

Devotion to God

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, well, many of you will probably have turned up to church this afternoon and you're worried about something. You're afraid. You might manage to hide it from other people so nobody else knows you're afraid, but deep down in your heart you're scared or there is some fear about something or other.

Now Psalm 27 gives us the key to coping with fears, with uncertainties, with trials, with challenges, with difficulties in life.

You notice that the title of the Psalm says of David, so just glance down and look at David's circumstances. So verse 2, he says, Then look at verse 3, he says, And then down to verse 12, he says, So that's the situation that David finds himself in, and yet despite his circumstances, what we see in this Psalm is that David expresses his confidence in God.

And so although the Psalm is written by David, it's not just about David as we'll see. Because as we read the Psalms in a Christ-centered way, we see how the Psalms speak about Jesus and how through Jesus they apply to us, to you and to me.

And so how do we get the confidence that is spoken about here in this Psalm? Well, it comes from a deep devotion to God. And so as we continue to look at our vision for Christ Church Glasgow to be a church that is loving God and loving each other and loving Glasgow, what we're doing this afternoon is looking at that first practice of loving God.

[1 : 5 7] And how do we love God? Well, last week we thought about loving God through our worship. This week we're thinking about loving God through devotion. And so if worship last week in Psalm 100 is what we do together, it's what we do corporately, devotion is what we do individually.

And that's what Psalm 27 is. It's David, and it speaks of his confidence and devotion in God. So it shows us what it means to be devoted to God.

So those three points. First of all, we're going to look at devotion gives confidence in God. Verse 1 to 3. Second, devotion seeks intimacy with God. Verse 4 to 6. And then third, devotion involves prayer to God.

And verse 7 to 12. So first of all, devotion gives confidence in God. If you look down, verse 1 to 3 in Psalm 27 are like a confession of faith.

So David says in verse 1, 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?

[3 : 0 3] So David's focus here is on God and his relationship with him. And that is always the best place to start. Not to be overwhelmed by our fears.

To the extent that we forget who God is and what God is for us. Because David here uses the covenant name for God, the Lord.

He says, The Lord is my light and my salvation. And the Lord is the stronghold of my life. And so he's saying that the truth of who God is and the security of his relationship with God means that he doesn't need to fear.

Doesn't need to fear anyone. And he doesn't need to fear anything. And so even though his enemies are fierce and they are surrounding him, his confidence is in God.

Not in himself. So verse 2 and 3. Say to us, 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.

[4 : 1 0] Though war break out against me, even then I will be confident. So get this, the threats are real. They are dangerous. They're powerful. David's got enemies and they want rid of him.

They want to kill him. And yet he has confidence in God because he says three times in verse 1 and 3. He says, Whom shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid?

Then verse 3. My heart will not fear. So he says he will not fear. And as we read David's words that reflect David's life, we're probably thinking, well, there's nobody trying to kill me.

At least I hope there's nobody trying to kill you. But you never know. This is Glasgow. But so there's nobody trying to kill us. But at the same time, although we're not facing the same situation that David is, a life-threatening situation, we do live in a world that is filled with fear.

And we do face different challenges and different dangers and difficulties in our lives, whether it be to do with our job or with our family or with our health or whatever it is.

[5 : 18] And so what do you do when you're afraid? Well, maybe you sing, I will always look on the bright side of life or just try and forget about your problems.

Relax a bit more. Just believe that what you imagine is the worst will never happen to you. Well, that's never going to work, is it? I mean, no, it doesn't work.

Well, why? It doesn't work because it's all about being confident in yourself and in your own ability. But sometimes you just don't have the ability or the power or the strength to change things or to change your situation.

And so you can put your confidence in yourself, your strength, your resources to cope with what you face. You can do that. That's one method. But what the Psalm is saying to us is that you can have a deep-rooted confidence in God that flows out of your relationship with him.

And so we're not saying here, if you be like David, then you can face any foe. No, we're not David, but we can have David's God.

[6 : 30] We can be confident in God because of who he is and because of what he is like. Because when we're devoted to him, we can say that he is my light.

He's my salvation. He is the stronghold of my life. Because when the Lord is my salvation, then I know that he has already saved me from the very worst that could possibly happen to me.

So that now, through my relationship with him, then my heart ultimately has nothing to fear. Not because God will slay all my enemies or make all my problems go away, but because I know he is the stronghold of my life.

