

# BELPRES CHURCH

## Sermon Title: Beauty of God

Pastor Annie Duncan

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**Scripture:** Psalm 27:1-6, 13-14

<sup>1</sup> 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?

<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>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 take heart and wait for the Lord.

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**Transcript:**

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It's good to be with y'all this morning. Good morning. Good morning. My name is Annie Duncan, I'm the executive pastor here. So good morning to y'all in person as well as online. It is a beautiful day to be in church together.

Last week, we finished up a sermon series on But, God, and next week we're going to kick off a new sermon series on Lead, but this week we are going to look at Psalm 27 and the beauty of God. The first couple of verses of Psalm 27 go like this, "The Lord is my light and salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? 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 wage out against me, even then I will be confident. 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."

So that's just the first couple of verses of Psalm 27, but already there's a lot going on. So King David, he's this king and he's got a lot coming at him, right? There's some enemies and some battles to fight, but despite all of that, King David says the one thing that I want, the one thing I desire, is to be with you God, to be in your house. Somehow God's beauty enables King David to hold his head up high despite his circumstances.

There's something about gazing on God's beauty that David names as his one thing, right? We hear it in verse four, "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 the temple." David's language here, it's a bit bold and it's a bit desperate. I'm asking God for one thing, just one thing, and this is it, to hang out with you, God, to be in your house.

Have you ever been desperate for God like that, for God's beauty? What is it about beauty that David names this as his one thing? Why is the beauty of God David's ultimate thing? Well, first thing we see is God's beauty is powerful, right? God's beauty is powerful. There's something about God's beauty that's so big and so awesome and so powerful that David's willing to put everything on the back burner because of it.

Now let's put this in a little bit of a Pacific Northwest context. How many of you have ever been driving on I-90 on a pretty, clear day, sun's out, and you experience mountain traffic? Come on, raise your hand if you've experienced mountain traffic.

You know what I'm talking about? It's when Mount Rainier is out in all of its beauty and glory and people just got to slow down their cars to get a good look at it. There's no wreck, there's no accident, it's just the mountain's out so people slow down. I've even seen somebody stop their car, pull over, get out, and start taking pictures. I mean, right there on the I-90 bridge, right?

To gaze upon the beauty of Mount Rainier, that's a little bit of what David's getting at here with God's beauty. It makes David want to slow down. It's so big and so powerful it takes his breath away and he just wants to breathe in it for a little bit.

But understanding that God's beautiful is not just this abstract thing. God's beauty is powerful, but God's beauty isn't abstract, it moves us to action. Sometimes when we look at Mount Rainier, that's all we do, right? We just look at it and we're like, oh, look the mountain's out. Yesterday, it wasn't, but today it is. Other times we look at Mount Rainier, it inspires us. It inspires us to say, I'm going to climb that mountain. Or it inspires us to say, I'm going to paint that mountain or take a selfie with that mountain, right? Similarly, David gazing on the beauty of God, it's not passive, but it's active and it inspires him to do some things.

We see this in verse eight. David says, "My heart says seek his face. Your face, Lord, I will seek." Being surrounded by God's beauty causes David to just want to hang out with God more and to seek his face. That means, in the Old Testament language, it is like being in your presence, God. God, I just want to be in your presence. I want to know you more. Let's just hang out all day.

So it's powerful. It's beautiful and it's powerful. God's beauty, it's not just informational and we don't just know it with our minds, but it's experiential, right? It's not just an abstract thought. We don't just believe in God's beauty, but we also get to experience it because it's all around us.

All right, I brought a little prop with me, so hang tight. Take this lovely delicious ooey gooey brownie, for example. Right? I can gaze upon the beauty of the brownie. I know that this is a brownie, I believe that it's a brownie, but this brownie is not just for me to believe in, this brownie is for me to experience, and it is a beautiful thing. I want to just take a bite, but then I do have to go on with the sermon. But keep this brownie in mind. We'll just put you here for now. Adrian's going to eat it later because he told me he would. Similarly, it's the same with God and God's beauty and presence. It's not just here for us to believe in, but it is here for us to experience because experiencing God's presence is a beautiful thing and it moves us to action.

