

Sanctuary

Psalm 27

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This morning we're looking at Psalm 27. If this sounds like one of the most familiar psalms in the psalter to you, it's no wonder. Several of our best-loved anthems and choruses are based on this psalm. We *sing* from this text all the time.

And yet rarely will you hear a sermon on Psalm 27. Phrases and verses from this passage circulate in my mind all the time, because so many of our worship songs come from here. So this is familiar ground for most of us. Let's take a little more analytical look at it.

This is a psalm of David, written during one of the many times in his life when trouble hounded him into exile. The whole psalm is about faith in times of trouble.

There's no indication in the psalm itself as to when David wrote it. It *could* pertain to almost any period of David's life after Samuel anointed him to be king. Some think the reference to David's father and mother in verse 10 proves that Psalm 27 belongs to an early period in David's life. I'm more inclined to think it comes out of his *later* life, because it is so full of the kind of confidence that grows out of experience and maturity. The Lord had delivered David out

of trouble many times in the past, and this whole psalm has the ring of seasoned reflection from someone who has learned to wait on the Lord.

But the truth is that in a timeline of David's life, psalm 27 would pretty well describe his experience at just about any given point. And the question of when David wrote this psalm is not ultimately important anyway. Just know that this is one of *many* psalms David wrote in times of trouble, while he was wrestling with depression, discouragement, a deep sense of betrayal, and fear.

In fact, if you take a big-picture look at the life of David, it really is remarkable how much and how long he suffered. The only really trouble-free period in David's life was his childhood and teenage years, when he was serving as shepherd over his father's flocks.

Then, according to 1 Samuel 16, David was suddenly called in from the fields one day and Samuel anointed him as king of Israel, in a private ceremony in David's father's house. David therefore became Israel's second king. Saul was still on the throne at the time, but Saul was not *God's* choice for king in the first place. Saul was the *people's* choice—and they selected him because of his physical stature. Saul (of course) proved to be a carnal man and an unsatisfactory king. So after a few significant spiritual failures, the Lord rejected Saul and sent Samuel to anoint David as his successor.

David's life was never peaceful again after that. It was one long chronicle of conflict, war, frustration, and struggle. Saul was still on the throne during David's rise to prominence, and of course he became jealous. So David spent years hiding from Saul, who became obsessed with killing David. Then when Saul finally died, the Hebrew nation was torn by civil war because there was a large faction in Israel who opposed David. David finally managed to unify all Israel, but then he spent *years* at war with the Philistines, the Amorites, the Moabites, and practically every neighboring tribe and nation. After that, David's own son, Absalom, attempted to usurp David's throne and drove David out of Jerusalem and into exile again. Absalom also eventually came against David with an army of more than twenty-thousand men. So trouble more or less dominated David's public life from start to finish.

It's no wonder that the psalter is full of psalms about David's trouble. And they are *great* psalms—we tend to love these psalms—because they express David's frustration in very human terms—but they also point the way through trouble to triumph.

There's a pattern David normally followed when he poured out his frustration in the psalms. Usually, he would *begin* with a very honest outpouring of his complaint to God—in words that are full of feeling. That's why we find it

so easy to relate to David. That's why the psalms resonate so powerfully in times of trouble and fear. David expresses emotions we all know all too well. He gets frustrated with so many trials. He grows weary of the strife. He wonders where God is in the absurdity of human injustice. He becomes exasperated when it seems the Lord is too slow in coming to the defense of His people. And as David describes whatever injustice or sorrow or other kind of affliction he was suffering, he expresses his emotions without apology in raw and honest language. He is never irreverent, but he is always bold and direct.

Psalm 13 is a classic example of that style. It starts with an expression of frustration: "**How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?**" And the first two-thirds of that short psalm are a drawn-out expression of David's dismay because it seemed the Lord was postponing His deliverance (Psalm 13:2): "**How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?**" Verse 4: "**my enemy [will] say, 'I have prevailed over him,' . . . my foes [will] rejoice because I am shaken.**" *That's not what You want, is it Lord?* (I know those feelings, don't you? I have been in that place.)

