

ONE THING...
PSALM 27

I have read that in Deadwood, SD there is a sign in a museum that had been left by a beleaguered prospector in the area: "I lost my gun. I lost my horse. I am out of food. The Indians are after me. But I've got all the gold I can carry." Hmmm. It seems he forgot something essential. But he's not the only one to forget. One management theorist warned that too often we are efficient about the wrong things:

"The curious thing is the righter you do the wrong thing the wronger you become. If you're doing the wrong thing and you make a mistake and correct it you become wronger. So it's better to do the right thing wrong than the wrong thing right. Almost every major social problem that confronts us today is a consequence of trying to do the wrong things righter." [Russell Ackoff, quoted in *Redeeming Productivity*, 114.]

When we have troubles and distress, it is easy to forget the things that are a priority — the things that are essential and cannot be forgotten. What is essential so we can live steadfastly in this troubled world?

Psalm 27 provides an answer. This Psalm was apparently penned by David, and while we are not sure of the circumstances of the writing, the Greek translation of the Old Testament includes the words "before he was anointed" in the superscript. And while those words aren't part of the original text of the psalm, they suggest that perhaps this was written at a time when he was not yet installed as king of Israel and Saul was chasing and persecuting him (that scenario fits with vv. 2-3a). Regardless of the exact circumstances, David clearly is suffering difficulty. And at the same, he is confident in God. In fact, this psalm is difficult to categorize — it has elements of both individual lament (his grief over suffering), and individual trust. Both are strongly present in this song. The lesson we learn from David is:

IN YOUR TROUBLE, SEEK FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AS YOUR SAFETY.

Trouble does not preclude God's power; God never fails or forsakes His people. So here **are four responses** to trouble in our lives (and four reasons to trust God):

1. **A Confidence for Troubled Hearts: God is **STRONG** (vv. 1-3)**
2. **A Quest for Troubled Hearts: **SEEK** God (vv. 4-6)**
3. **A Prayer for Troubled Hearts: "**TEACH** Me, God" (vv. 7-12)**
4. **A Commitment for Troubled Hearts: **WAIT** for God (vv. 13-14)**

The first response to trouble in our lives:

1. A Confidence for Troubled Hearts: God is STRONG (vv. 1-3)

- This psalm is about real problems. The problem with our problems is that we are tempted to believe that because we God we will not have problems. Nope. Notice that in verse 2 David says, **When evildoers came...**; he anticipates that trouble is a reality of life.
- This psalm is also about **fear** (vv. 1a, b, 3a) and **confidence** (or lack of it, v. 3b):
- When we have trouble and are tempted to despair and fear, how can we be steadfast — strong and enduring (1 Cor. 15:58)? David fights against his fears by remembering the character of God. Our confidence is *not* in ourselves. When you are in difficulties, remember what David said about God:
 - ✓ **The Lord is my light** = What is the function of light? To dispel darkness (Gen. 1:4; Ps. 119:105). God is our understanding (in dark days; 18:28; 23:4), joy, hope, and life.

“Never give up in the darkness what God has revealed in the light.” [Donald K. Campbell]

- ✓ The specific kind of light that David refers to here is the light that produces **salvation**. He is not only light, but He is also **salvation** (over 100x salvation is referenced in the Psalms). We hear that word and often think “eternal salvation;” but it also refers to temporal salvation (v. 9). God cares about our lives and He is able to preserve our life here *and* in eternity. Here or there, we are safe.
 - ✓ **God is the defense of my life**. I.e., He is a “stronghold, a protected place of refuge.” Where do you seek protection, safety, refuge, and solace? (Books or entertainment or social media or relationships or food or work or workouts?) David goes to the Lord, because the Lord doesn’t just *give* defense, He *is* the defense. So David is appealing to God rather than His works — He is going to the One who is His intimate companion and who by nature is light, salvation, and refuge.
 - ✓ These are a reminder that however great the problem, God is greater and stronger: David reminds his heart of God’s strength (v. 1b, inferred in v. 3b, 5, 6a, 14; cf. Ps. 78:14-20, 41-43). We are not strong; God is strong. The covenant making and keeping God has loyal love and omnipotent strength to preserve David.
- The attacks on David were real — **evildoers** (v. 2) wanted to **devour my flesh** (cf. vv. 5a, 6a, 9, 10-12).
 - ✓ To devour, might be an idiom for ridicule and slander, or it could be a desire to kill him (it reminds us of 14:4; 1 Pt. 5:8). In either circumstance, the opponents were real and they were hostile.
 - ✓ But notice what else is true about the evildoers — **they stumbled and fell**. The **enemies** expected David’s destruction, but instead they were destroyed. Their attacks were real and severe (don’t minimize that reality); but their end was just as certain. Don’t doubt that God will account for every act of righteousness (Rom. 12:19); evil and evildoers will give an account to God (Ps. 37:1ff).

