

# BELPRES CHURCH

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## **Scripture:**

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### **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—  
of whom shall I be afraid?

<sup>2</sup> When the wicked advance against me  
to devour<sup>[a]</sup> 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 says of you, "Seek his 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 take heart  
and wait for the Lord.

**Transcript:**

Well, hello. Good to have all of you here. Thank you for joining us. Those of you in the room, as well as those of you who are joining us online, thanks for being here.

The Scripture today comes from Psalm 27, "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? Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear. The war breakout against me, even then, I will be confident. One thing I ask from the Lord, and 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. 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. My heart says of you, 'Seek his face.'" Your face, lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger because you have been my helper. Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me. I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

Holy Spirit, help us live the words of this text through your power. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, when I was going to ask my wife to marry me, I was nervous about whether or not I could make it romantic, because I am not a romantic person. I sort of armed myself with dinner reservations at a fancy French restaurant and a quote from Shakespeare. I was going to ask her to marry me before dinner, so I also brought some cheese and crackers, because she gets really grouchy when she gets hungry and I didn't want her to say, no, because she was hungry. But I'm not sure it worked, because I'm not sure that, "Here eat a cracker. Will you marry me?" was the romantic vibe she was hoping for, which may explain why she now writes romance novels to compensate for her disappointment. I hope that's not the case, but you never know. But the Shakespeare quote, the crackers, they gave me confidence to ask her.

Where do you need confidence? What situations do you face where you need courage and you need confidence? Maybe it's an exciting opportunity. Maybe it's a good thing, but it requires confidence to do it, a new job, a new business venture, ask someone out on a date, ask someone to marry you. It's exciting, but it takes confidence. Or maybe you're facing a relationship or a health or a financial or career or school problem, and you don't know where you're going to get the confidence to deal with it, or maybe it's finding confidence to do the things God calls us to do, to get out of our comfort zone and live a bigger life, a bolder life as we partner with him in his rescue mission. Where do you get courage and confidence to do the things you have to do?

Well, the text I just read, you're in church, this answer is not going to surprise you. The text says it comes from God and we access that through prayer, but that can be challenging sometimes, right, because I don't know about you, but sometimes when I pray my mind wanders. I know, right? Does that ever happen to any of you or it doesn't feel like anything is happening? Not all the time, but sometimes when I pray it's like I'm not experiencing anything. I pray for courage. I don't feel more courageous. Part of the reason for that, I think, is because our understanding of prayer is way too small. It's like we're paddling around in a canoe and God is offering us a ride on a yacht. Biblical prayer gives us courage and confidence and hope and joy and exhilaration. That's why this summer we're going to be doing a sermon series on the Psalms, which is that book right in the middle of the Bible.

The Psalms are two things. They are songs that would've been sung in the temple during worship services in the temple, but not the way we probably picture it, because back then worship would've been very, very noisy. The Psalms contain instructions to shout for joy or shout to the Lord and those are literal instructions. The instruments were symbols and tambourines. They talk about dancing. Worship in the temple would've been really loud with a lot of shouting, a lot of dancing and a lot of loud instruments. If you want to know what worship in the temple looked like, go to New Hope Revival this afternoon at one o'clock, see how Africans worship and you will have an understanding of how worship was done in the temple.

The second thing the Psalms are is they are all prayers. They show us a lot of different ways to pray because most of our prayers, mine included, come down to two things, right, help and thank you. God, help, help, help, help, fix this, fix that, help me, help me, help me, and then every once in a while, oh, by the way, thank you. That's fine. It is okay to ask God for things. He tells us to ask him for things. It's fine to do that. It's just that there's so much more to prayer that we're missing out on. There's so much more depth to it than we experience. All this year we have been talking about what it means to be not just a churchgoer, but a disciple, someone who is becoming like Jesus. We've said there are six characteristics of a disciple. One of those characteristics is to obey Jesus as Lord through prayer and scripture. Prayer is key. This summer we're going to talk about all the different ways to pray because there are nine different types of Psalms in the Book of Psalms. Each of these nine different Psalms are also simultaneously nine different ways to pray. You may want to take a picture of the screen. There are Psalms of praise. Those aren't just a thank you God for this. Psalms of praise answer the question, fill in the blank, Jesus, what's great about you is... That's a psalm of praise or adoration. There are psalms of lament, where these are prayers where

we complain to God, get mad at God, yell at God, whine to God, prayers of lament. Psalms of thanksgiving, that's prayers where we thank God.