But in most of these psalms where David wrote about his troubles, there is a turning point where David shifts his

focus. As he pours out his heart to the Lord, He naturally begins to focus his *thoughts* on the Lord—and there he finds hope in the midst of every trial, because he knows the Lord is faithful. And Psalm after psalm that begins on a note of fear or crushing sorrow closes with a profound expression of hope and faith. Psalm 13, for example, starts with that cry of anguish and frustration: "**How long, O LORD?**"—but it ends just six verses later with this: "**I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.**"

Psalm 17 follows a similar pattern. It opens with a heartfelt plea from the psalmist, who is a victim of obvious injustice: "**Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry!**" Then he pleads his case for 14 verses. He rehearses a testimony about his own faithfulness; he recalls the Lord's faithfulness and tenderness; and he recounts the many evil attributes of his enemies. That makes him look at his troubles from the perspective of eternity, and he realizes that even though it sometimes feels like he is on the precipice of hell, the trials of this life are as close to hell as he will ever come—but this is also as close to *heaven* as his wicked adversaries will ever get. For David—and for all the Lord's redeemed ones—the troubles of this life are merely temporary. Because David trusted the Lord for salvation, he had the guarantee of ultimate and eternal satisfaction in the presence of the Lord. So he closes Psalm 17 with this classic expression of

assurance: **"As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness."**

Psalm 27 is similar to those psalms in one regard: It was written while David was under siege, living in exile, troubled on all sides, and tempted (like any of us would be) to become discouraged, downcast, and fearful.

And yet this psalm is dramatically different from most of the other psalms David wrote in times of trouble. It starts where those other psalms ended. It *begins* on a powerful note of triumph, and builds from there. In fact, the very first verse gathers up all of David's troubles, looks them square in the eye, and defies them all with a song of praise to God. It is a celebration of light in a world of darkness. It is a song of deliverance penned on a sea of difficulties. It is David's recognition that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. And it sets forth an unassailable reason for courage in the midst of discouragement.

That's why I'm inclined to think this psalm pertains to David's *later* life. He has learned that the best answer to all this life's darkest, most discouraging trials is simple praise rendered to God, and that has become the starting point for him whenever his heart is troubled.

In fact, that is the central message of this psalm. If you wanted to sum it up in a single sentence, you could hardly do

any better than this: The best remedy for *all* this life's trials and discouragements is *worship*.

That's it. David—who suffered more than most of us could ever imagine—learned through his suffering that worship is the best way through every trial. Worship is a uniquely heavenly activity. All of heaven is consumed full time with giving praise to God. Therefore nothing on this sin-cursed earth could possibly get us closer to the atmosphere of heaven than when we ourselves are engaged in worship. So if you want to be elevated above the pain and frustration of a cursed world and a life that's filled with difficulty, there is no better, no more direct, and no more efficient way to get from here to heaven than by focusing your heart on praise.

David had learned by long experience that worship offered the best sanctuary from earthly trouble—no matter what form his troubles took. Because worship transported him out of the world's darkness and misery—and into the presence of the Lord, who is our light and our salvation.

So this is a psalm about sanctuary. David was singing about because He knew a place of heavenly peace and safety he could retreat to in any kind of earthly trouble. That place of sanctuary is the main theme of this psalm.

There are three parts to the psalm. Verses 1-6 are a *testimony to the whole world* about David's unshakable confidence in the Lord. Verses 7-12 are *a prayer to God*,

seeking immediate deliverance from whatever evil his enemies wanted to do to him. And verses 13-14 are *a sermon David preaches to himself*, reminding himself of the main lesson he has learned through a lifetime of suffering. So you have a testimony, a prayer, and a sermon, in that order. And we'll let that outline be the framework for our understanding of this psalm.

Now with that as an introduction, I'm going to read the psalm. Watch for that central theme, and we'll look at how it runs through each of the three parts of this psalm and ties them together. Here's the psalm:

**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?**

2 When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

4 One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: 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 inquire in his temple.

5 For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.

6 And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!

8 You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek."

9 Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!