- Because of the nature of God and the sure confidence of the enemies' destruction, David asks two rhetorical questions and makes two positive affirmations:
 - ✓ The rhetorical questions (**v. 1**) are parallel and synonymous: **whom shall I fear?...whom shall I dread?** He clearly anticipates a negative answer: NO ONE!
 - David is not asking, "will I be able to avoid problems in this world?" Even the king will not.
 - David is asking, "in my troubles, will I be fearful? Is there anyone to dread?" No. He is safe. And David is not safe because he is the king. He is safe because he belongs to the King of kings.
 - ✓ The positive affirmations are also parallel: **my heart will not fear...I will be confident.**
 - He answers his question about fear with two positive declarations of dependence.
 - **Confident** essentially means "trust" — it is to place himself on the ground before God. He rests in God who is an unwavering rock and fortress of defense.
- The key to this section is v. 3 — **I shall be confident.** David trusted the Lord. Where is *your* confidence?
 - ✓ Our temptation is to trust ourselves (though we also understand we are untrustworthy, which is a primary reason we are anxious). You can trust God with your need (**1 Pt. 5:6-7**).

"If you feel that you are competent to stand up to life, and that you can deal with all these things that are set against you, you are the merest tyro [amateur/novice], an ignoramus; you do not really understand the problems and you do not understand yourself. No, this man's confidence is not based upon himself, and he makes it quite plain as to what the source of his confidence is: it is 'the Lord'. This, too, is always a distinguishing mark of the Christian. Our confidence is entirely and altogether in the Lord." [ML], *Enjoying Presence...*, 147.]

- ✓ No matter what anyone might do (vv. 2-3a), there is no cause for fear.
- ✓ Remember when you were a child and you had been somewhere with the family for the day; you were tired and you fell asleep on the drive home? You could hear mom and dad talking and the hum of the tires across the road and the street lights passing overhead? You were going home and you were safe. That's the Lord. We are confident that while we don't know the way or the time or the circumstances, He will take us safely home (**2 Tim. 4:17-18**).
- ✓ Our confidence is in God. When trouble comes, start with God, not the problem. When we are afraid it is not because of magnitude of problem, but the "smallness" of "our" God.
- ✓ When you are troubled, do things that will stimulate your trust and confidence in God:
 - Read Scripture. And when you do, answer, "what is God revealing about Himself here?"
 - Like David, recite and pray the attributes of God; write and pray lists of gratitude.
 - Confess all your unbelief and mistrust as sin against a strong and dependable God.
 - Read biographies of people who trusted (e.g., Heb. 11) — we are not alone in our troubles.
- When you are troubled, remember God is (infinitely) strong. It is His nature to be our defender.