Psalms of confidence, prayer for confidence that is based not in our circumstances, but on God's character. That's what we're going to talk about today. Five, kingship psalms, prayers for the ideal earthly king, but also about the perfection of God's kingship over us. It's also a model for how we can pray for our country. Six, psalms of remembrance, prayers where we remember what God has done in the past, which gives us confidence for the future. Seven, psalms of wisdom, prayers where we ask for God's wisdom. Eight, psalms of confession and repentance, and then finally nine, imprecatory psalms. These are the fun ones. These are the prayers that call down God's wrath and God's destruction and God's curses on people we don't like. You're really going to want to be here for that week.

This summer we're going to talk about the nine different kinds of psalms. They each show us a different way to pray. Starting today with Psalm 27, which I just read, which is a psalm of confidence. The word shows up twice in the Psalm. Confidence to handle the things that come our way. Confidence to live a bigger, bolder life that God calls us to. Remember, this psalm probably wouldn't have been read or recited, it would've been shouted during worship. I'm not going to shout, but just picture me, imagine me shouting, "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?" The writer is King David, and he uses the word, afraid, twice. What that means is he's afraid. Do you like the depths of my analysis of this text. Three years in seminary to learn how to do that. It's not easy. He's afraid. He goes on, "Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear. Though war breakout against me, even then I will be," there's that word, let's all say it together, "confident."

Now, none of us have an army coming after us, but sometimes the challenges we face in life can feel like an army. But notice, he uses the word, though, in these verses, "Though an army come against me." These aren't things that are happening. These are things that might happen. Do you ever do that? Do you ever worry about things that aren't happening, but worry about things that might happen? It's like if you're sick in some way, or if you have some kind of physical ailment, what is the worst thing you can do? Google it, right? Oh, my big toe hurts. Wonder what that is, Google? Oh my god, I'm going to die, right? That's kind of what's going on here. He's imagining the worst things that could possibly happen.

Part of the reason he's doing that is because any philosophy of life that does not take into account how hard, how evil things can get is a phony philosophy, and the Bible doesn't do phony. The Bible does fierce realism, and so David is saying, "No matter what happens, no matter what I face, an army may come after me, my friends may reject me, I may lose my

job, I may have exploding toe syndrome and my big toe, rats might eat me while I'm asleep, it could happen, but no matter what happens, no matter what happens, I can be confident. Why? Because the Lord is my light. My job is not my light. My friends aren't my light. My kids aren't my light. My health isn't my light. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom then shall I fear?"

Notice what he does not do to feel confident. He does not ask God to change his circumstances. Instead, he 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." In the original Hebrew, the phrase for one thing is in the emphatic form, so what he's saying is one thing, just one. I just want one thing, not two, not three, not 10, one thing and one thing only will fill me with confidence, hope, courage and joy, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. By that, he doesn't mean he's going to hang out in the temple 24/7.

He's saying there's only one thing that will give me true confidence that can never be taken away and that is a close connection to the living God. All the other things we want, good job, good spouse, good school, good grades, those are all really good things, but if I'm living for those things, if I'm putting my hope in those things, if I'm basing my confidence in those things, they will not give me indestructible courage and confidence. Instead, they will enslave me. If I live for the approval of others, I'm going to always be worried about how I'm being perceived, worry about my looks, my clothes. I won't have the courage to do the right thing if it's going to upset people because I'm enslaved to what they think about me. Even if something as good as my kids, if that's what I'm living for, if that's where I'm putting my hope and my confidence, then I'm going to see them as extensions of myself. I'm going to try to control every aspect of their lives and they'll end up resenting me for it.