It isn't me. So my confidence is in him, not in himself. And so Psalm 27 is pointing us to a confidence in God that grows out of a devotion to him.

So that's our first point. Devotion gives confidence in God. Secondly, following on from this, devotion seeks intimacy with God. So what's David's secret?

[7 : 40] Well, he answers in verse four to six, as we see his single-hearted devotion to God. Let's read verse four and five.

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.

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.

So there's one thing that David wants, seeks more than anything else. What's he talking about? Well, the one thing he wants is not for God to smash all his enemies, although you might expect that if you're in a tricky situation.

No, what he wants is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. And he uses four words here in verse four and five to describe this place of God's presence.

[8 : 44] So there's house, verse four, temple, verse four, dwelling, verse five, and sacred tent, verse five. And they all describe the dwelling of God on earth.

House, temple, tent. But he's not literally saying here he wants to go and live in God's sacred tent. He's not saying he wants to go and camp out in a church building all his life instead of living in his palace.

No, he's not saying that. It's David's way of saying he wants to dwell in God's presence all the time. He wants to be near to God.

He wants to enjoy the intimacy that comes from being in a relationship with God. That's the one thing he desires above all else. Because he knows that being with God means ultimate protection. It means that God and life with him is maximum security. God's gates can't be smashed. His walls are impenetrable.

[9 : 47] His windows are bulletproof. So he knows there's no safer place for me to be than with God, than in God's presence. But it's not just about physical protection for David.

It's about intimacy with God. Because David's supreme desire, he says, is to gaze on the beauty of the Lord. Now, to gaze on something is not just a quick stare or a quick glance, is it?

To gaze means a steady and sustained and long focus. It's taking something in. And so what he's saying here is that devotion to God will involve admiring God and experiencing God and enjoying God for who he is.

He's speaking about a preoccupation with God himself and not simply with what God can do for you. And so David here doesn't want stuff from God.

He wants God. That's the one thing he must have. And he must have it all the time. It's God. And so for David here, it's not just a burst of enthusiasm for God that comes and goes.

[11 : 06] But this is the settled desire of his heart. We're dwelling in God's presence and seeing the beauty of God and being satisfied by God gives David confidence.

Because in verse 5 and 6, he returns to confidence in God. Not just for security, but with the expectation that God will exalt him above his enemies.

He says in verse 6, 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.

So, this is David's situation. His enemies are surrounding him. They're all around him. And he can shout for joy before them.

How is he able to do this? It's because of his gaze. As his gaze is on the beauty of the Lord, it means David's not staring at his problems, is he?

[12 : 09] And because he's not staring at his problems, it means that people don't become too big for him and God becomes too small for him. But because of his devotion to God, he's able not just to survive, but he's able to thrive.

Because he has the one thing he needs, which is being in God's presence, gazing at the beauty of the Lord, because he's got that, then everything else will be okay.

And so, here's the issue for us. Well, if God is not the focus of your life and of my life, then something else will be the focus of our lives. Because if our gaze isn't on the Lord, then it's going to be fixed on something else or on other things.

And so, if intimacy with God is the one thing that you desire, then other things and other people won't disturb you or unsettle you or knock you.

Because when we're afraid, our fears will tell us what we're truly devoted to. Have you ever thought that? Our fears show us what we desire most in life.

[13 : 24] And so, whatever we're afraid of losing, that thing will be the object of our affection, what we're most devoted to in life. Whether it's our career or our reputation or our security or our looks or our money or our possessions or another person or whatever it may be.

Because if we know that losing that thing means we'll die a thousand deaths, then that's the thing that we are truly devoted to. Because that's what we'll look to, to give us confidence in life.

And so, a high-powered career can make you confident. It will take away a lot of your fears. So will a good reputation.

It will make you confident. Status, position, power, that will make you confident. So will the security of a big home and loads of stuff. That will give you confidence.

Good looks, good clothes, can give you confidence. So can a certain relationship status, can give you a confidence. Can you see?

[14 : 35] And so Psalm 27 challenges us on what one thing is most important to us. Because it wants to expose the true and the real and the deep devotion of our hearts.

Because what we seek more than anything else will be what we put our confidence in. But whatever we seek is also what will completely shatter our confidence if it fails us.

