

How to Deal With Worry

A Study of Psalm 27

Characteristic of Completeness: Faith

Big Idea: To sink your fears, seek His face.

Related Scriptures: Psalm 18:2, 28; 28:7; Isaiah 49:15; Jeremiah 15:15-16; Micah 7:7-8; John 8:12; 15:4-5; Romans 8:31-39; Hebrews 4:15-16; 13:5-6

Introduction:

- A. It started in junior high school. Sometimes my hands would get many little deep blisters on them and then the skin would crack and peel off. My doctor thought that I might be allergic to mahogany wood, so I had to wear some embarrassing, sweaty gloves in wood shop class, while I crafted my book ends and a coffee table.

But the gloves didn't help. My mom finally took me to a dermatologist who diagnosed the problem rather quickly. He said it was stress. And sure enough, I noticed the peeling did seem to coincide with particularly stressful circumstances. That was the first clear warning I can remember that I am a person prone to worry.

Perhaps you can relate. In fact, maybe you're worried about something this morning.

1. Maybe you're worried about your financial situation.
2. Maybe you're worried about your job.
3. Maybe you're worried that you'll never find a spouse.
4. Maybe you're worried about someone who has turned against you—a coworker, a boss, a relative, a spouse.
5. Maybe you're worried about your health.
6. Maybe you're worried about how your kids are going to turn out.
7. Or for that matter, maybe you're worried about how *you* have turned out.

- B. This morning, I want to turn to the Bible to learn how to deal with worry. I want to better understand how to cope with anxiety and fear. We're going to be using Psalm 27 as our primary biblical text for study.

- C. The ► superscription indicates that Psalm 27 was written by a guy named David. Right up front, I want to try to encapsulate what I think God inspired David to tell us about how to deal with worry. If I were to boil down this entire message to one ► big idea, here's what I'd say: To sink your fears, seek His face. That is, if you want to fight

your fears, if you want to attack your anxiety, if you want to declare war on your worry, then you must seek God's face.

How do you seek His face? I believe Psalm 27 gives us four interrelated ways to seek His face. These four parts of seeking God's face serve as the outline of this message. All four relate to faith, and as such, ► Faith is our Characteristic of Completeness for the week.

- I. Let's discover the first part of seeking God's face as represented in the first three verses of Psalm 27, which constitute the first strophe or section of this poem. It says:

^{NAU} Psalm 27:

- 1 ► The LORD is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the defense of my life;
Whom shall I dread?
- 2 ► When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,
My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.
- 3 Though a host encamp against me,
My heart will not fear;
Though war arise against me,
In *spite of* this I shall be confident.

- A. In ► Verse 1, David asks good questions: "Whom shall I fear? . . . Whom shall I dread?"
1. The words, ► "fear" and "dread" are synonyms that emphasize both the intellectual and emotional aspects of the concept of worry.
 - a. The word, "fear" comes from the Hebrew word, *yare*. It is the ► intellectual anticipation of bad things. To be sure, emotions can be included, but unique to this word is the intellectual dimension, as distinct from the emotional.¹
 - b. The word, "dread" comes from the Hebrew word, *pahad*. This strong word conveys pure ► emotion. It is the terror-and-trembling dimension of worry.
 - c. These two words give us the anatomy of worry. There is an intellectual component that anticipates bad things, and there is an emotional component that frightens us. Often the two go together, but they don't have to. For example, one can intellectually anticipate a specific bad thing, but not really dread it emotionally. Conversely,

¹ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. "יָרָא," (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), hereinafter referred to as TWOT.

one can experience the emotion of dread or anxiety without intellectually anticipating anything bad in particular. I suspect that's why I can feel anxious and fearful long after the reality of stressful circumstances has passed.

2. In ► Verses 2 and 3, David proceeds to name the things that could be a source of worry to him. There are ► “evildoers,” “adversaries,” “enemies,” “a host,” and “war.” We ► can add to the list, “foes” and “false witnesses” from Verses 11 and 12.

Notice that it's people who are worrisome to David. All these words describe people. To be sure other things can be worrisome—things like illness or financial hardship—and the things we'll learn apply to these problems, too. But for David, his problem is people. In particular, certain kinds of people are worrisome. The words he uses characterize them.

