Fear Not

Psalm 27

2014 Summer in Psalms Series

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One of the serious liabilities of practically functioning as your own god is you simply aren't adequate for the task. What's more is you know that. You know that, and it's manifested in our fear, in our worry, in our anxiety, in our despair, in our hopelessness. There's a sense within us that we are just not adequate for the needs of the day. Oh, I understand it's possible to function for a while and to think everything's okay. I kind of get everything figured out, and I have a plan, and I'm working the plan, and everything is going around nicely. But life has a way of eventually punching you in the face. And in that moment you suddenly realize there's very little in this life that I can control or change. And you start to have this sense of fear, this sense of anxiety, this stress, this pressure that often turns to a hopelessness and a despair, and you feel like, "I'm in the ocean and I'm treading water, and the water is rising and I don't think I'm going to survive." If we were to take all of those feelings—whatever those might be for you this morning—anxiety, pressure, hopelessness, despair, and kind of lump them altogether in the category of *fear*.

This morning we want to look at Psalm 27 to help us with that. But before we do that, as you came in this morning, you received a *Loop*. Inside the *Loop*, there was a card that looked like this. On that card, there's a place right in the middle that says MY FEAR IS: ____. So if you take all these emotions, whatever they are for you, lump them together in this category of fear, what would it be for you this morning that would define that fear? What is it that's keeping you awake at night? What is it that causes you anxiety and worry and stress, maybe hopelessness and despair during your day? Think about what that would be. This is just for you. Nobody needs to read your card. Maybe even write that down. If you want it completely private, just put it in code language, so the person next to you doesn't know what it is. The only thing that matters is that y*ou* know what it is. And then maybe use the back of this card for taking some notes. We'll come back to it at the end. What we want to see, if we can do it in the next thirty minutes is: how can Psalm 27 help with whatever this fear is?

So if you have a Bible, turn with us to Psalm 27. Psalm 27 is a *Psalm of David*. It's a little hard to determine exactly what the background is. It's likely one of two events: Either it's when David was fleeing for his life from King Saul who wanted to kill him, or it's later in life when David was fleeing from his own son Absalom who had taken over the kingdom, who was also pursuing him with the Israeli army wanting to capture him and put him to death. It's really helpful to process this psalm, to understand this was not David sitting on the side of a hill, wondering what it would be like if life got hard. This is David fleeing as a fugitive. He literally has an army tracking him down with the intent to capture him and to kill him. So in the midst of that, he writes these words:

> **The LORD is my light and my salvation;**
> **Whom shall I fear?**
> **The LORD is the defense of my life;**
> **Whom shall I dread?** (*NASB, Psalm 27:1)

LORD, capital L-O-R-D, always tells us that's the Hebrew *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah*. It's the God of the Old Testament that was intimate, that was personal, the God that had made a covenant relationship

with David—now the God whom he would trust in his hour of need. He uses three images: God is my *light*, my *salvation* and my *defense.*

The idea of God is **light**—we've talked about this before—it's helpful to remember that in the ancient world, without all of the artificial lighting, light was light, and dark was really dark. There was the sense you'd better get done what you need to get done in the light because dark is really dark. But beyond that, there was the reality that when it became dark, the risk went dramatically higher—whether that was a risk of an attack from a wild animal, such as a lion or a bear, whether that was the risk of a thief or a robber, or even an enemy army attacking. Everything was much more uncertain when it was dark.

Now we are not so much different today even with all of our modern conveniences. You still have children who, by day, they play in the basement; they play in their bedroom, and they are fine. But as soon as night comes, and suddenly it's dark, those places that by daylight were safe and enjoyable, now become filled with shadows and noises and gremlins, and monsters and it all becomes fearful. And many of us would say even as adults, there are times, in the dark of night, where suddenly the noises, the shadows, the unexpected starts to cause fear…things that in the light we wouldn't have given a second thought to.

So the idea is that *God is my light*. There's a sense of safety; there's a sense of security; there's a sense that everything is going to be okay. It feels different in the light than in the darkness. Now this is an image in the New Testament we are very familiar with. Jesus is the Light of the world. There's a lot of that talk in the New Testament. But it's worth noting this is the only reference to God as *light* in the Old Testament. So it's a significant imagery here.