So think of the career. If your confidence is in your career, then what happens when you get the sack from your job? You're devastated. Or if your confidence is in your looks and you grow old and ugly, what happens?

You're devastated. Or if your confidence is in another person or in a relationship and that relationship breaks up, you die a thousand deaths. You struggle to cope.

There is no confidence. And so can you see how whatever we put our confidence, our trust in, it will ultimately fail us.

[15 : 38] Because it wasn't designed to give us that kind of security. Only God can give us that. And so Psalm 27 is a challenge.

It's a challenge to all of us. And it's not giving us a quick solution to say, okay, you just switch having confidence in all these other things, your money, your career, your status, your job, another person, and you switch it onto being confident in God.

It isn't like that. It takes time to have this kind of devotion to God. And from that devotion, the confidence comes. It takes time.

It takes all the days of our life, in fact. That's why David is using words like he seeks, he dwells, he gazes. They're not quick fix solutions. But because God is beautiful, he wants to gaze on God's beauty.

It's a lifetime thing. Because when you think about it, when something is beautiful, you do want to gaze at it. You want to appreciate it. A couple of years ago, we went to Paris and so went to the Louvre Museum.

[16:47] And the one thing I wanted to do was to go and see the Mona Lisa, Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting. Because it's a beautiful painting and it's to be admired.

And I've seen pictures online, but I wanted to see it in the flesh. But the way they'd set it up in the Louvre was that you kind of had to shuffle past the painting with about 300 other people.

And you didn't really get time to stop and to stare and to gaze at the beauty of the painting. You were just pushed on by the security guards. For some reason, my son Josh managed to get a selfie with him and the Mona Lisa whilst he was moving along with the crowd.

But I came away and I was not satisfied by what had happened. It wasn't good enough. And you know, we will never be satisfied in this life if we look to other things to give us satisfaction other than the God who made us.

And that's why a quick glance, maybe at the Bible every now and again or turning up to church every now and again is not going to be enough to satisfy us.

[17:58] It doesn't cultivate the real devotion that Psalm 27 speaks of. Because only God can truly satisfy our greatest longings in life and only God can truly meet our deepest needs in life.

And when we get that, then everything else doesn't look so good. We'll see through everything else because everything that promises so much fails to deliver, doesn't it?

And that's why fixing our gaze on anything other than God will cause us to fear in life. But it's only fixing our gaze on Him that we will know real confidence.

That's our second point. Devotion seeks intimacy with God. And then thirdly, devotion involves prayer to God. So here is David talking to God in prayer. So devotion to God obviously will involve communication with God.

Verse 7, he says, hear my voice when I call, Lord, be merciful to me and answer me. So what's going on here? Because the psalm seems to be back to front.

[19:07] Normally, when you read the psalms, they start with a prayer of desperation and then they move through to a confidence in God at the end. But here, the confidence in God comes first and then we get this prayer of crying out to God.

And there's an urgency about the prayer. He says, hear, call, be merciful, answer. And so the devotion to God through prayer means essentially we can pray to God at any time and about anything.

Because prayer isn't just asking God for things. Prayer is depending upon God for everything. Because God wants us to speak to him and to seek him.

Not to get stuff from him, but to get him. So verse 8 says, my heart says of you, seek his face. Your face, Lord, I will seek.

Seems like God gives the command, seek my face. And it's an invitation to David and his people. And so David responds because it's the one thing his heart desires, echoing verse 4, and he accepts God's invitation and says, your face, Lord, I will seek.

[20:20] So God is inviting David and all of his people into his presence. And so in verse 7 to 12 to the near the end, David's saying he wants a deep experience of God.

Because there's a difference between knowing about God and knowing God, isn't there? You can know about God, but still never really know God.

You can know about him, but still never cry out to him in prayer and be in a relationship with him.

Think about it. If you're going to have a real relationship with somebody, it's got to be face-to-face, hasn't it?

I think that's why Facebook is so misleading because it doesn't give you face-to-face relationships. I'm sure we've all got hundreds and hundreds of friends on Facebook, but just think how many of those friends are actually real friends.

People who you see face-to-face, who you have a genuine relationship with. My kids tell me that Facebook is for old people like me and Snapchat is what people are into.

[21 : 28] But whether it's Facebook or whether it's Snapchat, if you don't have that face-to-face interaction, then it is not a real relationship, is it? So a relationship with God means we long for his presence.