- a. They have bad motives and do bad things. That's why he calls them, ► “evildoers.”
 - b. They are out to get him. They are against him. That's why he calls them ► “adversaries” and “enemies.”
 - c. They apparently are formidable and have him outnumbered. Notice the descriptions are plural, and he calls them ► “a host,” with which he is at “war,” suggesting they are many.
 - d. They are watching and waiting for him to stumble. The word, ► “foes” in Verse 11 literally means insidious watchers. They are those who lie in ambush, just waiting and watching for the opportunity to pounce.
 - e. And, they spread slanderous lies. That's why he calls them ► “false witnesses” in Verse 12. They break promises. They deceive. They deny the truth.
3. Sounds like David has good reasons to worry. Ever faced people who do not have your best interest at heart? People who are out to harm you. People who manufacture the truth, seeking to exonerate themselves, while casting you in a bad light. People who stab you in the back and betray you. I confess, I worry about these kinds of people.

And notice in ► Verse 2 that, for David, it's not *if* he encounters such people, it's *when* he does. It's inevitable.

- B. ► How does David deal with these worrisome people? He sinks his fears by seeking God's face. And, he seeks God's face first of all by taking a ► confident perspective. That's the first part of seeking God's face: a confident perspective—a confident perspective that is tied firmly to the truth about who God is—a confident perspective that compares how big his problems are to how big God is—a confident perspective that's grounded in the character and person of God.

Let's look at what David says about the character of God.

1. In ► Verse 1, David says, "The LORD is my light." Light is a biblical symbol for almost everything that is positive. Light symbolizes the truth², goodness³, joy⁴, and vitality⁵. Here, God is the light that dispels the darkness of the enemy. And, He does it for David personally. David says "The LORD is ► *my* light."

This truth is confirmed elsewhere in the Scriptures. For example, Psalm 18:28 ► says,

^{NAU} Psalm 18:28 For You ► light my lamp; The LORD my ► God illumines my darkness.

The Lord is my light.

2. In ► Verse 1 of our text, David also says, "The LORD is . . . my salvation." We often associate salvation with the forgiveness of sins and going to heaven, but here salvation simply means deliverance from or victory over real enemies on earth. And, again, it's personal. David says, "The LORD is . . . ► *my* salvation."

Other Scriptures speak of this kind of salvation. For example, Psalm 18:2 ► says,

^{NAU} Psalm 18:2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

The Lord is my light *and* my salvation.

3. In ► Verse 1, David also says, "The LORD is the defense of my life." He is a refuge and a shield.

² Psalm 43:3

³ Isaiah 5:20

⁴ Psalm 97:11

⁵ Psalm 36:9

Other Scriptures reiterate this truth. For example, Psalm 28:7 ► says,

^{NAU} Psalm 28:7 The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart exults, And with my song I shall thank Him.

The Lord is my light *and* my salvation *and* my defense. That's who God is.

4. And, it is because of who the Lord is that David can say in ► Verse 3, "I shall be confident." This is not some kind of self-centered optimism. It is a God-centered assurance. The Hebrew word for "confident" means "to trust, to be secure, to have assurance."⁶

So, the first part of seeking God's face is to have a confident perspective that's grounded in the character and person of God. And this is important because, too often, I ground my confidence in the shifting sand of my own resourcefulness or the expectation that circumstances will improve soon. But the truth is, I can be absolutely confident about just one thing: the character and person of God.

- II. There is a ► second part of seeking God's face that is represented in Verses 4 through 6. Let me read those verses.

^{NAU} Psalm 27:

- 4 ► One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD
And to meditate in His temple.
- 5 ► For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle;
In the secret place of His tent He will hide me;
He will lift me up on a rock.
- 6 ► And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me,
And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.

- A. I want you to notice that David has a singular ► purpose in the midst of his worrisome circumstances. That's the second part of seeking God's face: having a singular purpose. He says in Verse 4, ► "One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek." One thing. One Bible scholar describes this as, "one of the most single-minded statements of purpose to be found anywhere in the Old Testament."⁷

⁶ Charles R. Swindoll, *Living Beyond the Daily Grind, Book 1*, (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1988), 99.