So a couple of years ago I was hanging out with God just doing that, just hanging out with him, experiencing beauty and presence in my condo. I was all by myself. I had the whole day to myself and I had my Bible out, I had my journal handy, and I had

some worship music on, right? As I was hanging out with God, I was like, oh man, this is so good. I just love this. I asked God a question. I said, "God, what do you want to do right now?" Now I could have asked God a way deeper question, right? God, what is the ultimate purpose that you have me on this earth right now? But I didn't, I was just hanging out with my father and I was like, "God, what do you want to do right now?" The first thought that came into my mind was let's go for a walk and get a brownie.

I was like, "Well, that was way too easy. That's just what I want to do, God." So I listened again and I was like, "God, what do you want to do today? What do you want to do with me?" I immediately heard, "What makes you think I don't want to do what you want to do." Right? Is that a good father? It's Father's Day, how many good fathers are out there? Your daughter wants to go and get a brownie, do you say, "No, Annie, I just want you to sit on your couch and I want you to read your Bible and I want you to pray to me."? Right? No.

So I was like, "Okay, God." So we went for a walk and we got a brownie and every time I read the Psalm that says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good," I think about the time that God and I went for a walk to get a brownie. Because he's a good father, right?

Now, to be honest, I really was expecting God to say, "Stay there in your condo on your couch. I want you to learn more about me and I want you to read your Bible from Genesis to Revelation." Because I'm kind of conditioned to think that God wants me to do different things, but really he's just a good father. Amen? Amen. Okay. Hanging out with God that day and getting a brownie with him then made me, it inspired me, to want to read my Bible more, to want to pray and get to know God. I want to know and experience this beauty a little bit more.

When we experience the beauty of God and God's presence, it's a kind of beauty that truly satisfies and we get to understanding what David's getting at with him saying this is my one thing. This is it. This is my ultimate thing. So why is God's beauty David's ultimate thing? One, God's beauty is powerful. Two, God's beauty isn't abstract, but it moves us to action. Three, we need it. We need God's beauty in our lives.

Right before David talks about his one thing in verse four, he says, "When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it's my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear. The war rage out against me, even then I will be confident." Then right after verse four, David talks about the day of trouble. "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 upon a rock."

Why does David need God's beauty in his life? Well, just look at his living situation, right? He's a king, so he's got enemies coming at him left and right. In verses two and three they outline all of these bad things, and then in verse five with the day of trouble, we don't know what that is, but it can't be good either. Gazing on the beauty of God, it doesn't mean that our day of trouble goes away, but it means that we can be triumphant regardless.

Pastor Tim Keller says, "Gazing on the beauty of God enables you to face the rumble of panic underneath everything." I love how descriptive that is, the rumble of panic underneath everything. What's your rumble of panic that's underneath everything in your life?

I was talking to some good friends over the weekend and a word that kept on coming up over and over again was overwhelmed. I'm overwhelmed at work. I'm overwhelmed with my kids. I'm overwhelmed with everything that's going on in my family. I'm overwhelmed, right? So how do we cope? Do we throw our headphones in and just kind of be distracted by some cool music for a while? Or do we turn on Netflix and binge through a series? Do we phone a friend and vent? Do we open a bottle of wine and have a glass or two? There are a lot of things that we can do to cope, but coping looks like this, right? That's what coping looks like.

In Psalm 27, David is not coping, he is triumphant. In verse six, he says, "My head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me." That means my head's going to be lifted up. I'm going to be confident. "And at his sacred tent, I will sacrifice with shouts of joy. I will sing and make music to the Lord." What emoji goes in there, right? That's not a gritting your teeth emoji, that's a victory dance. Amen. Yeah.