10 For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in.

11 Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

12 Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.

13 I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!

14 Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

One of the commentaries I read said this psalm is a psalm about "balanc[ing] the ups and downs of real life." That seems an awfully trivial way of putting it, and I hope you can see that. The "ups and downs" of David's life were hardly

trifling things. When he speaks in verse 3 about "**an army encamp[ing] against [him]**," that was exactly the kind of trial he faced in the most literal sense. His enemies were more numerous and more powerful than most of the problems you and I will ever face. His life was quite literally in mortal jeopardy virtually all the time; the times he had to spend in exile were truly costly in almost every conceivable sense. These were real, imminent dangers that he faced—and yet he found the Lord a sufficient shelter in the very worst of times—"**our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble,**" to borrow words from Psalm 46:1. Or verse 11 of that psalm: "**The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.**"

That's the same message featured in our psalm. Here in Psalm 27, David gives us a threefold reminder that the Lord Himself is the best place for the believer to find true sanctuary—no matter how fiercely the storms of life may blow. The first part is—

1. A TESTIMONY (TO THE WORLD)—VV. 1-6

The psalm opens with a trumpet-blast of faith and assurance: **"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?"** If that verse were all we had—if we stopped without reading the rest of the psalm—we might ever know that this is the expression of a troubled heart. It is a declaration of fearlessness.

David was a naturally courageous personality-type. even in his adolescent years, he was generally fearless. You see that clearly in 1 Samuel 17, where David first encounters Goliath. Everyone else was cowering in terror at the sight of a giant. David comes along—still basically an adolescent—and he is amazed that no one else had struck Goliath dead yet. His reaction was (1 Samuel 17:26), **"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"** And then David recounted how while working as a shepherd he had killed both lions and bears, and he told Saul, **"this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God."**

Here in our psalm, David gives a testimony that explains such courage. It is not the carnal courage of an impetuous person who trusts in his own strength. It is a different kind of courage; it arises from faith in God. David doesn't trust his

own skill. He trusts the Lord, who is his light and salvation and stronghold.

And notice he doesn't say that the Lord *brings* salvation, or that he *gives* light. David's point is that the Lord *is* those things, so that the one who lays hold of God by faith has everything necessary to answer the darkness and trouble of this life, because God *is* our light, salvation, strength, and protection. That is exactly what the apostle Paul said about Christ in 1 Corinthians 1:30—that Christ *is* "**wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.**" He *is* our salvation, and sanctification, and wisdom. He *is* our righteousness. That is even one of the names of God. Jeremiah 23:6: "**This is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'**" He *is* the only real righteousness we possess. His righteousness, imputed to those who trust Him, provides everything we need for a right standing before God.

David, of course, looked forward to a redemption he could not possibly understand completely. He didn't know God would come to earth in human form, in the person of Jesus Christ, David's promised Son. He had no way of knowing Christ Himself would *be* the perfect sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. But he got the gist of it.

That's exactly what David means when he says, "**The LORD is my light and my salvation.**" That is the gospel,

summarized superbly in the opening phrase of David's testimony. It's not about David, it's about his God. David says nothing about his own strength or skill or sanctification. His confidence in no sense rested in his own abilities. David was celebrating the greatness of God, not boasting about his own valor. This is a psalm of praise to God, not a celebration of *David's* superiority.

And yet notice that it is *personal*: "**The LORD is my light and my salvation.**" David's faith in God was personal, and therefore his assurance was personal. David could be confident that the Lord was on his side, because he had laid hold of the Lord by faith, entrusted himself to the Lord's care. Verse 1: "**The LORD is the stronghold of my life.**" The Lord Himself was David's only sanctuary.

And the Lord had fought for David repeatedly. Although David's life had been a long chronicle of conflict, it was also the story of triumph over every foe. David's *only* failures were his own personal moral lapses—such as his sin with Bath-Sheba. But his conflicts with earthly enemies *always* ended with victory for David. Verses 2-3 testify to that fact: "**When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.**" The fierceness of David's adversaries is captured perfectly in verse 2, which pictures

them as cannibals or wild beasts—hungry for violence out of sheer, evil bloodlust. But no matter how evil or how determined they were, God always preserved David, and it was his enemies who stumbled and fell—starting with Goliath, all the way through to Absalom, who was defeated because his long hair got caught in an oak tree.

