

The Lord is My Light, Whom Shall I Fear?  
Psalm 27

Turn to Psalm 27. Psalm 27 is the kind of psalm they call a psalm of confidence. The composer of the psalm has huge confidence in God, and says so. We read them and pray them when we do *not* have confidence. When we're unsure that God is any help in our situation, a psalm of confidence brings us comfort and encouragement.

Psalm 23 is like that, the Lord is my shepherd. David's psalm shows great confidence in God, and when we hear that confidence, we're encouraged and comforted.

God gives us psalms of confidence for just this reason. God knows that he completely faithful and taking good care of us, and he also knows that often it does not seem like that to us. So he gives us these psalms. "Say this out loud," he says, "it's true. Pray this and put your trust in me again." Let's read Psalm 27.

*<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life—whom shall I dread?*

*<sup>2</sup> When the wicked advance against me to devour me,  
it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall.*

*<sup>3</sup> Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;  
though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.*

*<sup>4</sup> One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,  
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.*

*<sup>5</sup> For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling;  
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.*

*<sup>6</sup> Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me;  
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord.*

*<sup>7</sup> Hear my voice when I call, Lord; be merciful to me and answer me.*

*<sup>8</sup> My heart speaks for you, "Seek my face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek.*

*<sup>9</sup> Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger;  
you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior.*

*<sup>10</sup> Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.*

*<sup>11</sup> Teach me your way, Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.*

*<sup>12</sup> Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me,  
spouting malicious accusations.*

*<sup>13</sup> I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

*<sup>14</sup> Wait for the Lord; be strong and make your heart bold, and wait for the Lord.*

Safe with the Lord, Nothing to Fear (Vv1–3)

*The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life—whom shall I dread?*

The first word in the psalm is God’s name, “Yahweh.” Both lines begin with God’s name. That means verse 1 is about God himself. The confidence comes from knowing God, knowing Yahweh. Since the LORD is my light and salvation, fearing someone else makes no sense. Since he’s the stronghold of my life, dreading someone else silly. It’s impossible that I’d be in danger.

It’s a bold claim, isn’t it? Psalm 23 also begins with God’s name. The LORD is my shepherd. Since the LORD is my shepherd, I will certainly get what I need. If he’s my shepherd, I will be well cared for, it cannot be any other way.

Psalm 27 can make a liar out of me. The words are bold – can I actually say this honestly? *“The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—whom shall I dread? When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.”*

It’s all very well for us to read this so we all feel better. But God hopes we’ll say this and mean it. Perhaps we need to say, “I believe, help my unbelief.” God invites us to say this to ourselves and mean it.

Perhaps your greatest fear is not a person, but some other circumstance. *The Lord is my light and my salvation—what shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—what shall I dread?*

Even when we are afraid and cannot trust these words, even when anxieties are swarming all over us, it’s good to say these words. Tell ourselves the truth. Use your own mouth to put the truth into your own ears. because at some level you know that these words are true, even if you cannot leave your dread behind.

Give the Holy Spirit something to work with in your mind. Tell yourself the truth. Let’s say this out loud together *“The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—whom shall I dread?”* And once more. When fear gets strong, use fear as a prompt, a queue, to tell yourself some truth. Our minds get in dark ruts. We cannot control what we feel, but we can control what we tell ourselves. This psalm brings God’s truth to our fear and dread. We cannot make the feeling go away, but we could tell ourselves some truth.

We could say it out loud, at least whisper it, so our mouth says it and our ears hear it. This we can do. The liar wants us to feel helpless in our fears, but we are not helpless. Telling ourselves the truth is no magical cure. But it is something, and it makes a difference. It gives the Holy Spirit something to work with. Fight the fight, you’re not helpless, tell yourself God’s truth.

One Thing Matters: That I Live in God's Presence (Vv4–6)

*“One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,  
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”*

Verse 4 explains vv1-3. How does it happen that God is our light and salvation and stronghold? One of the Bible's explanations for God's protection is that our God is always with us, he never leaves us. Ps 23 has a line like that: “even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil for you are with me.” In the Bible, God speaks to us like that many times.

But in Psalm 27 it is the other way around. God is my light and salvation and stronghold because I am near him. Not because he's with me, but because I'm with him. I want to be in his presence. When we read this psalm, we say, “God, I want you, I want to be close to you, so you will take care of me in the day of trouble.”

What does the psalm actually ask for? *“That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord, and to seek him in his temple.”* Priests were the only ones that actually spent a lot of time in the temple. We're not asking to be priests. “... To gaze on the beauty of the Lord.” God is invisible, he's spirit, we cannot actually see him. Gaze at what?

David is using concrete words but he means them symbolically. He's not asking to actually spend all day every day in the house of God, in God's sacred tent, gazing where there is no God to seek. He's saying, “God, there's only one thing I want from you. I only seek one thing: I want to live close to you, in your presence, I want to spend all my life near you, in your presence, so that I can enjoy you and seek you, asking you for guidance and help. That's one thing I want, always to be in your presence. If I ask one thing, that's what it is.”

He's not asking for an experience, he's not asking to feel God's presence. He's asking to *be* there, to *be* in that place, a place that is close to God, near God, in God's presence. Whatever God's presence and dwelling actually is, that's where he wants to be all the days of his life.

To be honest, when I began to realize what verse 4 was saying, I was not even sure I wanted that. It scared me. To do the things God wanted was one thing, but to spend my whole life that close to him – did I want that at all? Could I say v4 to God and mean it? I spent 15 or 20 uncomfortable minutes sorting that out, because at first I did not want that at all.

