of the psalm, 7–14, in both form and substance. Let me mention how it differs in form.

In verses 1–6 the form of the language is third person. He's talking about the Lord in the third person. But in verses 7–14 it becomes a prayer in the first person, directly talking to the Lord.

Verses 1–6 talk about the Lord; verses 7–14 talk to the Lord. It differs in form from third person to first person.

Then it also differs in substance. Verses 1–6 are characterized by confidence and trust. The mood is buoyant, triumphant, assertive, confident, sure, powerfully strong, upbeat. All those kind of things can be used to describe the power that's in those first six verses.

But the second part is a little less sure. And a little bit more pleading in tone. More plaintive. I'd identify the first six verses as the upside of trust and the last seven verses as being the downside of trust. Both sides exercise trust. But one I think comes out of a great gospel gathering and

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you're so pumped up that nothing can stand against you. There are times we've had that experience. Pumped up because we've seen God do some great things.

But verses 7–14 are not quite as pumped up. There's still a trust. But it's calmer, not as boastful or assertive. It seems the kind of confidence that follows about two days after the real high. The strength is still there but one is on more quiet terms and still trusting.

I. As we look at the first part I'd call this a statement of confidence and trust, verses 1–6.

It is divided into two segments.

A. The first three verses or the first stanza speaks of a faith that smites fear. The decision we find David is a military one. You can see this by the words “advance,” “attack,” “besiege,” and “war break out.” All various words that describe various military movements. Here's David facing that kind of situation. He's saying, “An army's advancing against me. I may have a siege against me.” That's kind of a helpless situation. When you're besieged there's nothing you can do but hope your food and water supply last longer than the enemy that's camped out there in front of you. David is saying, “Though that happens to me I will not fear.”

Out of this realization is the Lord is going to help us. “The Lord,” David says, “is the security of my life. He's my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?” (verse 1). He owes his security, not to having a well-trained army, which he did. Not to having well-stocked warehouses and well-stocked cisterns with water, which I'm sure David did. He owed his security to the presence of the Lord. He describes the Lord in terms of three things the Lord is to him. The Lord is his light, his salvation, and his stronghold. We might take a moment to look at each of those.

“The LORD is my light” (Psalm 27:1, NIV). “Light” is a natural word for everything that's positive. In the psalms and the prophets, light stood as a synonym for truth, for goodness, for joy, for vitality. So when David thinks of God being his light he's thinking how God brings him into

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a place where he does have vitality and joy and goodness. We function a lot better in life when the lights are on and when we know where things are. He's saying when the Lord is the light of my life I know where everything is.

The Lord is "my salvation" (verse 1, NIV). He's suggesting here that the Lord is deliverance.

The Lord is his stronghold. I like the word "stronghold" because it means the safest place you can be; if you're in a military conquest it's the last bastion. It's the holdout. It's the well-fortified place. The Lord is that in David's life.

These words therefore express a certainty that banishes fear; regardless of the dimensions of the threats against me my faith is in the Lord. If He's on my side of whom then shall I be afraid?

B. That faith that smites fear passes into the second part. David talks about the request that produces delightful results. "One thing I ask of the LORD" (verse 4, NIV). This is the only time I believe in the Old Testament and I don't know there's a parallel passage in the New Testament. The only time where the phrase is used "One thing I ask of the LORD" in that particular kind of a way. What is that question, if you had one thing to ask of the Lord? David says "That I may dwell in his house all the days of my life" (verse 4). There's some that think that David here may be thinking of the physical temple. But since the temple hasn't yet been built I think it's more reasonable to assume that David is talking about the desire to be in God's presence all the days of his life and never be away from the Lord.

He feels that if he can have that request, two results will follow. He'll be able to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, verse 4, and he will be secure, verses 5–6. This is what's called in Christian mysticism the beatific vision of God. One like Moses gets so close in their spiritual experience that they want to reach out and see God and experience as much of God as they can.

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If there's anything that the Pentecostal or charismatic renewal has brought to the church it is this emphasis on not just an objective relationship with God, but a subjective relationship with God where heart to heart we communicate with God—past words and into His presence. We see unity of our heart with the Lord so that we can even have a prayer experience where we are not conscious of elapsed time or even aware of bodily needs such as hunger. It is this kind of interchange with the Lord that David is seeking. “Lord in my time of fear I want to be very much in Your presence. I know that when I'm there I'm going to have visions unfold to me that will give me strength and help and I know I'll be protected and secure.” That's the triumphant way with which the first part of the psalm concludes. That he's going to sacrifice with shouts of joy because the Lord's going to lead him into that kind of experience.