It also never mattered how large and powerful David's adversaries were. David managed to elude Saul and all his armies with just a few hundred men who lived in caves like outlaws—until Saul actually fell on his own sword in a disastrous battle against the Philistines. On the day Absalom's rebellion was overthrown, 2 Samuel 18:7 says twenty thousand men in Absalom's army were killed on that one day.

So neither the size nor the ferocity of David's enemies were any reason for him to fear. The Lord had delivered him again and again from every earthly enemy. That was literally the story of David's life.

Notice, too, that he speaks of the Lord's deliverance as a present-tense reality. "**The LORD is my light and my salvation . . . The LORD is the stronghold of my life . . .**" And as he rehearses the way the Lord always delivers him, he keeps his testimony in the present tense (verse 2): "**When evildoers assail me . . . it is they who stumble and fall**"—as if to say, "*That's how it always happens. It's happening even now to*

the current cast of enemies." Verse 3: "**Though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.**" Again, his hope is in the Lord, not in his own strength. This is the furthest thing from carnal confidence.

But here's another remarkable thing about this psalm. In the whole psalm, there is not a single imprecatory plea against his enemies. When we get to the prayer section in verses 7-12, you'll see that David's prayer is full of petitions for himself. He acknowledges his need for the Lord's grace and mercy. He praises the Lord for His faithfulness. He pleads for the Lord to teach him, and lead him, and keep him safe. But there's not a word about the destruction of his enemies.

That's because in this psalm, David treats that as a given. It's not that David was showing some kind of post-modern charity towards the evildoers, pretending that he could win them over by being nice to them. God *would* cause David's enemies to stumble and be destroyed, just as He always had. David had already expressed his absolute confidence in that certainty.

Elsewhere, David *did* pray imprecatory prayers, calling for the downfall of his adversaries. And there was nothing wrong with that, because they were truly evil men with evil agendas. But that wasn't the point of this psalm. This is a psalm about a higher principle.

David himself spells out that principle for us in verse 4: **"One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: 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 inquire in his temple."** That is this psalm's key verse, and it's a perfect summary of the whole message.

In the midst of so much trouble, David desired only one kind of sanctuary: He wanted to be in the Lord's house with the Lord's people, beholding the beauty of the Lord in worship in that corporate setting. It was the best preview of heaven available to David and therefore it was the one thing that could lift him above the troubles of this life and into the heavenly realm.

Now that says a lot about the importance of worship, and I want you to notice, first of all, that this is not a truth that David isolates to this one psalm. The psalms are *full* of similar expressions. One of the first verses of Scripture I ever memorized as a child was Psalm 122:1: **"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'"** It's the whole theme of Psalm 84. Verse 1: **"My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God."** Verse 4: **"Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!"** And verse 10: **"For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a**

doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness."

David loved to be in the Temple, praising God. It was the purest joy he knew on earth. In the midst of so many wars and so much conflict, this was the one form of sanctuary David craved most of all.

Verse 5: **"For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock."** The word *pavilion* evokes the imagery of a military encampment. *Pavilion* is derived from the French word for "butterfly," because the king's pavilion was naturally the most colorful, ornate tent in the camp, and it had a peaked top that gave the impression of butterfly wings. The king's pavilion would always be at the center of the camp, because if any enemy wanted to infiltrate, he would first have to get past rank after rank of armed men. So the king's pavilion was the safest place in camp.

It was a high privilege to be allowed *entry* there. To dwell there permanently was in effect to share the king's own privileges. So this is a bold request that David makes. But he craves that place of sanctuary—a place of relief from the troubles heaped on him by his enemies. He has always found the best sanctuary from those trials in the place of worship. Therefore this is the **"one thing"** he has desired from the Lord. **"One thing"** (v. 4).