Relationships, school, job, all good things, but if they are more important to us than God, they do not give us confidence. They give us the reverse. They give us stress, and they give us worry, and they give us fear because we know we're basing our hope and our confidence on something that can and almost certainly will disappoint us and can be taken away. Behind all of our worries is a false God. Behind all of our worries there's a false God, so follow your worries and you will find the false gods that enslave you. The only thing that gives us indestructible confidence and courage and joy, the only thing that can never be taken away is connection to the living God. David says, "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face.' Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me." He uses the word, face, three times, because face is how we recognize each other. Face is a symbol of relationship. He's not asking God for things. He's asking God for his presence.

The purpose of prayer is not to get something, but to be with someone. Again, it is good to ask God for things. That is a good thing to do. It's just that there's more. The only thing that gives us permanent confidence is to experience God's presence, not think about it, not know about it, experience it. David says he wants to dwell in the house of the Lord, gaze on the beauty of the Lord. Dwell and gaze are not intellectual, theological words. He's not saying, "I want to gaze at the eschatological and sociological implications of the Parousia." He's not asking for that, shockingly enough. He's saying, "I want to be with you, God." He wants an experience of the presence and power of God that gives us confidence to face an army. Now, as I said earlier, that doesn't always happen when we pray, right? We don't always pray, "God, give me courage," and, poof, we have courage all of a sudden. God make me confident, poof, we're confident. It doesn't always work that way. We see that in the text, as well. David starts out very confident, "The Lord is my light. Whom shall I fear?" But then just a few verses later, he's saying, "Do not turn your servant away in anger. Do not reject me or forsake me," which means somewhere in his head is a fear that God's going to reject him. Even in the middle of his prayer, his fear pops up. If you pray and you don't immediately feel confidence, you are in good company, because in this prayer, David is in conversation with God. It's a back and forth. The Lord is my light. Whom shall I fear? I'm afraid. I'm afraid I'm going to be rejected. Back and forth, back and forth, and he keeps at it. I think sometimes we don't experience the power of prayer because we give up too quickly when nothing happens.

One of my pastor friends says that one day a man in his church said to him, "Pastor, the Bible says that we should preach, teach and heal. Pastor, you preach and you teach, but you don't heal." My friend said, "Well, I've tried that before, but nothing ever happens." The guy said, "Well, nothing ever happens when you preach either, but that doesn't stop you." Prayer is a conversation and we can't give up just because nothing happens at first. So, pray. Listen for those thoughts that come from God, or memories, or a scripture verse that pops in your head, a picture, a song lyric, that's God talking to you. A woman I know says that one period in her life she prayed Psalm 51, which asked for a new heart. She prayed that psalm every single day for a year. She said, over the course of that year, her heart began to change and heal from a broken heart of having lost her dad, having her dad die. She kept at it.

That's what David does in this Psalm, back and forth, back and forth conversation with God until finally he says, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me." Through having this conversation with God, he finally realizes it is not in God's character to reject anybody and it shouldn't be in ours, either. It is only in God's character to never leave

us. When he realizes that, then he says, "I remain confident," there's that word again, "of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

After a back and forth conversation with God, he finds confidence, not based in his own goodness, not based on his circumstances, not based on his GPA, not based on his job title, not based on his kids, not based on who he's married to, not based on his circumstances at all. His hope is not in his circumstances. His hope is in the unchanging character of God who will always show us his goodness in the land of the living. Even if the worst happens, he will be with me. He will bring good out of it, and he is so powerful, his presence gives us confidence and courage.

It's like a story I once heard about a mom who was tucking in her little six-year-old boy to bed during a thunderstorm. The little boy said, "The thunder is scaring me. I'm afraid. Mom, will you sleep in my room tonight?" The mom said, "I can't. I have to sleep with your dad." After a minute, the boy said, "Oh, all right, the big chicken." We are all big chickens, at least sometimes about some things, but in the presence of God, we can face what we have to face. I said, especially, if we have the presence of a powerful parent with us, and that's what God is.