The second is God is **my salvation.** The word **salvation**, the Hebrew word carries the idea of *a rescuer*. It's the idea that maybe you are in the ocean and you are drowning, and you are about to go down for the last time. And this huge arm comes out of the heavens, picks you up, rescues you and sets you on dry ground. It's the idea of someone who steps in and comes to the rescue.

Maybe a good summer image is: imagine being somewhere where there's something like a petting zoo. Maybe you are at the children's zoo or you are at the state fair or you are at the Omaha zoo. Maybe you are even at Holmes Lake with the geese. What happens is these little kids think it would be fun to feed the animals. In a lot of these places, you know, you put a nickel in and you get some food, and it's all well and good. So the little goat comes up and starts eating the food, and then another one, and then another one, and what happens is when you have food, you become very popular. If you are at Holmes Lake with a little bread, all of a sudden, here comes one goose, then another, and then another, and all of a sudden the environment starts getting out of control really fast, and we've probably all seen it. All of a sudden, in that little kid's eyes, this went from kind of fun to now becoming terrifying, and just before there's all out panic, mom and dad step in, pick up the child, and suddenly everything's okay. Well, that's the imagery of this idea of salvation. It's when life feels like it's caving in, and there's this momentum, and it's getting out of control and, "What am I supposed to do?" And God steps in, picks us up, and holds us and reminds us that everything is going to be okay.

The third imagery is the imagery of **the defense of my life**. The Hebrew word would mean something like *a walled city*, or *a strong tower*, or *a fortress*. Again, in an ancient world they didn't have all the things that we take for granted. If we are out and about and feel in some way threatened, we can always just pull up a phone, dial 911, and someone will be there. But in the

ancient world, obviously they didn't have that option. Actually outside your walled city, life was extremely dangerous. It was kind of the law of the jungle. And so there was this sense that the only way to really feel safe was in a walled city, in some sort of a tower, in a fortress, in some place where you can shut the door, shut the gate, and feel like you are safe. Maybe think of a winter storm, or a summer storm, and you are caught out in the storm and you finally get somewhere where you go inside and the door shuts behind you and suddenly everything feels safe. You are out of the storm. That's the imagery of the idea of a defense.

So he says, "The LORD is my light, my salvation, my defense." Therefore, the conclusion is: whom shall I fear? It doesn't really matter if it's "whom" or it's a "what". What do I have to be afraid of? If God is my light and my salvation and my defense, what shall I dread? Now he's thinking backwards:

> **When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh...** (Vs. 2a)

The Hebrew word there, **devour**, would be describing a wild animal that's about to devour me, to consume me. So he's using an imagery of the enemy army closing in, wanting to devour me, like an animal.

> **When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,**
> **My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.** (Vs. 2)

So David is looking back and he's remembering in the past, God has been faithful. You remember when David was standing before Goliath, and David said to Saul, "I'm not afraid; the God who in the past delivered me from a bear and from a lion, will deliver me from this oversized windbag." Well, it's the same idea here. David is saying God has been faithful in the past. If this is during the time of Absalom's rebellion, maybe he's remembering what happened when Saul was chasing him with the army, and God was faithful, and that God will be faithful again.

I do believe to be a person of faith, to get beyond the fear and the worry and the anxiety and the stress and the hopelessness and the despair that sometimes define life, you have to have a good memory. You have to remember, in a sense continually file away God's faithfulness. I think we have a tendency to have a rather short memory, as if everything we've experienced is a new test of God's faithfulness, rather than realizing if God has been so faithful through the ups and downs and the storms and the valleys of life, can't I trust him for whatever it is I'm facing today? That's the idea of verse 2; he's looking backwards. Verse 3, he's back to the present.

> **Though a host encamp against me,** *(meaning an army)*
> **My heart will not fear;**
> **Though war arise against me,**
> **In *spite of* this I shall be confident.**

Again, this is not David sitting on the side of a hill, contemplating what it might be like if life got hard for him. He is hiding in caves. He is on the run. He's a fugitive. He literally has an entire army tracking him down to kill him! And yet, he says, "In the midst of this, I will be confident," because he trusts in God.