⁷ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19*, David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Baker, eds. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 232.

What exactly is the singular purpose? He says it's, ► “that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life . . .” He wants to dwell in the house of the LORD everyday.

1. Notice the different words David uses for the Lord's dwelling place. In Verse 4, he calls it ► His house and His temple. In Verse 5, he calls it ► His tabernacle and His tent.

Does this mean that God resides in a certain building and David wanted to go park there for the rest of his life? No. His house, His temple, His tabernacle, and His tent are metaphorical places of contact with the Lord. And to dwell in the house of the Lord is a figure of speech that means to live in God's presence.

2. Well, what exactly does it mean to live in God's presence? Inasmuch as God is everywhere all at once, aren't we all living in God's presence? Not exactly. You see, living in God's presence is not a theological idea relating to omnipresence; it's a relational idea relating to fellowship. It has to do with experiencing a close relationship with God. David is saying that he wants a close relationship with the Lord every day. He wants to seek His face. That is his singular purpose, particularly in the context of adversity and worry.⁸

- B. What is the one thing you set your mind to do in worrisome circumstances? Work harder? . . . Escape? . . . Defend yourself? . . . Retreat? . . . Eat? . . . Recruit supporters? . . . Figure it out? . . . Avoid conflict? . . . Talk on the phone? . . . Negotiate a deal? . . . Sleep?

As good as these options may seem, they are not to be our primary focus. David set his mind on one thing. To seek His face. To dwell in His house. To live in His presence. And it makes perfect sense. If the only sure ground of my confidence is the Lord, then I would do well to make seeking His face my singular purpose.

- C. (Results)

1. David says in Verse 4 that his singular focus on seeking God's face will allow him to ► “behold the beauty of the LORD / And to meditate in His temple.” The beauty of the LORD refers to His delightfulness and pleasantness.⁹
2. David also says in ► Verse 5 that, in the context of seeking God's face, ► “He will conceal me,” “He will hide me,” and “He will lift me up.”

⁸ The New Testament parallel for dwelling in the house of the Lord is abiding in Christ (John 15:4-5).

⁹ Donald Williams, *Psalms 1-72, Mastering the Old Testament*, vol. 13, Lloyd J. Ogilvie, ed. (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1986), 210.

► So, the first part of seeking God’s face is to have a confident perspective. The second part is to have a singular purpose.

III. The ► third part of seeking God’s face is to engage in a passionate ► pursuit of God, in keeping with the singular purpose. It’s to seek the Lord fervently, to go all out.

A. And, part of the passionate pursuit is passionate prayer. ► Verses 7 through 12 of our text constitute David’s passionate prayer to God. As I read the verses, notice the boldness with which David asks for God’s help. I’ll underline the directives as I read.

^{NAU} Psalm 27:

- 7 ► Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice,
And ► be gracious to me and ► answer me.
- 8 *When You said, “Seek My face,”* my heart said to You,
“Your face, O LORD, I shall seek.”
- 9 ► Do not hide Your face from me,
► Do not turn Your servant away in anger;
You have been my help;
► Do not abandon me ► nor forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
- 10 ► For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
But the LORD will take me up.
- 11 ► Teach me Your way, O LORD,
And ► lead me in a level path
Because of my foes.
- 12 ► Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries,
For false witnesses have risen against me,
And such as breathe out violence.

In these ► six verses, David issues ten directives to the Lord. ► “Hear.” ► “Be gracious.” ► “Answer me.” ► “Do not hide.” ► “Do not turn.” ► “Do not abandon.” ► “Do not forsake.” ► “Teach me.” ► “Lead me.” ► “Do not deliver me over.” That’s passionate!¹⁰

A passionate pursuit involves passionate prayer.

B. ► Another part of the passionate pursuit of God is the passionate search of the Scriptures. ► Verse 11 of our text says,

^{NAU} Psalm 27:11 Teach me Your way, O LORD . . .

The word ► “teach” here comes from the same Hebrew root from which the word *torah* is derived. The word, *torah*, is used to describe some type of instruction, or a set

¹⁰ This is in keeping with other Scriptures, like Hebrews 4:15-16, that encourage us to boldly and passionately seek help from the Lord.

of rules, or even a way of life handed down from one person to another. *Torah* is the comprehensive term for God's revealed will, and squarely within the idea of *torah* is the written Word of God we know as the Bible.