I said earlier, David uses the word, face, three times. I think what he's getting at is we have confidence to face the things we have to face when we look in the face of God. God does have a face, because God came himself in the person of Jesus so that we could know him better and know what he's like. He died to pay the price for our sins that were standing in the way of us and close connection to God. He solved our estrangement problem and he sent the Holy Spirit to live inside of us and provide us with that close personal connection. That is the one thing, it is the only thing that provides indestructible confidence because it can never be taken away.

Then practically speaking, practically speaking, how do we do this, because we don't always experience his presence? Well, first thing would be expand our prayer life to these nine different ways to pray. Come this summer, and if you miss a week, then watch it online, because we're going to talk about these nine different kinds of psalms that are nine different ways to pray. Because when our prayer life expands beyond help and thank you, we experience more of the power of God. Pray in different ways. Pray out loud. That often helps prayers seem more real. Pray with other people. Pray with your eyes open. Do you know that there is actually no verse in the Bible that says you have to close your eyes when you pray? You can pray with your eyes open. Often, I am more engaged if I keep my eyes open.



Then specifically this week, pray prayers of praise. Those are the prayers where we say, "Jesus, what's great about you is... Jesus, what's great about you is you bring good out of bad. What's great about you is you never leave us. You always pursue us. You make a way where there is no way." This week, spend five minutes every day writing a list of what's great about Jesus. I believe if you do that every day, you'll feel at least a little more confident by the end of the week, and then, just keep at it. Don't give up. Just keep at it. A friend of mine talks about a time when she was 10 weeks pregnant. The day that they were going to tell everyone that she was pregnant, she started bleeding. She went to the doctor and found out that she had a cyst that was growing. The doctor said that usually people that had the cyst, they usually lose the baby. She went home and she and her husband prayed and prayed, and then a week later, she went back to the doctor and the cyst had stopped growing, but it was still there. They couldn't operate on it, remove it, without endangering the baby. The doctor said, "Well, it's in God's hands now. We'll just have to see what happens."

She went back to work, and as she was driving over the 520 bridge, she started to pray with her eyes open, because she was driving. She got this thought that she knew was from God that said, "This baby is in my hands." She said at first, she just felt so irritated because, what does that mean? There's no... What does that mean? The baby's in my hands. It didn't mean that things were going to turn out okay. But she kept praying, and she said a few minutes later, she felt this surge of courage and confidence, not that the circumstances were going to turn out the way that she hoped, but in that moment, Jesus became the one thing she was focused on, and that gave her courage and confidence because he was the one thing she could never lose. That gave her the ability to trust, keyword, trust, that no matter what happened, he was with her and he would bring good out of any circumstance. That confidence and that courage stayed with her through the weeks and months ahead, and she could go into her future with courage and confidence.

Now, I know you probably are wondering, how did the story end? Did she have the baby? I'm not going to tell you, because the point of the story was not in how it turned out, but the courage and confidence she had no matter how things turned out. If it's really going to drive you crazy all week, then ask me after the service and I'll tell you how it ended. But the point is that through prayer, Jesus can become our one thing. He is the one thing that can never be taken away. Even after we die, we only get closer to him. When he is the only thing, when our hope is built on him and nothing else, then we don't just say, then we don't just recite, then we don't just read, then we will shout at the top of our lungs, "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom then shall I fear? Whom then shall I fear?"

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Jesus, make it so for us. Jesus, help us experience your presence. Help us experience your power. Jesus, help us know that you are with us no matter what happens, so that we can be brave and bold and courageous, the way you were brave and bold and courageous. Jesus, you have been good to us. Help us to recount that goodness. Help us to remember that goodness. Lord, this week help us to be able to complete the sentence, what's great about you, Jesus, is there's so many things that are great about you. Lord, meet us, guide us, give us your courage. Help us to know you're real. In your name, Jesus. Amen.

## **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last's week's sermon and scripture...How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and 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?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

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

- On a scale of 1 to 10 do you approach God more because he's useful (1) or beautiful (10)? Explain.
- What helps you make God the most important thing in your life?

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

**Closing Group Prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.