Verses 1, 2 and 3 are possible because of verses 4, 5 and 6. In other words, if you want verses 1, 2 and 3, then you have to understand verses 4, 5, and 6. Verse 4:

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:

Okay, let's stop and think about this for a minute. You were fleeing for your life; a literal army is chasing you, with the intent to kill you. There have been false accusations; he's been falsely accused. If there was one thing that you were going to ask of God, what would it be? I'll tell you what it would be for me. It would be: "God, wipe these guys out. Smash them." That's not what he asked for.

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD
And to meditate in His temple. (Vs. 4)

The one thing he asked, the one thing he shall seek in his hour of need is to dwell in the presence of God. His request *is to behold the beauty, the wonder, the mystery, the majesty of God.* The word **meditate** here is a different word from Psalm 1. This is a word that means *to investigate*. It's the idea that I will explore; I will investigate that this relationship with God is like an adventure—it's the adventure of a lifetime. And I want to pursue; I want to seek; I want to know the wonder and the beauty and the majesty which is God.

One of the thoughts related to God that I think is staggering, is to understand for all of eternity, I will go on this adventure of seeking to pursue the wonder and the majesty and the fullness of God, but through eternity, I will never get to the end of that which defines God. God's beauty, God's majesty, God's wonder is inexhaustible. And even if I have forever to seek Him, I'll never get Him figured out. That is a staggering thought. I would suggest to you if you went on an adventure to discover the wonder and the complexity of that which is Bryan, it would take you no more than two hours and you have exhausted all there is. *(laughter)* But forever, we will never exhaust the mystery of God. David says, "If I could just ask for one thing, that's what I want." You say, "Wow! Why would he ask for that in his hour of need?" Verse 5:

For *(could be translated because)* **in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle;**
In the secret place of His tent He will hide me;
He will lift me up on a rock.

In the ancient Near East, when you invited someone into your tent, you, as the host, were now responsible to do everything necessary to protect that person, everything necessary to provide for that person, even if it costs you your life. So the imagery that David is presenting is that God in his hour of need will take him into His tent, and He will protect him; He will provide for him; He will hide him in His tent. And God will do whatever is necessary to care for him there.

Why in his hour of need, why does David say this one thing I ask for is that I would know God deeply and fully? It's because eventually life's going to punch me in the face, and in that moment, I need to know God because this is the God who's going to hide me in His tent; this is the God who's going to protect me; this is the God who's going to get me through it. If I know God, I will trust God. To know Him is to trust Him.

I think many of us as Christians, we trust Christ as Savior. We are excited about that. We are confident we have our ticket to heaven. We are excited about our relationship with God for a while.

And then it just kind of shifts into cruise control. We are cruising along. We are not doing anything bad; we are not getting into trouble; we are just kind of cruising along. But if we were to be honest, we are not passionately pursing a love affair with this God. If we are to be honest, we'd have to say, "You know this really isn't the adventure of a lifetime. I'm not all that passionate right now about pursuing the mystery of God and the wonder of God, and the holiness of God and the fullness of God. God's more like, kind of an acquaintance at work and, when I see Him in the hall I say, 'Hi,' to Him. But it doesn't go a lot farther than that." I hear Christians say, "You know, I've never had this deep, intimate relationship with God. I don't know that I've ever really danced with Jesus." The response is always, "How hard have you tried to know this God?" To think that in my hour of need, it suddenly just magically happens is ridiculous. It's a relationship. We kind of want all the benefits without all the complications of relationship. We just want God to show up in our hour of need and take over. And I'll tell you: from watching this year after year in my own life and in the life of fellow believers, it just doesn't work that way. If in your hour of need, you don't really know God, it makes it very hard to trust Him. It makes it very hard to really believe that God is going to be enough to somehow, out of nowhere, conjure this up. So David says, "I pursue this; this is the one thing I asked for because in my day of trouble, this is the one thing I'm going to need. Since I'm not God and there's very little I can change or control in the world, then I need to know the One who is in charge, who *can* change and control."