When I was thinking about that expression, it reminded me of that moment in Luke 10 where Jesus is in Bethany at the home of Mary and Martha. And Martha was fussing around with all the details of being a good hostess. She was collecting dishes, and serving refills, and tidying up the kitchen, and whatever it is that hostesses do for their guests—while Mary just sat at Jesus' feet and worshiped Him. Martha gets frustrated with Mary and actually makes a kind of backhanded rebuke at Jesus for not encouraging Mary to get busy serving. Luke 10:40: **"Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.'" The next two verses say, "And Jesus answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about *many* things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."** One thing is necessary: worship. David understood that. It's the "one thing" he seeks in Psalm 27.

Notice the setting of this psalm in the canon. It comes right between two other Psalms that also celebrate the joy of seeking the Lord in His holy tabernacle: Psalm 26:6 says: **"I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked"**; but verse 8 says: **"O LORD, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells."** Verse 12: **"In the great assembly I will bless the LORD."**

Then in Psalm 28:2-3, we read: **"I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary. Do not drag me off with the wicked, with the workers of evil."**

That was David's perspective. He hated nothing more than the assembly of evildoers. That's the starting point of Psalm 1, isn't it? **"Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful."** And conversely, he loved nothing more than worshiping the Lord in the beauty of holiness with people who shared his love for the Lord.

The worldly church of our generation has it exactly backward. In fact, it's hard sometimes nowadays to differentiate between the church and the assembly of evildoers. And it's rare to find Christians who truly love the worship of the Lord as much as they love worldly recreation. In fact, some churches have actually cultivated an appetite for entertainment and fostered an atmosphere of amusement rather than authentic worship.

So it's no wonder if this psalm sounds a little bit odd to postmodern ears. Our minds are full of worldly distractions. Our eyes are assaulted almost nonstop every day with advertizing and entertainment that is designed to appeal to the basest kinds of carnal lust. We frankly have a hard time understanding what David meant when he talked about beholding the beauty of the Lord. The Tabernacle of David's

time was a temporary, makeshift arrangement on mount Moriah. In 2 Chronicles 1:3, we are told that the Tabernacle Moses built, which the Israelites carried through the wilderness, was being kept at Gibeon. Presumably, most of the tabernacle's furnishings were kept at Gibeon, too, until Solomon brought everything to the temple. During David's reign, the tent that was situated on the future temple grounds in Jerusalem was just a temporary place David had prepared as a shelter for the ark of the covenant. There was nothing elaborate about it. In fact, David himself did not think the temporary tabernacle was even adequate, and he pleaded with God to let him build a permanent, more elaborate, temple.

So understand what David is saying in our psalm. It was not the structure, or the location *per se*, that gave him a place of sanctuary. And the beauty of the Lord He wanted to behold had nothing to do with the temple itself or its furnishings. It was not about the rituals involved in the sacrifice, because those rituals were deliberately bloody, and anything *but* beautiful.

But when David speaks of "**the beauty of the Lord**" in verse 4, he is talking about the glories of divine *truth*—the truth as revealed in God's Word, which is the truth on which Israel's worship was based.

That is reflected in these very psalms. This was the music of Israel's worship: revealed truth. Scripture. God's Word in written form, celebrating His attributes, rehearsing His faithfulness, exalting His glory, just the way this psalm does.

And Israel's worship was so much focused on the truth revealed in verbal form that the important thing about the psalms themselves was not the musical accompaniment they were sung to, but the truth they conveyed. We know that the psalms *were* sung, and Psalm 150 outlines a whole orchestra of musical and percussion instruments that accompanied them. But the *tunes* were not preserved for us. The *words* were.

For all the debates and arguments about musical styles in church worship today, we should not lose sight of the fact that the real beauty of Israel's corporate worship was embodied in the truth the psalms conveyed, not in the musical style or the tunes. In Hebrew poetry, it's the *ideas* that rhyme, not the sound of the words. That's why Hebrew poetry is full of parallelisms. The "beauty" was unveiled in the truth the words expressed. That's why Scripture was at the heart of all true corporate worship in Israel. You see that clearly in Nehemiah 8, where the people of Jerusalem stood for hours as the priests read the word of God.