So, when David says, "Teach me Your way" I believe he has in mind the written Word of God. Indeed, he probably has in hand the written *torah*, and is asking God to teach him as he studies it.

David is not alone. Jeremiah was a prophet whose life was filled with misunderstanding and persecution. Jeremiah "encountered more opposition from more enemies than any other Old Testament prophet."¹¹ He knew what it was like to be in worrisome situations. Listen to his passionate prayer in ► Jeremiah 15:15:

^{NAU} Jeremiah 15:15 You who know, O LORD, Remember me, take notice of me,
And take vengeance for me on my persecutors. Do not, in view of Your
patience, take me away; Know that for Your sake I endure reproach.

Here, he's passionately praying for God's help. Now, look what he says to God in the very ► next verse:

^{NAU} Jeremiah 15:16 Your words were found and I ate them, And Your words
became for me a joy and the delight of my heart . . .

Jeremiah is passionately pursuing God's Word as a means of seeking God's face in the midst of his worrisome situation. Notice the strong poetic language. He ate God's words. He chewed them. He savored them. He swallowed them. And, they became his joy and his delight. He passionately pursued God's Word.

- C. ► What is your response to worrisome situations? What do you do? Sometimes my natural inclination is to do everything but pursue God passionately. I want to pursue a solution passionately. I want to pursue the enemy passionately. I want pursue relief passionately. But, do I want to pursue God passionately through prayer and the Scriptures? That does not come naturally.

I am deeply grateful for the things I learned in seminary. And, many of the things I learned were not academic. I remember one class session in which the professor became very vulnerable. At home, his wife had a life-threatening illness. At work, there was interpersonal conflict. And, he was struggling with his own health. He said he was having a hard time sleeping. But, the thing I'll always remember is how he spent his sleepless nights. He said to us, with tears welling in his eyes, "I am having some of the richest times with the Lord that I can remember as I read through the psalms in the middle of the night."

¹¹ Charles L. Feinberg, "Jeremiah," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 360.

- D. Our approach to God in time of trouble—our passionate pursuit of God’s face through praying and searching the Scriptures—should be like our approach to a perfectly loving father. We should run to Him and cry out to Him. ► Verse 10 is particularly poignant in this regard. It says,

^{NAU} Psalm 27:10 For my father and my mother have forsaken me . . .

It appears that somehow David’s earthly father and mother have forsaken him. To forsake means to leave, desert, or abandon. Perhaps they died and in that way left him. Or worse, perhaps they rejected David somehow. Regardless, the pain and anxiety of abandonment can be excruciating. Some of you know what I mean. Perhaps your spouse has abandoned you. Perhaps a dear friend has been lost. Perhaps a business partner has turned against you.

Whatever the case, take comfort in the second line of Verse 10. It says,

^{NAU} Psalm 27:10 . . . But the LORD will take me up.

The phrase, ► “will take me up” is a Hebrew idiom for a father lifting up his child with the intent of providing for his needs.¹² What a beautiful picture of God’s loyal love. God affirms it when He says in ► Isaiah 49:15:

^{NAU} Isaiah 49:15 “Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.”

► So, the first part of seeking God’s face is to have a confident perspective. The second part is to have a singular purpose. The third part is to engage in a passionate pursuit of God’s face.

- IV. The ► fourth and final part of seeking God’s face is to exercise courageous ► patience. After having a confident perspective, a singular purpose, and a passionate pursuit, *then* we are to simply wait for the Lord. David says in ► Verses 13 and 14,

^{NAU} Psalm 27:

13 *I would have despaired* unless I had believed that I would see
the goodness of the LORD

In the land of the living.

14 Wait for the LORD;

Be strong and let your heart take courage;

Yes, wait for the LORD.¹³

¹² Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1991), 246.

