

**Psalm 27 – How do we handle fear?**

Franklin D Roosevelt believed that the greatest problem in life was not the absence of finances but the presence of fear. In his inaugural address, he spoke one sentence that has been often quoted, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself”.

But what is the reaction to fear? There’s a great sketch with Basil Fawlty in Fawlty Towers where he is trying to organise a fire drill in the hotel but everyone seems to be totally relaxed about it. Then an actual fire breaks out in the kitchen, and Basil goes into a complete meltdown, totally disorganised, with no real sense of order.

But fear is a real problem. Doctors tell us that fear performs a good physical function because it triggers certain glands in the body that, in turn, release substances that enable us to do amazing things. But when fear grips the heart, the body is paralysed.

**QUESTION – What are the things that you are afraid of? There will be frivolous ones but there will be serious ones also. How do you personally react to fear?**

**Context** – we are not full sure of the context of this psalm, but it seems that David is under some sort of attack, maybe a military one as he talks about enemies or foes. He is also being falsely accused. Whatever the context, it is probably significant that we don’t know the detail, as it helps us see that this psalm is for all of us whatever fear we might be facing. David shows us how to overcome fear, whatever it is.

**Central theme** – the central theme that comes out from this psalm and actually the whole group from psalm 23 – 30 is dwelling in the house of the Lord, or seeking after him. That is how to deal with fear. It might seem rather simplistic, but it is far from easy to achieve. David is talking about a total way of life that is focused on God and which desperately clings on to him where no other route is helping.

**Pause – Think about something of worry that you are maybe facing at the moment, or have recently come through where there just is no route through it.**

**READ - Read Psalm 27 through twice**

So the structure of the psalm is :

Verses 1-3 – David asserts his confidence in God alone

Verses 4-6 – David’s desire to be completely fixed on and focused on God

Verses 7-12 – David’s fear brings him to a place of prayer

Verses 13-14 – David reaffirms his faith in God and provides some instructions.

1. Confidence in God alone (1-3)

**QUESTION – Who is David talking to in these verses?**

Himself. It is important in those fearful times of our lives to keep speaking into our hearts about the trust we can have in God. David spoke these into his own heart. We too can do

this by having a series of scripture verses written down in a book that we can say when we feel that fear is consuming us.

**QUESTION - What previous experience did David have which gave him a confidence in God?**  
He stood up against Goliath, he defended his father's flock by killing a bear and a lion.

David could have boasted about his own strength or the army that he had with him, but instead he affirms that his defence is in the Lord alone (verse 1 – The Lord is my light and salvation. The Lord is my stronghold)

We all have a tendency to trust in ourselves to fix issues. How often when faced with fear do we immediately have that confidence in God, or do we run to other aids. David understands Yahweh's protective role. He is his light, his salvation and his stronghold.

Light is a significant symbol of God. It tells us that God is source of all life. 1 John 1:7 *'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.'* Or Micah 7:8 *'Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light'.*

The Hebrew word 'Salvation' is the name 'Joshua' – 'Yahweh is salvation', and this therefore points us to Jesus.

Stronghold refers to a fortress which the enemy cannot penetrate. We do not run into the fortress to hide but instead to get the power needed to go back and face the enemy, confident in God alone.

## 2. Fixed on and focused on God (verse 4-6)

**QUESTION - Picture yourself in the middle of fear. If you were to realistically write verse 4 how would you write it?**

**One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek.....**

I suspect we might say, "Get me out of here Lord" or "I don't want to play this game any more".

David realises that the only thing necessary is to draw close to the presence of God (the tabernacle or temple – the place where God's presence was known) and being caught up in God's beauty. So often we are like Martha who didn't take time to fellowship with Christ. The only reason that David knew that God was his light, his salvation and his fortress was that he learned it while gazing on God's glory in his time of worship and meditation. David wants his fear to drive him to a deeper experience of God himself.

The imagery here of dwelling in the house, seeking God in the temple, hiding in the shelter of the tent must be put in context. In David's day the temple was not yet built. The ark of God was kept in a tent. The word temple means a sanctuary. But tent conveys a place of shelter and protection from what is outside.

Have you ever been somewhere where you have seen the amazing beauty of nature around you? Has it then brought you to a more deeper sense of the nature and beauty of God through his creation?

There's a well known Theologian and preacher who lived in New England, in the 1700's called Jonathan Edwards. He wrote about that sense of gazing and beholding the beauty of the Lord after reading the words of 1 Timothy 1:17, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen". He wrote this, "*From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. An inward, sweet sense of these things, at times, came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them.*". (Cited in Jonathan Edwards, by Iain H. Murray [Banner of Truth], pp. 35, 36.)

He went on to say, "*My mind was greatly fixed on divine things; almost perpetually in the contemplation of them. I spent most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year; often walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy, and prayer, and converse with God; and it was always my manner, at such times to sing forth my contemplations. Prayer seemed to be natural to me, as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent. The delights which I now felt in those things of religion, were of an exceeding different kind from those before mentioned, that I had when a boy; and what I then had no more notion of than one born blind has of pleasant and beautiful colours. They were of a more inward, pure, soul-animating and refreshing nature*".