2. A Quest for Troubled Hearts: SEEK God (vv. 4-6) This is the heart of the Psalm; act on what you know

- When we have trouble, our tendency like Adam and Jonah is to run from God, or like Peter walking (sinking) on the water, to forget God. But the psalmist is *fixed* on God; he runs *to* Him (not away from Him).
- Because God is our confidence (we can trust Him), He is also our quest/pursuit.
- So David says, **one thing...** This is among most single-minded purpose statements in the OT. The best answer to distracting fear is a preoccupation with God. This is the essence of discipleship.
 - ✓ David's request (***dwelling in the house***) doesn't mean he wants to literally live in the tabernacle; it doesn't even mean he wants to immediately go to Heaven. It means he wants to live permanently in God's presence and be in fellowship with Him — David is preoccupied with God (cf. **26:8**).
 - ✓ This psalm is preoccupied with YHWH — He is named 13x in the Psalm. David wants *Him*.
 - ✓ Notice also that David **asks**, but he also **seeks**. He is on an unending pursuit (***all the days of my life***) for fellowship with God (**Phil. 3:10a**). From that day and into eternity, David wants God. He will be eternally preoccupied with God, so he is preoccupied with God now. Cf. **Ps. 15:1; 23:4ff**.
 - ✓ And one of the things he is looking for is to **behold the beauty of the Lord**. **Beauty** is an expression of God's goodness to His people. He wants to discover afresh God's grace and mercy. He is going to **behold**, take a long, lingering gaze at the grace of God.
- Why should David and we pursue and seek God?
 - ✓ Because God will **conceal** (v. 5a), He will **hide** (v. 5b), He will **lift me up on a rock** in victory (v. 5c), and He will **lift up my head** (v. 6a). Those phrases indicate that God will give David security and safety and protection and shelter. He will give victory and He will remove shame.
 - Whether it was then or in eternity, David trusted God to provide for him.
 - When God's people go to God, we have all the provision and protection we need.
 - ✓ David also pursues and seeks God because pursuing God produces joy (v. 6b).
 - ***I will offer in his tent sacrifices*** refers to the psalmist going to worship.
 - ***with shouts of joy*** refers to his attitude of joy (not begrudging) as he goes to worship.
 - ***I will sing, yes I will sing praises to the Lord*** refers to his joyful involvement in worship.
 - Note that David is worshipping and thanking God before it is clear how the Lord will care for David. But he pursues worship even when he is overwhelmed with trouble.
 - Even before he has the answer to his prayer, he is resting in God. The pursuit of God and the preoccupation with God produces rest in God (vv. 5-6).
 - In trouble and hardship we may be tempted to avoid worship (personal or corporate); what we need the most is worship — for someone to direct our hearts to the truth about God and life.
- Isn't it true that when we are fearful and anxious, our thoughts are consumed with our present predicament and potential problems that arise from those circumstances? In those moments, how much are we preoccupied with God and Christ? David would not only say with Christ, "don't worry about tomorrow," but he would also add, "be preoccupied with God's character and His grace today."

3. A Prayer for Troubled Hearts: “TEACH Me, God” (vv. 7-12)

- When his problem arose, David sought YHWH. And then...things apparently did not change (vv. 10, 12). So these verses constitute David’s prayer when God didn’t immediately answer. This is his lament.
- But these verses are not a complaint; they are a further declaration of trust — manifested in trials.
- Notice all the ways David affirms his dependence on God in prayer: **Hear, O Lord** (v. 7a), **be gracious** (v. 7b), **my heart said** (v. 8), **do not hide** (v. 9a), and **do not turn** (v. 9b).
 - ✓ This repetitive language indicates an intensity of soul and a great trouble and problem — PLEASE, God. But it is not a prayer of despair; it is a prayer of “abandonment to God.” [VanGemeren]
 - ✓ He sees God as loyal and able and knows that God is the only one to whom he can go.
- Notice the content of David’s prayer:
 1. **be gracious** (v. 7) is an appeal to God’s character — “Give me grace” (because you’re loving!)
 2. Then David says, “I want you” — “Give me Yourself!”
 - **your face, O Lord, I shall seek** is to want to see God; to see the face of God is to be in the presence of God. So this is a parallel thought to v. 4 — I want to be with you (Job 42:3-5).
 - **Do not hide your face** (v. 9) is the negative affirmation of what he has desired in v. 8. And again, **do not turn Your servant away...do not abandon me nor forsake me** are desires for the sustained fellowship with God. He cannot bear the thought of being estranged from God, since all others (even family) have left him or died (v. 10).
 - Perhaps v. 9 is a kind of confession of sin; when David sins, he will not have favor with YHWH (Ps. 66:18; 1 Pt. 3:7; Mt. 27:46).
 3. Then David asks for correction and transformation — “Give me sanctification!”
 - **Teach me** (v. 11a) — Because of the attacks of the enemies, David needs to know how to respond and what to do (cf. 25:4-5). This is similar to the NT request to renew our minds and put off the old self and put on the new self (Eph. 4:22-24). This is a request for direction and sanctification. And that request is extended in the next phrase...
 - **Lead me in a level path** (v. 11b). Because of adversaries, there are troubles and dangers. David doesn’t want to walk the crooked path of those unrighteous men; he wants direction from YHWH.
 4. David’s final request is for protection (**do not deliver me over to...my adversaries**, v. 12). “Give me protection” (of physical life).
 - The opponents of David are **adversaries...false witnesses** and they are passionate against him as they **breathe out violence** — they are unrelenting in their pursuit of David.
 - David entrusts himself to the Lord knowing only God is able to protect him from the enemies (cf. 41:2). David’s trust in God is a great contrast to the violent treachery of the ungodly.
- David trusted. David desired. David prayed. He “did everything right.” And (it seems), God did not immediately answer (how many of you have something you’ve prayed for longer than one year? five years? ten years?). God *does not always* answer our prayers immediately. Why?