And that's why David prays in verse 9, 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.

What he's saying is I want to know, God, that you are with me. I want to experience you. And he knows that when he's in relationship with God, God will never abandon him.

So verse 10, he says, Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me. So he takes the strongest of human relationships, that between parents and children, to express how God's relationship with his people is even stronger than this.

But David's not just praying here to save his own skin. Verse 11, he says, Teach me your way, Lord. Lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. So he's saying that he doesn't just want to know God's will.

[22 : 40] He wants to walk in God's way. Where's the way of the Lord found? Well, it's found in the word of the Lord. So David wants God to teach him how he should live.

Because when we are devoted to God, we don't just want to experience God, but we want to obey God. It's not one or the other. Because the desire to meditate on God's word will help us to see his beauty and experience his presence.

And that will help us to walk in the Lord's way. Because when we see the beauty of the Lord from the word of the Lord, then we will want to go in the way of the Lord.

And so just as the psalm begins with confidence, so in verse 13 and 14 it ends with confidence. I will remain confident of this. I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait for the Lord. Be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. So presumably David's circumstances haven't changed at all. His enemies are still there and they still want to kill him.

[23 : 49] But he says to himself, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. Because when you know the Lord and you're devoted to him and you understand his goodness, then you can wait with patience rather than panic with fear.

Because we wait by dwelling in God's presence and by gazing on his beauty. And when we make this the one thing that we seek in life, then we can be confident.

Well, how? Because of Jesus Christ. Since the words of Psalm 27 are also his words. So the Psalm applies to David because he wrote it, but it also applies to Jesus because he experienced it.

So Jesus himself can lay claim to every line of this Psalm. Because when he prayed it, the longing to dwell in the house of the Lord describes the desire of Jesus to have this intimate relationship and fellowship with his Father all the days of his life here on earth.

And Jesus echoed David's confidence in God when his enemies wanted him dead. And yet Jesus faced even greater hostility than David did. We know that.

[25 : 10] Jesus was handed over to his foes and false witnesses rose up against Jesus sprouting malicious accusations. Verse 12. And then they crucified him.

And Hebrews 5 verse 7 tells us during the days of Jesus' life on earth he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death and he was heard. So Jesus didn't fear. He was confident. Confident he would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Verse 13.

How would he see it? Well he would see it when he rose from death. And so when the psalm says in verse 10 though my father and mother forsake me the Lord will receive me it is only through Jesus that we can face anything.

Confident that God will never forsake us. Why can we be confident God will never forsake us? Because what did Jesus cry when he was dying on the cross? He cried out my God my God why have you forsaken me?

[26 : 19] And as Jesus died he was taking the forsakenness we deserve for our sins so that when we believe in God through him we know that God will never ever forsake us.

He will receive us. And so when we devote our lives to him we'll be able to draw confidence from Psalm 27 because through Jesus Christ it's for us.

A man called James Hannington discovered this. He was a missionary in Uganda and in 1885 at the age of 37 he was seized and he was then imprisoned.

On the day before he died a martyr's death he wrote this in his journal. He said October the 28th seventh day a terrible night first with noisy drunken guards and secondly with vermin.

I don't think I got one hour's sleep and woke with fever fast developing. O Lord do have mercy on me and release me. I am quite broken down and brought low comforted by reading the 27th Psalm.

[27 : 26] Fever developed very rapidly soon was delirious. So that was his situation and we've read about David's situation. So how could both be comforted with these words in Psalm 27?

how could they be confident despite what was going on? Only through devotion to God. And so whether in life or in death when you know God and you've entered into a relationship with him through Jesus Christ there is nothing to fear in life or in death.

And so seek God and you will find him in Jesus Christ and in finding Jesus Christ you will discover ultimate security. Jesus brings us into a relationship with God.

God becomes our Father and loves us as his children as he loved his own beloved son. And so now in Jesus Christ we can enjoy intimacy with God gaze on the beauty of the Lord and dwell in his presence.

And so this Psalm is far richer as we see it fulfilled in Jesus before we apply it to ourselves. And so as we devote ourselves to God these words become our prayer.

[28 : 52] And as Jesus prayed this Psalm so do we. Jesus says to us verse 13 wait for the Lord be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

How can you do that? because 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?

Let's pray. Thank you.