Just before Edwards says these things, he actually mentions about specific fears around Thunderstorms. Afterwards he rejoices in them, because he could see the majestic voice of God in them. Beholding the beauty of God alleviated Edwards' fears.

If I am totally honest, this is not a natural response that I would have in time of fear. But the point still stands that we will overcome our fears when we focus more on God himself and are captivated by his beauty.

These verses also bring out the importance of song. David not only sought the Lord and gazed up his glory, but he also praised him in song. How easy it is to plead with God in the midst of difficult times and then forget to praise him as we realise the victory we have in him.

David now has his fear return, and therefore he redirects his focus to prayer.

### 3. Seek the Lord in heartfelt prayer (verses 7-12)

**QUESTION - If we have considered gazing on God in these last verses, what does David now say in each verse (verse 7 – 11) about coming before God and his relationship with him, and therefore our relationship with him?**

V7 – we can have a conversation with him

V8 – we can see his face

V9 – God is our helper and saviour

V10 – God never lets us down

V11 – God teaches and guides us

So in our place of fear remember to speak with him. Wiersbe in his book 'Meet yourself in the psalms' says that we cannot stay on the mountaintop beholding God's glory, if we are not going to descend into the valley and share his glory with others. And so David knows that the glory and majesty of God will now be with him as he seeks him in the issues of fear.

So here are some points for prayer :

- a) Are we aware of our need to come before God in all things (v7)?

Do we realise our need of him? How often do we realise that if God is not with us in a situation, we are doomed. Do we only come to him when we have big issues, or do we realise our need of him for the next breath we take? Read Colossians 1:16 & 17, *"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together"*.

- b) Prayer is based on God's mercy (v7 be merciful to me)

David doesn't ask God to answer his prayer because he's been a good person. Psalm 130:3 says, 'If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?' So when we come to God with our worries we come humbly knowing that he is fully of grace and mercy as shown to us through Jesus Christ.

- c) We should come knowing that God hears us and we expect him to answer (v7b – Hear my voice, answer me)

Do we expect God to answer us? It may not be how we expect him to answer, but David came expectant. The answer may not and will not always come immediately. On a practical step, why not have a book where you write down the requests that you made to God and the context of why you asked him. And then record when you see an answer to that prayer.

- d) Prayer should be seeking after God, not just for an answer (v8 your face Lord I seek)

It's not just about bringing our shopping list before God. David didn't just want an answer, he wanted God.

- e) When everything else lets us down, we can always come to God in prayer (v10 Though my father and mother forsake me, The Lord will receive me)

Nothing will ever cut us off from prayer. Even when all hope seems to have faded.

We can still talk and have the comfort of knowing God is there.

- f) Prayer is about shaping us so we become more aligned to God's path (v11 teach me you way O Lord, lead me on a level path)

Do we have a teachable heart and are we willing to do what God shows to us through our prayers? We can't honestly pray to God for deliverance from a fearful situation if we are not willing to learn and walk in his ways. Psalm 23:3 *'He leads me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake'*.

**QUESTION – So in light of these points, (awareness of our need, God's mercy, God hearing us, us seeking God and not just the answer, accessibility to prayer, and having a teaching heart) how will this affect how you pray in the future when you are fearful?**

4. David finishes by reaffirming his faith with some instruction (verses 13-14)

Verse 13 - I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Calvin reads this as "Had I not relied on the promise of God, and been assuredly persuaded that he would safely preserve me, and had I not continued firm in this persuasion, I had utterly perished: There was no other remedy". It is faith in the Lord as we face fear that sees us through. Wiersbe here says that the world remarks that seeing is believing. But for a Christian, believing is seeing. When we go through the battles of life, and the fear that can come, we are able to promote "the goodness of the Lord".

The final verse, wait for the Lord, is much easier to read than it is to practice. Here the Hebrew verbs for wait suggest that David is speaking to himself again – *'be strong in the Lord, and let your heart take courage'*. In a time when God seems silent and the crisis is severe, it is important to talk to ourselves and reaffirm the goodness of God (which we can be tempted to doubt) and our own need to keep waiting on him. It's not that we sit around. It's an active mental attitude that we need to adopt that says "I believe that God is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6) It takes a lot of courage to wait. Wiersbe says, 'The ability to calm your soul and wait before God is one of the most difficult things in the Christian life. Our old nature is restless.

God can help us to conquer fear if we will learn to be confident in him only, to gaze on him in worship and adoration, to come to him in prayer, and then to wait. Wiersbe really speaks to my heart in his concluding lines of his chapter – 'All religious activity is not necessarily ministry. Instead of building us up, it might be tearing us down'.

### **Conclusion**

We don't have a magical formula that we can apply to every issue of fear. We must seek the Lord. But it's a daily practice.

**Pause – How are you ensuring that you are coming before God daily, seeking after him, gazing on his face, in order to overcome your fears?**