- ✓ God (at times) keeps us in our trials to reveal whether we want Him (vv. 4-6), or His provisions. The delay in His response often reveals what we really want from Him; too often the fleshly heart just wants the problem solved and is really uninterested in God Himself.
- ✓ God (at times) keeps us in our trials to keep us dependent on Him and to remove every secondary desire of our lives that has become primary — so that He alone will be primary. God is more interested in our sanctification than in removing our troubles (which is hard to say).

“As evangelicals we’ve become addicted to ‘happy ending’ stories where we go through ‘x’ (hard thing) and then start praying and then—Shazam!—God makes everything better and we have a nice, utopian story to tell where we are the hero who ends up with the great job, the great family, the time off, the free plane ticket, the lost purse, or the great healthy kids. The fact of the matter is, sometimes (often) the happy ending is heaven, and the getting there is a really difficult but formative part of our sanctification. And sometimes what God wants in the interim is for us to find our happiness, holiness, and identity in Him, rather than our perfect jobs, perfect 2.5 kids (or 6.5 kids in the case of our church), and perfect testimonies.” [Kluck, *Why We Love the Church*, 193.]

- Trust God. Desire God. Pray to God (with persistence). And finally, wait for God...

4. A Commitment for Troubled Hearts: **WAIT for God (vv. 13-14)**

- It’s hard to wait. Impatience is a persistent problem.
- But notice what David says...
 - ✓ ***Unless I had believed I would see the goodness...*** His goal was not protection from his enemies, but to see demonstrations of God’s goodness (which was not necessarily the removal of his problems). He wanted the fellowship of God and the experience of His grace.
 - ✓ ***in the land of the living*** = i.e., on earth — he trusts that God will do good and protect him here on earth (though sometimes God’s earthly provision is by taking us to glory; 2 Tim. 4:17-18)
 - ✓ ***Wait...be strong...take courage*** is David’s summary exhortation to those who would sing this song. These are common OT phrases when some great task is about to be attempted (cf. Dt. 31:6-8; Josh. 1:6-9, 18; Ps. 31:24). It is a reminder that the Lord is working, the Lord is strong; the Lord will accomplish His work in His time. In fact, twice David says to ***wait***. It is a double reminder for the weak-hearted: it is worth waiting for God.
 - ✓ But these words are not just for the singers of the song — they are also David’s words to himself. As he is waiting for the Lord’s answer, he is speaking to himself, commands and counsels himself to wait for God. He reminds himself that however long it takes for God to answer, it is worth the wait; “rest in Him...do not despair...He will provide.”
 - ✓ Those are good words for our own souls as well. Wait for the Lord. Be patient. Don’t be fearful. He will accomplish His good purposes through our trouble in His good time.

CONCLUSION:

“What do we miss most when we are in a period of trial or life has us out of our routine? We want things to return to normal. We long for the predictable and the known—for a favorite restaurant or TV program or just relaxing at home. But at a time when David’s life was in turmoil, he desired for one thing to be restored more than anything else: ‘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 (Psalm 27:4).’
[Steve DeWitt, *Eyes Wide Open*, 17.]

King David had problems in his life. You and I will have problems in our lives. Sometimes it may feel like we are only moving from one problem to the next. This is neither unusual nor extraordinary.

As we go through our difficulties, we have one singular goal. To be steadfast, we need to **sing one single song** in our troubles — that we might see and be in fellowship with the Lord in the trial. And when we have His fellowship, we will be safe.

BENEDICTION: Jude 24-15 (Rob)