¹³ Verse 14 can be taken several ways. It can be taken as David speaking to himself. It can be taken as David addressing anyone in a similarly worrisome situation. Or, it can be taken as an answer from God in

- A. The Hebrew word translated, ► “wait” is *qavah*. It means “the straining of the mind in a certain direction in an expectant attitude.”¹⁴ Its original meaning was to stretch or twist. Over time it was used to convey the idea of the tension of enduring or waiting.¹⁵ So, the biblical idea of waiting involves a twisting, a tension, a stretching.
- B. We don’t often remember, or perhaps we’d like to forget the length of time God has asked some people to wait.
1. David waited for over a decade for the throne.
 2. Abraham waited 25 years for a promised child.¹⁶
 3. Joseph waited 2 years in prison.¹⁷
 4. Israel waited 400 years in Egyptian bondage.
 5. Israel waited 40 years in the wilderness.
 6. Israel waited 70 years in Babylonian exile.
 7. The Jews waited hundreds of years for the Messiah.
 8. The Church has waited nearly 2000 years for the return of Christ.
- C. ► Nobody likes to wait. But waiting for the Lord while seeking His face is worth it. I’ve found 13 biblical benefits of waiting for the Lord. Let me read them. Don’t even try to write these down. There are too many. Pick up an audio recording or a transcript later. For now, just sit back and be refreshed and encouraged. You see, by waiting for the Lord while seeking His face . . .
1. ► You will avoid shame.¹⁸
 2. ► You will receive what God has promised.¹⁹

response to his requests. It doesn’t really matter which way you take it, the admonition is the same: Wait for the Lord.

¹⁴ Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Girdlestone’s Synonyms of the Old Testament*, 3d. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 122.

¹⁵ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. “קָוָה,” (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), hereinafter referred to as BDB.

¹⁶ Genesis 21:5; cf. 12:1-4

¹⁷ Genesis 41:1

¹⁸ Psalm 25:3; Isaiah 49:23b

¹⁹ Psalm 37:9

3. ▶ You will be exalted.²⁰
4. ▶ You will be heard by God.²¹
5. ▶ You will be saved from enemies.²²
6. ▶ You will gain new strength.²³
7. ▶ You will receive God's goodness.²⁴
8. ▶ You will be overjoyed.²⁵
9. ▶ You will develop perseverance, character, and hope.²⁶
10. ▶ You will be comforted.²⁷
11. ▶ You will receive praise, glory and honor.²⁸
12. ▶ You will receive great reward.²⁹
13. ▶ You will find favor with God.³⁰

These are great reasons to seek His face in the midst of worrisome circumstances—▶ to seek His face with a confident perspective, a singular purpose, a passionate pursuit, and a courageous patience.

- D. For the first time in years, my hands have been peeling again lately, evidence of stress and worry. Oh, I can point to the circumstantial stressors. And I can preach on worry. But I still worry. I need to be reminded of the truth.

And so, I'm asking myself the questions this sermon raises. And I'm praying for answers. This week, perhaps you could join me in asking yourself some questions before God.

²⁰ Psalm 37:34

²¹ Psalm 40:1

²² Proverbs 20:22

²³ Isaiah 40:31

²⁴ Lamentations 3:25

²⁵ 1 Peter 4:12-13

²⁶ Romans 5:2b-5; James 1:2-4

²⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

²⁸ 1 Peter 1:6b-7

²⁹ James 1:12

³⁰ 1 Peter 2:20

A confident perspective. Hmmm. What is the ground of my confidence? Is it anything other than the character and person of God? He is my light. And my salvation. And my defense.

A singular purpose. Hmmm. What is my overriding purpose? Is it anything other than living in God's presence every day? Am I focused on His house, His temple, His tabernacle, His tent? There, in His presence, I will "behold the beauty of the LORD." There, "He will conceal me." There, "He will hide me." There, "He will lift me up."

A passionate pursuit. Hmmm. In the midst of a worrisome situations, what am I chasing? Pain relief? Distracting amusement? Or God, through passionate prayer and His Word to me? "The Lord will take me up," as a father lifts his child.

A courageous patience. Hmmm. Am I patiently hanging on to a confident perspective and a singular purpose and a passionate pursuit even when there's no relief in sight? Even when I don't feel like it? Even when the panic attacks still come in the night? "Be strong" and "take courage." "I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."

To sink your fears, seek His face.