II. Then in verses 7–14 comes the quieter side of the psalm where David prays for help.

This likewise is divided into several categories.

A. First there's verses 7–10 where David is asking for an audience with the Lord. “Hear my voice when I call LORD. Be merciful to me and answer me.” What is David's concern and our confidence that the Lord will hear us in the day of trouble? David's confidence was in the Lord's mercy. The trouble for David had become so deep that the thought plagued him that maybe even God was going to abandon him. He had the problem of no assurance. He slams the door on that doubt when in verse 10 he says even though his parents forsake him God, his Savior, would not. I think there are moments in maybe every Christian's life. In my reading of the lives of the saints, there have been times when they have felt very much cast off and alone from God. The time when it's most likely to hit is a time when we're going through a lot of external difficulties. That's David's concern. “Lord, I've got enough to handle with all the external problems I'm going through without also at this moment coming to grips with the internal trauma of having

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You hide Your face from me and not being around. Lord, don't do this. Let me in this moment resolve in my heart to realize that even if I feel that You've abandoned me You really haven't. Because you don't abandon me."

A person who probably did in his lifetime more for the Lord's work than maybe a handful of other people in Christian history, was David Livingston. His favorite text, which he quoted again and again all through his life, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). The reason why that was such a special verse for him was that he was alone so much. He had a sense at various times of God maybe not being with him. He had to fortify himself with the objective Word of God. Not the subjective feeling that comes when we're all in a worship service and surrendered to the Lord and we can feel that emotional power surging through our life of the Lord's presence. But those moments instead when there's just no feeling there. One has to rely on something deeper. I think David is crying out his sincere desire from his heart. "Lord, I know You're not going to abandon me. Help me to bring my feelings in line with that. I always want an audience with You."

B. In verses 11–12 he then asks for God to help him both internally and externally. Verse 11 addresses the theme of asking the Lord to give him internal help as he faces the difficulties that surround him. The internal help that he asks for is an inner direction. Under pressure he might be tempted to walk a crooked path rather than a straight path. Under pressure he might be prompted to do something that is sinful and foolish that will lead his own life into ruin. In the midst of the military language of being besieged by an army and being under attack he's saying, "Under this kind of pressure teach me your way. Lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors."

What's interesting to me in this psalm is that David, when he finally gets around to giving God specific requests, does not start out by asking God to win the battle for him. He asks God first of

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all to win the battle in him. And to guard his steps and to lead him in a level path, which simply means in conformity to God's written Word and God's will.

C. He closes the second part of this psalm, which is more plaintive and mellow. Those two verses speak of the real confidence the psalmist has in the Lord. Verse 13 is David's solution of the whole matter of being troubled. "I am still confident of this. I will still see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living." Then verse 14 is not evidently spoken by David to the Lord. But perhaps as witness of the Spirit within his own heart or some think this psalm was sometimes used in anniversary services for a king's coronation. Every year you would celebrate the coronation. There are a number of psalms that could fill that role of an anniversary psalm. The feeling was that every year of David's reign or succeeding kings there would come a moment when this would be the hymn that would be brought out and used. And the king would be responsible for singing the first thirteen verses. The first part would be real upbeat and powerful and the last part would be more plaintive and perhaps might take on somber significance if there were very real military dangers they were facing at that moment in the kingdom. But then when the king was all done singing the psalms then the leading priests or perhaps one of the prophets would come along and sing verse 14 as sort of the response at the end. Everybody would join in chanting this as a psalm, which closes with great assurance. A word of prophetic injection. God has all along been listening to the cry of David and had heard him. Wait for the Lord.

Waiting sometimes is the very hardest thing to do. Particularly for people of action. To sit and wait may not be the most encouraging or helpful counsel at times. There are matters we all wrestle with and don't see an instant solution to. There comes this word: simply wait for the Lord. It's more than simply a passive wait and mark time. But it's the idea that in the process of

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waiting, God is going to exercise His will and His purpose and He's going to make things come out all right.

There are times when it is wrong to take any action because the only thing we can do is wait it out. In those times this psalm is saying be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. It'd be nice if sometimes we could get quick resolution on things that we're going through. If we have to wait, God will work it for His good and His glory. In the process of waiting it's in the quiet confidence we find the strength to go on and do the work of God and live for the Lord and find the strength to walk with Him in a way that He approves.

This is the psalm that we can use to calm our fears. I know this psalm played a significant role for Corrie Ten Boom in her days also. It's a powerful psalm going through down times.