That, I believe, is the "beauty" David wrote about in this psalm. When he speaks in verse 4 about "**inquir[ing]**" at the

Temple, that is the implication. He wanted to learn more about God and immerse himself in the truth of God's Word, which is where the beauty and glory of the Lord are most clearly unveiled for us.

You'll see David's passion for the truth expressed again in the prayer section of the psalm—especially verse 11, where he prays, **"Teach me Your way, O LORD."**

But before we leave this *first* point, let me point out a couple more features of David's testimony to a hostile world. Don't miss the tone of unshakable confidence that runs throughout these first six verses. The first verse twice raises the question of whom David has to fear with the Lord as his fortress. It's the very same note of confidence the Apostle Paul sounds in Romans 8:31: **"If God is for us, who can be against us?"** Verses 2-3; he rehearses the fact that his enemies *always* meet their downfall. Verse 4, he testifies that he desires this one thing from the Lord: a permanent place of habitation and sanctuary and worship in the Lord's own house. And then in verses 5-6, he expresses confidence that the Lord will grant that one request. **"In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD."**

Here's a geographical fact: the place where David brought the ark of the covenant to rest was the highest point in the ancient city of Jerusalem. Even today, there is a rock that protrudes from the top of the Temple mount. I've seen it. Today it's inside the mosque known as the Dome of the Rock, which derives its name from that high outcropping of rock. David pictures himself situated on a high rock like that, safely inside the Lord's own pavilion, lifted up far above his enemies. It's an image of the victor's position—and to David, this would be the very pinnacle of earthly victory: to **"offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle [and] sing praises to the LORD."**

That requires most of us to adjust our thinking a bit, doesn't it? Think about this: The one thing David desired more than anything else in life is something you and I can do freely, any time we like. We can enjoy the fellowship of God's people in unbridled worship together right here. We get to behold the beauty of the Lord and hear His truth taught clearly and in-depth all the time—and if the weekly corporate gatherings of the church are not enough, we can listen to recorded sermons again and again. We're not being pursued by armies or hounded by evildoers who want to kill us.

And yet sometimes we act as if there is more pleasure to be found in worldly diversions than in heavenly worship. Sometimes we act as if the assembly of evildoers has more to

offer than the congregation of the Lord. If that's the true measure of where our hearts are, then a lot of us need to repent. *David's prayer needs to be our prayer.*

So look at the second section of this psalm. It's—

2. A PRAYER (TO GOD) vv. 7-12

We can't spend a lot of time in this section. I've already pointed out a few things about it. But the thing to notice, first of all, is that there is a distinct change in tone starting with verse 7. Up to that point, David is confident; resolute; fearless. But starting in verse 7, he is pleading with God for help.

The shift is so dramatic that some commentators have suggested that perhaps these are really two different psalms, written by different authors. Of course, that's rubbish. There's no incompatibility between the faith David expresses in the first six verses and the plea for divine grace he makes in the next six verses. In fact, David's prayer for grace and mercy simply underscores what we already said about the tone of the opening verse: this is not a carnal self-confidence. It is an expression of trust from someone who knows his only hope is in the Lord and who has cast himself on God alone for redemption from the guilt of sin and deliverance from the evil consequences of sin.

This prayer is, first of all, the cry of a penitent heart. David begins the prayer section with an explicit plea for grace and mercy. "**Be gracious to me**" (verse 7); and (verse 9) "**Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger.**" Implicit in those expressions is David's own recognition that he has sinned. He is not worthy of the Lord's goodness to him, but he recognizes his profound need for divine grace, and he has both the faith and the courage to plead for it.

That highlights the difference between worldly anxiety and godly fear. David detested one kind of fear and cultivated the other. When it came to his enemies, he was heroic, refusing to waste energy worrying about what they might do to him. When it came to the Lord, David knew that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. So after declaring that he is unafraid, even when surrounded by whole armies of human adversaries, He pleads with God for mercy and grace.

