

Hope for Difficult Times

Psalm 27

I'm sure for many of us as you think about the year ahead of us there are things that you are really looking forward to, right? Graduating. A new job. Retiring. Getting married. Paying off the mortgage. Time with family. A special trip. For us, we will become first-time grandparents. We are really looking forward to that.

For many of us, as we think about the year ahead, however, there are also things that we worry about. We have concerns. There are things looming in the future that threaten us – things that threaten our joy and peace and security. As you look to 2018, what produces anxiety in your heart? I'm guessing that for many something pops into your mind immediately when I ask this question. What is it for you?

As you think about that worry or concern, here's the question I want to ask you this morning: Does your experience of God make any real difference in how you deal with that thing? Do you find peace and assurance from God? Or, would you have to say that even through you know you should find peace and assurance from God, the truth of the matter is that you really don't?

Well, thankfully for us, Scripture offers examples of people who experienced real threats, but who also experienced real help from God. There are examples of people for whom God was more than just an idea or a principle; He was a real personal presence that brought help in the face of a threat. David was one such person.

This morning I'd invite you to turn with me to Psalm 27. I'd like to look at this psalm and see David's experience of confidence in God. The inscription at the head of this Psalm says "A Psalm of David." Literally, it is "*of David*," which can mean "written by David," or "concerning David," or "dedicated to David." My personal belief is that David wrote this psalm, but even if this psalm was written by another for David, the truths of the psalmist's experience of God in the face of a threat are still the same. God was a person in whom he had personal confidence and in whom he found great help.

David's Confidence (1-6)

In reading this we get a sense of the occasion. David faced a threat. Enemies. Impeding war. And in that situation, David's relationship with God made a real difference in his life. David found confidence in the Lord.

¹ *The LORD is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the defense of my life;
Whom shall I dread?*

In verse 1, David says three things about the LORD. He is *my light*; He is *my salvation*; and, He is *the defense of my life*. *Light* is a force that dispels darkness. In this situation, the darkness is David's enemies who are coming against him. God is *salvation*. God is the one who has the ability to save and give him victory over his enemies. He also says that God is *the defense of my life*.

David is not just stating truths that believes intellectually, he knows these things experientially. He knows that God is these things for him – He is *my light*; *my salvation*; *the defense of my life*. And the reason he knew this experientially is because God had delivered him in the past. In verse 2 he says:

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

David remembers how God had delivered him in the past. And because of that, he is confident about the future and he can say, “*Whom shall I should fear?*” “*Whom shall I dread?*” He says in 3:

³ *Though a host encamp against me,
My heart will not fear;
Though war arise against me,
In spite of this I shall be confident.*

Even if a host encamps around him and enemy armies prepared to attack, David says that facing that kind of threat, he would *not fear*. He would *be confident*. He had experienced the Lord in such a real and profound way that it made a difference in his life.

As you consider the things that cause you worry or concern, do you find confidence in the Lord? Is your experience of God so real that you can look at those things and say, “I’m not afraid,” “In spite of these things, I shall be confident”?

David had hope in his difficult time, not because all around him looked secure, but because he was confident in the Lord. God was not just an idea or a concept to him; He was a person whom he experienced as light, salvation and as the defense of his life. And so regardless of the size of the problem that David faced, he looked to the Lord and to His greatness and he was confident.

Now, David experienced this kind of help from the Lord as a result of his relationship with God. He had this intense desire to seek God; to be in God’s presence. In verses 4-6, we see his commitment to seek the Lord. It was out of this seeking that his confidence in the Lord was renewed. In verse 4 he says:

⁴ *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.*

David has this single-minded desire to seek God. There is *one thing* that David asked from the LORD and there was *one thing* that he sought and that was to be in God's presence. When David says that he wants to *dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of [his] life*, he is saying that he wants no gap in his experience of God. He longed for this experience because he wanted to *behold the beauty of the LORD*. The New Living Translation translates this as "delighting in the LORD's perfections." In other words as David dwells in God's presence, he is reminded of the character of God. And as he is reminded of God's character, his confidence was renewed.

In verse 5, David clarifies the relationship between seeking the Lord and the occasion that he is facing.

*⁵ 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.*

David knew that there would be *a day of trouble*. But as he sought God he became convinced that God would protect him in that day. When he says that God will conceal him in His tabernacle, that God will hide him and lift him up on a rock, this is poetic language that literally means that God himself will protect him.

And so in verse 6 he expresses his confidence that the Lord is going to deliver him and out of that confidence he rejoices. He says:

*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.*

David's experience of God was so real to him that it made a difference in his life. He knew God was his light, his salvation and his refuge. He knew this because he knew God. He sought God. He contemplated God's character. And this gave him confidence even when he was in the midst of adversity.

David had hope in his difficult times not because his problems were small or because he saw how he would escape them. He had hope because of God. God was his hope in his difficult times.

David's Prayer (7-12)

Now, as we come to verse 7, the psalm transitions from David declaring his confidence in God and his commitment to seek him, to David actually praying to God. This prayer reveals his firm

commitment to seek God. And I believe it was through this kind of interaction with God that he got to a place of confidence in God.

*⁷ Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice,
And be gracious to me and answer me.*

David knows that if God answers his prayer it is an act of grace.

*⁸ When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You,
"Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."*

Again, we see David's resolve to seek God.

*⁹ 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 can feel the intensity of David's seeking. He is holding onto God. He is asking God to come through for him. We see his raw honesty here. He feels like God is hiding His face from him and turning away from him. But he cries out to God asking that God not abandon him or forsake him. He wrestles with God, looking for God to once again be his help in the way that God had been in the past.

To do what David does here means that he doesn't deny the problem. He's honest about the threat. Sometimes I find that hard to do. I want to ignore it and just hope for the best. Or sometimes I spend all my energy trying to figure my way out of whatever the threat is. David didn't do that. He was honest about the threat and he sought God and because of that he found help.