In the midst of the rumble of panic underneath everything, we can still be victorious. So maybe you're thinking, yeah, right. Yeah, right. You don't know how overwhelmed I'm in. Or, Annie, you don't know the rumble of panic that exists in my life. You're right, I don't, but I know what it's been like for me and I know what it's been like for the people that I love in my family. So here's an example from my brother of how he experienced God's beauty and how he was triumphant regardless of the rumble of panic in his life.

So he was in college at the time and he was going through his own day of trouble. Maybe you remember this from your late teens to early twenties, there's just a lot of questions that you ask, like what should I do with my life? These are big questions that you're asking, right? What should I do? What college should I go to? Should I even go to college? Should I date somebody? Should I break up with somebody? Who am I going to marry? Where am I going to live? Should I move? Should I go to another country? Should I go across the world? What should I do, right? You're asking a lot of questions. We ask those questions all throughout our lives, but really in your late teens

and early twenties, you're just asking them at a very accelerated rate. So that was the state that my brother was in.

One night he couldn't sleep so he went out to his dorm lobby and he just sat there by himself in a chair kind of desperate. Desperate for something, right? He started to pray. I stopped by in the middle of the night because I attended the same college that he did. It's the middle of the night, no one ever sleeps in college, so I swung by in between other activities. Other activities, yeah, okay, that's not in my notes. Anyway, I swing by to see how he's doing and one of the first things he says to me is, "Annie, God loves me." I was like, "Yeah, I know." Really good sister, right?

He's like, "No, no, no, you don't understand. God's love is so real. He loves me." I could tell that my brother was having this really, really powerful moment in experiencing God's love, maybe for the first time experiencing it that powerfully. For my brother in that moment, God wasn't practical, God was beautiful. God was beautiful. More than my brother needed to know all of the answers to the questions he was asking, he needed to know that he had access to God's power, God's beauty, God's love, even in midst of asking all those questions.

When a coworker of mine found out that I was preaching on this Psalm she emailed me and she said, "That Psalm got me through my divorce 15 years ago." It's a Psalm that I had read at my wedding. My parents had it read at their wedding. I've read this Psalm at many funerals. Because what's so special about this Psalm is that it's a lifeline. Sandwiched in between all that we've got going on, sandwiched in between all of the battles, all of our enemies, all of the celebrations and divorces and overwhelmedness, sandwiched in between all of that, we have God's presence and beauty. It was a lifeline for David, it was his one thing, and it's a lifeline for us as well. God's beauty, it pulls us out of whatever moment we may be caught in and points us to something powerful and beautiful.

So if God's beauty was David's one thing that he asked for, where do we find it? Where do we go to find and access this kind of beauty? Well, we've got to go to the temple, right? We've got to go to the temple, we've got to be honest with God. We come with all of our baggage, all of the things that we're overwhelmed with, and we spend time with him and that's how we're forever changed because of it.

In Psalm 27, David names five places where he goes to seek the Lord: The house of the Lord, seek him in his temple, being kept safe in his dwelling, finding shelter in the sacred tent, and at his sacred tent, I will sacrifice. In David's context, people had to physically go somewhere in order to experience God's presence and God's beauty. Later on in Psalm 84, David says, "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere."

David had thousands of places he could have gone. We have thousands of places that we can go. But David's one thing, he kept on going back to God's presence, he kept on going back to the temple. Here on a Sunday morning with all of you, in person as well as online, it is such a great place to be in community, in worship with you all experiencing God's beauty and God's presence.

But unlike David, unlike David and David's time, it's not the only place that we find the temple. Because where is the temple of God today? It's us. Us. It's us. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst? What does it mean to go to the temple? It means that we carry God's spirit in us and so we can experience him wherever we are. In the ordinary everyday aspects of our lives, we have access to God's beauty and presence.

A couple of years ago, I taught a class at SPU and it was on spiritual disciplines. During the quarter, the students attending this class, they had to pick a spiritual discipline that they wanted to practice throughout the whole quarter. The only homework then aside from that was they had to turn in a one page, one sentence, one liner to me telling me how it was going, like how's it going practicing that spiritual discipline? A lot of students picked hearing God's voice as the practice that they were going to spend the whole quarter practicing.