I pointed out that David's prayer is devoid of any pleas for the destruction of his enemies. What he *does* pray for is a clearer vision of God. This is a perfect parallel and really just a further elaboration on the "**one thing**" he said he desires: "**to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD.**" He wants that unobstructed vision of God's glory. Verse 9: "**Hide not your face from me.**"

That's poetic language, of course. He does not literally expect to look into the face of God. In Exodus 33:20, God said to Moses, "**You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.**" But remember that David is acknowledging his sinfulness and his need of divine grace. "**Hide not your face from me**" is simply another plea for mercy. It's a parallel of the next expression: "**Turn not your servant away in anger.**" In other words, "*Don't turn away from me, and don't turn me away from You.*"

Also, when you read it in light of verse 8, it underscores the fact that what David really sought was truth—specifically, truth about God. A clearer understanding of God's self-revelation. Verse 8: "**You have said, 'Seek my face.' My heart says to you, 'Your face, LORD, do I seek.'**" David declares his obedience to the Word of God by echoing what God said and owning the Lord's command as the desire of his own heart. The command in this case was to seek the Lord's face—to pursue a knowledge of God as He has revealed Himself. And in David's own words, he had already declared that this was his heart's deepest desire: "**to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD.**"

Therefore he says (verse 11), "**Teach me your way, O LORD.**" That is a prayer the Lord will always answer, because it is in perfect accord with his will for us.

Before we move on, notice verse 10: "**For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in.**" We're not to imagine that David's mother and father literally turned against him. Nothing in Scripture ever suggests that David's relationship with his parents was strained. In fact, when he was still a fairly young man, hiding in a cave from Saul, 1 Samuel 22:1 says David's parents came to be with him. He was so concerned for their welfare that 1 Samuel 22:3 says he traveled to Moab and made a treaty with the Moabite king to provide his parents a place of refuge.

Verse 10 probably suggests that by the time David wrote this psalm his parents were dead, so they could no longer stand with him against his enemies. But David recognized that the Lord would be with him forever.

The prayer section closes with this (verse 11): "**lead me on a level path because of my enemies.**" In other words, smooth out the bumps in the road of my life that my enemies place there, so that I can more easily devote myself to the duty of seeking your face. Verse 12: "**Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.**" Hide me; hold me; keep me safe; grant me sanctuary in your pavilion. Remember—that is the theme that ties the whole psalm together.

It's still the one thing that David has asked of the Lord. That is the whole essence of his prayer here. It is a prayer for

sanctuary in the Lord's own presence—a prayer that is every bit as bold as the testimony David began the psalm with.

So we have heard David's testimony and listened in on his prayer. The last, brief section of the psalm is—

3. A SERMON (TO HIMSELF) vv. 13-14

Two short verses constitute the sermon at the end of this psalm. Verse 13 is another affirmation of David's conviction that the Lord is on his side. It is an emphatic statement of his trust in the Lord: **"I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!"** The grammatical construction in the Hebrew reads like a conditional statement: **"Unless I believed . . ."** Most modern translations supply words to fill in what the Hebrew merely implies. So if you are reading the New American Standard Bible, it says this: **"I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living."**

That, in David's mind, is the singular answer to utter despair in a sin-cursed world: to **"look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."** It is what he has been saying from the beginning: if you want an answer to this life's troubles, you'll never find a satisfactory answer apart from a clear vision of the beauty of the Lord. So if you struggle under a heavy load of trials, as David did, set your heart on worship, and wait on the Lord.

This is not only a powerful expression of David's faith; it is also a practical reminder to himself that **"th[ose] who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength."**

David's prayer in verse 11 was, **"Teach me your way, O LORD."** Lesson number one, Isaiah 55:8: **"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD."** God's *timing* is rarely in sync with our expectations, either. So it is crucial to wait upon Him. Run ahead, and you are stuck with what you can do in your own strength. Wait on Him, and both your faith and your energy will be strengthened. That is why worship offers such a perfect place of sanctuary in the midst of this world's troubles.

That's the very message of Isaiah 40:27-31:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.

30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;

31 but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.