I was thinking, “No, God, I'll do what you want, but I'm not sure it's safe for a person like me to be that close to you.” At the same time God was calling me, and I wanted to say, “yes I want that!” Eventually I could see that *not* being in God's presence was scarier than being near him. I had to trust that God actually wanted people like me near him. After about 20 minutes I could say v4 to God and mean it. This all happened last month in an Edmonton hotel room. Intense.

Here's how this relates to verse 1. Verse 1 says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation. The Lord is the stronghold of my life." This is what the Lord does for me. Do I have a part to play in this? Who gets to say that?

The person who says: "*One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.*" These people can say, "the Lord is my light and my salvation, the Lord is the stronghold of my life."

Above all, God's presence is the safe place: (Vv5–6) *For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.*

How Shall We Come Near to God? The Seeking Prayer (Vv7-13)

The psalm does not speak directly to God in vv1–6. Up to verse 6, the psalmist gives us his testimony. But beginning in v7 we speak to God about these things. The prayer in vv7–13 has two different cycles of doubt and then confidence.

First Prayer Cycle: Lord, Will You Receive Me? (Vv7–10)

Now doubt comes into David's mind. He really wants to be near God and dwell in God's presence, because that's the only safe place to be. But will God take him in? He wants to live in God dwelling, but will God receive him? Does God even want him there?

*Hear my voice when I call, Lord; be merciful to me and answer me.  
My heart speaks for you, "Seek my face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek.  
Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger;  
You have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior.  
Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.*

He hears a call from God: "seek my face." He answers: "Your face, Lord, I will seek." What does that actually mean? No one can see God, and if we did we would die. So we cannot take it literally. Let's make it as close as we can to that. "God, I want to be right in front of you. I want to be where you are, so that if I could see you, your face would be right there. It is the only safe place to be in the day of trouble. Have mercy on me and receive me.

Verse 4 said, *One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.*

Verses 7–9 turn that desire into prayer. In these verses, we ask God for the one thing, we ask him to bring us into his dwelling: *My heart speaks for you, "Seek my face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior.*

In the prayer, we doubt that God wants us that close. What if God hides his face from me, what if he turns me away in anger? We know very well that God has good reasons not to want us in front of him. The psalm does not mention sin, but our sin and failure are why God would hide himself and turn us away in anger. “Be merciful to me. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior.”

And this doubting prayer ends with confidence in v10: *Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.* Rarely will parents forsake their children, although it does happen. But God always, always receives those who seek him. Psalm 9:10: *Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.* I love that line. You have never forsaken those who seek you.

In Psalm 27, God calls us to seek him. The safe place in God’s dwelling, and this psalm urges us to come near to God because his dwelling, his presence, is the safe place. “In the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling.” This prayer, vv 7–13, is how we come near.

Second Prayer Cycle: Lord, Teach Me and Lead Me (Vv11–13)

*Teach me your way, Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations. I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

We cannot ask to live in God’s presence without agreeing to live in his ways. “Teach me your way, Lord, lead me in a straight path.” We ask God to help us live in his ways. He does this for us, and I’m so glad. He has changed your life and mine by doing this for us. Psalm 23 says, “He leads me in the right paths for his name’s sake.”

Earlier in we said, “Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger.” We say that because we know we have failed, and we ask for mercy. But we don’t just ask for mercy, we also say, “*Teach me your way, Lord, lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Don’t turn me over to the desire of my foes.*”

Make no mistake, there are people and spiritual powers who would love to see you and me fail miserably to live in God’s ways. We can pray about that: “*Teach me your way, Lord, lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Don’t turn me over to the desire of my foes.*”

The prayer of vv7–13 has two cycles. The first doubts that God will receive us when we seek him, and that ends in confidence. The second wonders if we’ll be able to live in God’s ways, and asks for help. And that also ends in confidence. *I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

Call to Confidence – v14

In this last verse, for the first time, the psalm speaks directly to the rest of us: *Wait for the Lord; be strong and make your heart bold, and wait for the Lord.*

“Make your heart bold” is my literal translation of what it says in Hebrew. I like it because it’s kind of preposterous. Can we even do that? Can we make our hearts bold? Apparently we can. *Wait for the Lord; be strong, and make your heart bold, and wait for the Lord.*

Waiting does not mean doing nothing, it means living faithfully. God telling us that he has this under control, he has the situation in hand. And if we’re in his presence, we’re in a safe place. God really hopes we’ll take comfort and courage from that.

Conclusion: Three Requests in this Psalm.

The confidence of Psalm 27 builds on 3 requests:

(1) In verse 4, Lord, I want to spend all my days in your presence: *“One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”*

(2) In verse 9: *Lord, have mercy on me, do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger, do not reject me or forsake me.*

(3) *Teach me your way, Lord; lead me in a straight path.* (v11)

The psalm does not ask for safety or protection. If we’re in his presence, we’re in the safe place. It asks for God’s presence. *In the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling.* The psalm brings us into God’s presence, his dwelling. And then v14 is for us: *Wait for the Lord; be strong, and make your heart bold, and wait for the Lord.*

PRAYER: Great God, we want to live in your dwelling and be in your presence all the days of our lives. Lord, don’t hide your face from any of us, and do not turn your servants away in anger. Thank you that you have never forsaken those who seek you. Lord, teach us to follow your ways, lead us in your right paths. We need your help with this. Thank you for being our light and our salvation. Thank you for being the stronghold of our lives. Thank you that when the day of trouble comes, you keep us safe in your dwelling. Thanks that you keep telling us the truth. Amen.

BENEDICTION: The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.