At the beginning, when students would turn in their homework, the things that they were saying sounded something like this: I got up an hour early this morning and I practiced listening to God's voice. Then as the quarter went on, students turned in these kinds of responses: I'm still getting up early, but I'm really discouraged because I'm not hearing anything. Then something really cool happened towards the end of the quarter. Students started to turn in responses like I heard God's voice while I was walking to class, or God spoke to me while I was on the I-90 bridge, or while I was at work this week in a difficult situation, I felt God's peace and presence speak to me. So powerful.

The students, they started with really great intentions, right? Like getting up early to spend some quiet time with God. While that worked for some students, because it did it, didn't work for them all. For some reason, when we think about spending time with God and being in God's presence, we think that it needs to be done quietly, right? But God can speak to us in the quiet and the loud. He speaks to us wherever we are because we have access to him all the time. The thing that's so powerful about David's one thing that he asked for, to just be with God and to hang out in his temple, it's even more powerful for us because it's not locational for us, it's everywhere. We have access to God's presence wherever we are.

The greatest story...

This keeps on falling. Have you guys been noticing that? It keeps on falling down. I'm just going to bring it right up here. Sorry, AV.

The greatest story ever told is one that's filled with beauty. Filled with beauty. It's the story of God sacrificing his son so that he can hang out with us forever and so that the Holy Spirit can dwell inside of us. Jesus is the greatest portrayal of God's beauty. God's temple, now inside of us because of Jesus' sacrifice and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit inside of us so that we can be God's temple to all those around us and all those around us can be God's temple to us. Because of that, we get to see God's beauty at work everywhere, not just by going to the temple, but in the everyday aspects of our lives.

I will close with this. In seminary, I took a practical theology class. When we were talking about communion in that class, I remember the professor telling a story about serving communion to a woman who couldn't leave her home. She was home-bound. He went over to her home for the very first time to serve communion and he didn't know her whole story, but he did know that she was a bit elderly and he knew this funny fact about her, that the only phrase that she could say was, oh boy. How are you today? "Oh boy." It's really nice and sunny out, isn't it today? "Oh boy." So sweet.

So as he sat with her and started to get the elements ready to take communion, he just wasn't sure, does she know what's going on? Does she know why I'm here? But as he broke the bread and gave her the juice, tears started to stream down her face. The body and blood of Christ. "Oh boy." Broken and shed for you. "Oh boy."

When we experience God's beauty, we can't help but respond, right? We respond in so many different ways. We respond with tears in our eyes. We respond like Pastor Alexis, jumping up and down. We respond by wanting to hang out with God more because God's beauty is all around us.

So this week, BelPres, look for God's beauty in your life like a powerful mountain that inspires you to maybe want to climb it or a really delicious brownie that inspires you to want to eat it, bite after bite, and experience and taste and see how good it is. We get to live our lives like that, and the more we live our lives, we recognize our need for God's beauty in it and how much we see God's beauty around us. Oh boy.

So God, we thank you that no matter the obstacles or situations we find ourselves in, we always have access to your presence. Jesus, we thank you that you are the one that we can go to and cry out, we need a move. God, I'm not willing to move from this place until I experience your presence. God, you're such a good father that you



meet us right where we are. So God, thank you for that. Thank you for your son. Thank you for your spirit that encourages us and comforts us and inspires us. Jesus, we need you. Amen.

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**Discussion Questions:** Read Psalm 27:1-6, 13-14. Answer the following questions with your family, friends or All In group.

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**Opening Question:**

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions --** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions –** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- When is the last time something beautiful took your breath away? Have you ever had that experience with God, and God's beauty taking your breath away? Why/why not?
- In Psalm 27, David isn't just coping with his circumstances, but triumphant over them. Can you think of an example when you've felt victorious despite "the day of trouble" (vs. 5)?

**Closing Question and Application:**

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?