

## One Thing

### Psalm 27

#### Introduction – When Life Presses In

Everybody's got problems. If you don't, you will. It's a reality of life. Job, reflecting on his incredible misfortune, lamented,

“...affliction does not come from the dust,  
nor does trouble sprout from the ground,  
but man is born to trouble  
as the sparks fly upward.

Job 5:6-7

It is the times of trouble that test the mettle of our soul – what we are made of. Difficulties reveal our inner motivations and values as we try to navigate the stormy sea of our circumstances.

I've led a blessed life. I haven't faced heavy persecution or threats to my physical safety. Still, all of my adult life, I've been a leader. And it is the leader's calling to bring about change. Most folks resist change. I'm not complaining; it's the way things are. While I haven't had people threaten me with a knife or a gun, I've heard some tough criticism; sometimes it has shaken me to my core and taken a long time to process.

Those may not be your issues. I know some of the troubles that many of you face and frankly, they are a lot more trying than what I've had to deal with. Some deal with evil people who are trying to assassinate their character. Some of you face the deep pain of betrayal - having been misunderstood by people that you deeply love and they have turned on you. Others face troubles at work that threaten your livelihood. Many of you are battling serious illness in your own body or in the life of a loved one.

The troubles that you and I face reveal what we are made of. Our reactions to our difficulties show where we truly put our trust. The lives of the psalmists were awash in afflictions. Their response reveals a fervent trust in God. In times of trial, their songs give us the language we need if, indeed, our trust is in the Lord. Psalm 27 is one of those psalms.

**Text – Psalm 27 (ESV)**

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?

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.

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.  
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.  
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.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud;  
     be gracious to me and answer me!  
 You have said, "Seek my face."  
 My heart says to you,  
     "Your face, Lord, do I seek."  
 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!  
 For my father and my mother have forsaken me,  
     but the Lord will take me in.

Teach me your way, O Lord,  
     and lead me on a level path  
     because of my enemies.  
 Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;  
     for false witnesses have risen against me,  
     and they breathe out violence.

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

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

### **David's Troubles**

Understanding the Bible is not a puzzle to be solved only by trained ministers. The Scriptures are meant to be understood by all who read them. There are just a few important principles that we need to observe in order to rightly understand God's Word to us. The first, and most important, is to have some grasp of the story – the context – in which the words were written. I

can't over-emphasize this too much. The meaning of words and phrases is dependent upon the circumstances in which they are written. For example, if I were to say, "my favorite place to stand is in the pulpit," you might assume that I'm talking about the place where the preacher stands. If, on the other hand, I was telling a story about sailing around the world in a small boat, the pulpit would be the very front of the vessel. The circumstances of the writer are critical to understanding the meaning of the text.

Over half of the psalms in the Bible were written by David. If you want to understand the psalms he wrote, familiarize yourself with his life experiences found in I Samuel 16 through the entire book of II Samuel. It's a great read. There's action and adventure, romance and politics – all the makings of an engaging story. According to the Greek translation of the Old Testament, Psalm 27 was written by David before he was anointed king. Most likely, it was conceived during the many years that he was on the run from King Saul. David was completely innocent in those days – a man of impeccable integrity. And yet the king was insane with jealousy and tried to kill him. Twice David narrowly escaped the spear from Saul's hand. Driven from his favored position in the palace, David was on the run in the wilderness from Saul and his army for over ten years. His wife was given to another man. He hid in caves, pretended to be mad and eventually had to live with Israel's enemy, the Philistines, in order to preserve his life.

God works in strange ways. Why did he allow Saul to have an evil spirit that prompted murder in his heart for David? We can never know the fullness of God's wisdom and his reasons for allowing evil in this world. But David's run for his life, even while he knew that he would one day be king, cultivated a deep dependence on God. He would become Israel's greatest king and the one through whom the Savior of the world would eventually come. Instead of making David bitter, his trials made him into a "man after God's own heart." It is the same for you and me. We will have troubles. They can make us bitter or turn our heart towards God.

### **Unpacking the Song**

We are to be "do-ers" and not "hearers" only of God's Word. Let's make this real in your life. Name your trouble...go ahead, write it down. You may not have troubles now, but you most

likely have had troubles in the past. Write it down and keep it in mind as we unpack the treasures of this wonderful song.

*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?*

Some translations of the Bible entitle this psalm as “Fearless Trust in God.” Certainly the first two verses convey that thought. *The Lord is my light.* The picture of light is a powerful one. Light enables us to see – to make progress in the pathway of life without endangering ourselves. The Gospel of John says that the Word of God, which would become human in Christ, is the light of all men. God is my light, so I am not without direction and hope when the darkness presses in. *The Lord is also my salvation.* When danger threatens me, it is God who rescues me. No wonder David didn’t fear – and we can share his same confidence. Typical of poetry in the psalms, David amplifies his thought by calling God his stronghold. As a man of war, David understood the importance of a strong defense. God would be his mighty fortress. He could stand with confidence in the presence of his enemies and not be afraid.

*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.*

It is in this section of the psalm, as is the case in most psalms, that we hear echoes from Psalm 1: the righteous will prosper while the wicked will fail. When David wandered all those years as a fugitive, God turned the tables on his enemies many times. Two times, David spared Saul’s life

when he could have easily killed him with his own bare hands. In both situations, Saul's army had David surrounded. David avenged the kidnapping of women and children and the plundering of his camp by the Amalekites through a decisive victory that rescued his loved ones and returned all of his goods. David had confidence in God because he had history with him. Is that not true with you as well? How many times has God rescued you and turned the bad into good? How many "Ebenezers" – monuments to God's goodness - do you have in your life? When troubles press in, recall those monuments in your spirit and start polishing them. The Lord's lovingkindnesses never fail.