Ultimately, in verse 10, we see him come to a place of resolute trust in God.

*¹⁰ For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
But the LORD will take me up.*

The idea here is that even if the closest people to him reject him or fail to come to his aid, he has confidence that the Lord will not. This phrase, *the LORD will take me up*, is a picture of a father lifting up a little child with the intent of providing for him. That is how he sees the Lord. God is the ultimate perfect parent who will care for his child. God cares for you.

In verses 11 and 12 he makes two specific requests. He prays for guidance and he prays for deliverance from his enemies.

¹¹ Teach me Your way, O LORD,

And lead me in a level path

Because of my foes.

¹² *Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries,
For false witnesses have risen against me,
And such as breathe out violence.*

At that point David's prayer ends. In his wrestling in prayer he comes to a place of renewed confidence in the Lord. And out of this confidence he speaks to others. He gives a reminder to himself and to others.

David's Reminder (13-14)

¹³ *I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD
In the land of the living.*

Without God, he would despair. With God he knew that he would see God's goodness to him. And so ultimately, in verse 14 David encourages all to take up the same pursuit of seeking and trusting the Lord. He says:

¹⁴ *Wait for the LORD;
Be strong and let your heart take courage;
Yes, wait for the LORD.*

I think David is speaking a reminder to his own heart here, but he is also speaking to any follower of God – *Wait for the Lord*. Over and over again the psalms command us to wait for God (Ps. 25:3; 37:34; 40:1; 62:5). We are to continue to look to God in hope that He will provide; that He will deliver; that He will come through for us. David found hope for difficult times. Not in his own abilities. Not in an army. He found hope in his relationship with God.

And so here's the question: How can we experience God like David did; in a way that gives us real hope in difficult times? I want to spend the rest of our time thinking this.

First, I would encourage you to simply **ask – ask that God would help you experience Him in this way**. This was the *one thing* that David asked. He asked God that he would be able to dwell in His presence and to see His beauty. We need to understand that we can only know God and experience Him if He chooses to reveal Himself to us. So, we should ask.

In light of your worries and concerns, you might be asking God for better health; or better relationships; or a better financial situation. You are hoping that God will change your situation so you might experience peace. But here's the thing, in David's situation, his confidence and a sense of peace and security didn't come once the threat was removed, it came in the midst of the threat.

I don't think there is anything wrong with asking God to change your situation, but more than asking Him to change your situation, ask Him to help you experience Him in such a real way that even in the middle of whatever difficulty there is you find your heart at rest, at peace, because you really are experiencing God.

Secondly, I would encourage you to **decide that you are going to seek God**. David said that the one thing he asked was also the one thing he sought – beholding God (v. 4). When God invited him to seek His face, David's answer was, *"Your face, O LORD, I shall seek"* (v. 8). David had decided. And I believe this was David's desire whether he was facing a threat or not. He longed to dwell in the house of the Lord in good times and bad. Whether you are facing a challenge right now or not, decide that you are going to seek God.

Part of deciding that we are going to seek God is to develop a plan. Do you have a plan for how you are seeking God? And here's the deal, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to seeking God. This will look different for each of us. And so as much as I'd like to say, "Here's what you need to do to seek God," I can't, because I don't know for you.

Now, what I do know is that God has given us spiritual practices through which we can seek Him. And at the heart of these are two foundational practices – seeking God through His Word and seeking God through prayer. I would encourage you to make a plan for how you will seek God through these things.

What is a realistic plan for seeking God through the Scriptures? For me, I read four chapters a day, one each from the Old Testament historical books, one from the Wisdom books, one from the Prophets and then one from the New Testament. For me, one thing I need to be careful to do, however, is to not make this a check-list kind of thing. I need to make sure I'm reflecting on what I'm reading. That's what makes space for God. But sometimes I will deviate from this. This last year, there were times, however, where my time in the Word was spent memorizing passages of Scripture and meditating on them. What is a good plan for you at this season of your life?

In terms of prayer, how will you seek God through prayer? Maybe you want to spend 5 minutes in prayer each morning and evening. Or maybe you will determine that what would be most helpful for you is to take 10 minutes every morning to just sit quietly and listen to God. Prayer is not just talking to God it is also listening. What will your practice of prayer be?

Beyond these two foundational practices, there are all sorts of other spiritual disciplines to consider. Things like solitude and silence and fasting or observing a weekly Sabbath. Right now I'm reading a book on observing a Sabbath. I'm wondering if this needs to become part of my plan. It seems like life is continually speeding up and with technology, there are more and more distractions that I need to resist, and so I'm wondering if observing a weekly Sabbath might be what I need to do.

The point is to decide that you are going to seek God and then make a plan. There is a tool on our website that can help you with this. If you go to the “Next Steps” tab there is a thing called a *Spiritual Growth Planning Tool* that will guide you through developing a plan. One of the questions on that tool asks, “What one thing, if done regularly, would make a world of difference in my relationship with God?” Figure out the answer to that and then make that thing a part of what you will intend to pursue this year.

Does your experience of God make any real difference in how you confront the hard things in your life? Like David you CAN experience God in a way that gives real hope in the midst of difficult times. Ask that God would help you experience Him and then decide that you are going to seek Him.

You know the reality is that we live in a day where there is a lot of despair. Despair is all over the news. And it is easy for us to get sucked up in this, right? And yet, because of who we know, we should be some of the most hopeful people in the world – not because we ignore the very real problems in the world, but because we know the Creator. We know the one who reigns and rules over all. We know the end of the story!

May we be a people who have hope in difficult times. And may that hope be a bright light shining in a dark world, pointing people to our great God!

Amen.