Think of it this way: I think, biblically, marriage is meant to be a picture of the love relationship that we have with God. So Patti and I have been married thirty-three years this month. And I would say, over the last thirty-three years there's very little in my life that has taken as much time and energy and thought as making my marriage thrive. It doesn't just happen. We didn't just get on white horses on our wedding day and just ride into the sunset with this beautiful love story. It's a choice every day to die to yourself. It's a choice every day to serve the person you love. It's a choice to explore the mystery of that which is Patti. You know, you ladies are complicated. *(laughter)* You are totally a moving target. About the time we figure you out, you change again. But that's part of the wonders, part of the mystery. It's part of the adventure of marriage. But it takes time and energy. But over thirty-three years I would not change that for anything. I would never want to settle for less than what we experience today.

Think about how much time and energy is necessary to make a marriage thrive with someone who is basically like me, in the sense that she is a human. She is concrete; she's objective; she's right there every day. If that's true, how much more time and energy would be necessary to cultivate a deeply meaningful relationship with a God who is infinite, a God who is Spirit, a God who is so much more complicated. Many of us, if we invested the amount of time in our marriage that we have invested into our relationship with God, our marriage would not survive for another day. So why would we think somehow, magically, out of nowhere, this relationship with God would thrive in my day of trouble; it would be everything I need? So what David is saying is, "This one thing I want is I want to know God; I want to pursue God; I want to dwell in His presence; I want to behold His wonder because I know in my day of trouble, that this is the God who's going to hide me in his tent, and I want to know Him so I might trust Him rather than fear." Verse 6:

And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me;
And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.

Again, nothing in his circumstances has changed. Yet he's singing songs of worship to God because he knows God is a majority, and as long as God is on my side, that's enough. He'll hide me in His tent and I won't be afraid. I will be confident.

In verses 1 through 6, David sounds like super Christian. As a matter of fact, it's kind of hard to identify with him. He's like *a Wow*! He's just beyond! If you struggle to identify with David in 1 through 6, you'll really like 7, 8 and 9 because he totally melts down.

> **Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice,**
> **And be gracious to me and answer me.**
> ***When You said*, "Seek My face," my heart said to You,**
> **"Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."**
> **Do not hide Your face from me,**
> **Do not turn Your servant away in anger;**
> **You have been my help;**
> **Do not abandon me nor forsake me,**
> **O God of my salvation!**

You say, "What happened to the guy in verses 1 through 6?" because now all of a sudden, his insecurities are flooding out. Now he's having some sort of an emotional meltdown and he's saying to God, "God, be gracious to me, be merciful to me; don't turn from me; don't forsake me; don't throw me away in anger; don't walk away from me; don't hate me!" And you say, "Where is this coming from?"

Let's imagine that I come home from work this next week and when I walk through the door, Patti is crying. And she says, "Honey, please don't hit me! Don't blow your temper at me! Don't forsake me! Don't hate me! Don't walk away from me! Don't leave me!" And she's just in tears. And I'm kind of shocked by this and I say, "Honey, where in the world is this coming from? Why would you ever think that of me when I have never done any of that to you?" And she says, "You know, I have a friend, and I thought their marriage was perfect, and all of a sudden all those things happened out of nowhere, and my friend is devastated. And now I've got to thinking, what if this happens to us and what if you did that to me?" And I have to back her up and say, "Honey, I'm really sorry about that with your friend. But your friend's husband is not me. I promise I won't do that to you." That's exactly what's happening to David. He talks about it in verse 10. Why is he having this meltdown?

> **For my father and my mother have forsaken me…**

Now whether he's talking literally about his father and mother or whether it's more of an imagery of the people around me, the people that I love the most, the people I cared about the most, the people that I thought no matter what would always be there for me, would always be faithful to me, would always be in my corner, they have forsaken me; they have turned their back on me; they have joined the forces of the enemy, and now all of a sudden, David's projecting that onto God. And if the people who love me most, the people who are most committed to me, have now forsaken me and turned against me, then how do I know God won't do that? And now he's projecting all this onto God. "What if God forsakes me? What if God walks away from me? What if God flings me away in anger? What if God won't listen to me anymore?" But in the midst of his meltdown, because he knows God, in a sense he gets hold of himself; he recalibrates, and he remembers just because people in my life have done that to me, doesn't mean God will do that to me. God is

speaking to his heart and saying, "But I am not like that. You can trust me." Evidenced by the second part of verse 10:

> **But** (*this is where he stops himself*) **the LORD will take me up**.