*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.*

David is letting us in on his life-secret. This one thing is what keeps him going. It's what gives him hope, balance and purpose. You see this theme played out so many times in David's actions: his passionate desire to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, the massive music and worship ministry that he established, and his plan to build a permanent temple for the worship of the Lord. Now, of course, David wrote this before a temple was built. His desire is beyond bricks and mortar, gold and priceless tapestries. David's one desire is to live in God's presence. Why?

*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.  
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.*

It is in God's presence that David finds refuge from the confusion and danger of his enemies. It is in God's presence where we will find peace amidst the storm. It is in God's presence, the Scriptures say (Psalm 16:11) where we find fullness of joy. No wonder David worshipped with abandon. Should we not do the same?

*Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud;  
be gracious to me and answer me!*

David has spoken of his faith and confidence in God, so he boldly comes to ask for help in time of trouble. I love this about the psalms...and we'll see this even more as we journey through the series. If you have faith in God, come boldly and present your complaint and need before him without any reservation. Sometimes we think we can only say certain things to God and we have to say them in certain polite ways. Let me tell you: the psalms are not polite. The soul is laid bare. It seems strange to me to come to God who knows the condition of our heart even better than we do and try to hide something from him. It's unnecessary. Present your request without reservation.

*You have said, "Seek my face."  
My heart says to you,  
"Your face, Lord, do I seek."  
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!*

I love this passage. You see, it is God who puts it in our heart to seek him. When we bring our request to him and seek his presence, we are doing what he designed us to do. Don't run from

God. Come openly and honestly before him. He smiles and embraces us when we come to him in this way.

*For my father and my mother have forsaken me,  
but the Lord will take me in.*

We do not have any evidence in the Scriptures that David's father and mother forsook him. It is doubtful that they did. David is making a point through exaggeration. His mother and father are bound to his soul; they would never forsake him. God's loyalty to his loved ones is infinitely greater than the love of a human parent. Consider that for a moment as you recall your trials. God will never – no, never - forsake you.

*Teach me your way, O Lord,  
and lead me on a level path  
because of my enemies.  
Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;  
for false witnesses have risen against me,  
and they breathe out violence.*

David has declared his confidence in God and his passionate desire to be in his presence. He has made his prayer for deliverance in his difficult circumstance. Now he humbles himself and asks God teach him and lead him. As great as David is, he is not self-sufficient. He is not a self-made man. Friends, this is one place that we struggle. Isn't it? We're prairie tough. We've got American resiliency and pride. We don't want help and we don't want people to know that we struggle.

Humble yourself. Your self-sufficiency is not a virtue in God's eyes. A person of faith relies on God. And God most often uses the people of God to meet the needs of those who humbly call on him. When life presses in, let your heart cry out, "Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path..."



The psalm closes, like so many, with a strong statement of faith:

*I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living! (...that means right now – before I die!)*

Can you say that...even in the midst of your troubles?

*I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living!*

*Wait for the Lord;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the Lord!*

David would know. May you know, too.

### **One Thing**

One of my favorite movies is *City Slickers* made in 1991. I know the language is a little rough, but it stars Billy Crystal and he is one funny guy. The premise is a common American experience: Crystal's character, Mitch, is experiencing a mid-life crisis in both his job and family life and he sets off with some friends for a two-week dude ranch experience to try and figure it out. There are all kinds of funny episodes as the "city-slickers" try to fit in on the trail. In one of the more serious moments of the film, Curly, the crusty old trail boss (played in his Oscar-winning role by Jack Palance) has a conversation with Mitch. He is condescending about the city boys who in all their sophistication and messed-up lives try to find themselves in a two-week trail ride.

"It won't work," he tells Mitch. "You need to know the secret of life." And then he points his forefinger up.



“What’s that,” Mitch asks sarcastically, “your finger?”

“One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that and everything else don’t mean *nothing*.”

“That’s great. What’s the “one thing?”

Curly, in his wise crusty voice replies, “That’s for you to figure out.”

David figured it out. His “one thing” was to live in God’s presence. It’s true for us, too. When you continually seek to live in God’s presence you can stand with bold confidence against any trial or trouble that comes your way. Knowing God and living in his presence cultivates hope, confidence, direction and peace in the midst of any storm.

Let David teach us this morning. Are you like Mitch, with the focus of your life scattered across the landscape of your own self interests? You won’t find peace there. You won’t find confidence in that place. Be like David and seek the Lord with all your heart. Wait for him and your heart will take courage!

*Teach me Thy way, O Lord, teach me Thy way!*

*Thy guiding grace afford, teach me Thy way!*

*Help me to walk aright, more by faith, less by sight;*

*Lead me with heav’nly light, teach me Thy way!*

*When I am sad at heart, teach me Thy way!*  
*When earthly joys depart, teach me Thy way!*  
*In hours of loneliness, in times of dire distress,*  
*In failure or success, teach me Thy way!*

*When doubts and fears arise, teach me Thy way!*  
*When storms o'erspread the skies, teach me Thy way!*  
*Shine through the cloud and rain, through sorrow, toil and pain;*  
*Make Thou my pathway plain, teach me Thy way!*

*Long as my life shall last, teach me Thy way!*  
*Where'er my lot be cast, teach me Thy way!*  
*Until the race is run, until the journey's done,*  
*Until the crown is won, teach me Thy way!*

Benjamin M. Ramsey, 1919