The Hebrew there is a phrase used to describe a parent picking up a child and holding that child safely. It is that imagery of the world feeling like it's starting to collapse around me, and it's getting worse and worse and the hopelessness and despair and the loneliness and I'm in over my head and, suddenly, God reaches in and picks me up. And He holds me, and He says, "Even though everybody forsakes you and walks away, I will always be there for you." It's a beautiful imagery. But David could not stop himself and recalibrate if he didn't know God. So he says in verse 11:

> **Teach me Your way, O LORD,**
> **And lead me in a level path**
> **Because of my foes.**
> **Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries,**
> **For false witnesses have risen against me,**
> **And such as breathe out violence.**
> ***I would have despaired*** **unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD**
> **In the land of the living.** (Vs. 11-13)

David says **I would have despaired**. He's talking about his meltdown, but he stopped himself, and he believed that he **would see the goodness of God in the land of the living**. He stopped himself; he recalibrated; he remembered what is true of God that was cultivated over time. So then he responds finally in verse 14:

> **Wait for the LORD;**
> **Be strong and let your heart take courage;**
> **Yes, wait for the LORD.**

It's interesting we, as a congregation, picked the nine psalms. We've gone through—this is the sixth one—and this is the third one that deals with the theme of *waiting*. There's nothing more difficult than just waiting on God. When I understand I am not God, there's very little in life that I can change or control, and so what I can do is I can trust God, and trusting God often means right now, all I can do is wait and it's up to God. But he says, "I won't just wait; I'll be strong." **Let your heart take courage. Yes, wait for the LORD.**

What is the thing that's causing you fear, that's causing you anxiety, that's causing you worry, that's maybe causing you hopelessness or despair? What is it that's creating the stress or the pressure that seems to define your days and nights? And explain to me why God isn't big enough for whatever it is you're facing? The more you know God, the more you'll believe that. And the more you believe that, the more the fear, the worry, the anxiety begins to fade away, and the more you say," I will not fear. I will be confident. I will take courage."

So go back to your card. This is meant for you to take home. At the bottom there are three boxes—David saying, "I will not fear. I will be confident. I will take courage." What I would suggest is you take this home. You go back through the psalm, maybe look at some of your notes, and you decide for yourself: if God is God, and you are going to trust Him as God, then you need to pursue Him and know Him—for in your day of trouble, that is what you'll need. You'll need to know if

God puts me in His tent, and He hides me in His tent, that everything is going to be okay, because He is God and when the world is caving in all around me, He will reach in; He will rescue me; He will take care of me. I'm confident; I believe that. So no matter what I face, when life punches me in the face, I will say, "I will not fear; I will be confident; I will take courage. I will choose to trust this God in my hour of need." If that's true, sometimes all you can do is, for now, we wait. We wait without fear, without anxiety. We wait with trust.

Our Father, we are thankful that You are good and You are faithful. God, the more we know You, the more we know that to be true. To know You is to trust You. God, I pray that each one of us would pray with David that this is the one thing I want more, the one thing I want most is to behold Your beauty and Your majesty, to dwell in Your presence, to investigate the wonder of that which is You as God, that in my day of trouble, I might know with confidence that You will be faithful. Lord, may that be true of each of us. In Jesus's name. Amen.

[Reader]

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the defense of my life;
Whom shall I dread?
When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,
My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.
Though a host encamp against me,
My heart will not fear;
Though war arise against me,
In *spite of* this I shall be confident.

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD
And to meditate in His temple.
For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle;
In the secret place of His tent He will hide me;
He will lift me up on a rock.
And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me,
And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.

Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice,
And be gracious to me and answer me.
***When You said*, "Seek My face," my heart said to You,**
"Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."
Do not hide Your face from me,
Do not turn Your servant away in anger;
You have been my help;

Do not abandon me nor forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
For my father and my mother have forsaken me;
But the LORD will take me up.

Teach me Your way, O LORD,
And lead me in a level path
Because of my foes.
Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries,
For false witnesses have risen against me,
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***I would have despaired* unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD**
In the land of the living.
Wait for the LORD;
Be strong and let your heart take courage;
Yes, wait for the LORD. (Psalm 27)

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