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## Prayers

### To God

*Use whatever means you have to tell the Lord God how much you appreciate Him and how much you appreciate His work on your behalf. Thank Him for His defeat of evil so that you might be free.*

### For myself

As each day goes by, I owe You more and more, Lord Jesus. I never fully understand the consequences of what I do in this strange and troubled world. Nevertheless, because of Your love, I am confident that You will draw everything in my life together for good and for blessing. So, despite my hesitancy, my guilt, my faults, my habits and my general failings, Lord Jesus, You have already done everything necessary for my redemption, and I am amazed! **Halleluia!**

### For others

Weekly theme: embracing change

*Ask the Lord your God to make you, personally, ready to face the changes you need in your life.*

## Meditation

In a few moments of quiet reflection,

Think over what has happened during your day:

Have you achieved your goals or not?

And has the Lord achieved His goals in you?

Has love been the standard of your life?

And have your words and deeds shown God to others?

Do you feel good or bad about the day?

And what do you imagine the Lord thinks of this?

How much rest have you been able to have?

And how much time have you put aside for God?

Has there been a spiritual balance to your life?

And have you been able to let the Lord lead you?

In a few moments of quiet reflection,  
Think what the Lord might do in the next 24 hours ...

## Bible Passage

### ***Psalm 27:1-6***

*Of David.*

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?  
The LORD is the true security of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?
- <sup>2</sup> When evil men come near to me  
to consume me,  
it is they, my enemies and my foes,  
who will stumble and fall.
- <sup>3</sup> Though an army set up camp against me,  
my heart will not fear;  
though war break out against me,  
even then will I be confident.
- <sup>4</sup> I have asked one thing of the LORD,  
which is what I seek:  
that I may live in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to look upon the beauty of the LORD  
and to seek Him in His temple.
- <sup>5</sup> For He will hide me in His dwelling  
in the day of trouble;  
he will conceal me in the cover of his tent  
and set me high upon a rock.
- <sup>6</sup> Then my head will be held high  
above the enemies who surround me;  
I will offer sacrifice  
with shouts of joy in His tent;

## Review

Psalm 27 is a well loved psalm, and contains so much we will study it in two halves, 27:1-6 and 27:7-14. In the first section, David writes confidently, having overcome his enemies by remaining close to the Lord. In the second half, his voice changes, and the psalm becomes a plea for God's help; *'Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!'* (27:7). We will explore what this means, tomorrow.

Today's reading, however, is a vivid poem in which we can almost hear David speaking to us!

Now although we cannot be absolutely sure about which psalms were written by David and which were collected, this psalm certainly connects well with him. The author speaks as Israel's king, whose job it was to protect Israel and deal with her enemies; he speaks of '*an army encamped against me*' (27:3), which he must defeat by trusting in God (27:1,2). It certainly sounds like David!

Verse 4, however, presents a mystery. David speaks of seeking God '*in the house of the Lord ... in His Temple*' (27:4), at a time when the Temple had not yet been built (2 Samuel 5,6,7)! Some therefore doubt that David wrote the psalm. However, many other Scriptures speak of the Tabernacle (as it was in David's day) as '*the house of the Lord*', and even '*the Temple*' (Ex. 34:26f. 1 Sam. 1:7f. 3:15, 2 Sam. 22:7). So even before the Temple had been built, God's people loved the 'Tabernacle' as His dwelling place with them, and they honoured it by such words.

The language of the psalm is powerful yet also very general, and we can therefore add our own thoughts and feelings to its words. It invites us to think about our devotion in a very personal way; e.g. '*the Lord is the true security of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*' (27:1). Most of all, many people love these words; '*I have asked one thing of the Lord ... that I may live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life ...*' (27:4). This expresses great devotion to God and a desire to be with Him. In saying this, we join with millions of Christians and Jews throughout history who also long for God's personal presence.

## Going Deeper

### ***The qualities of God***

The first verse of the psalm is incredibly encouraging. It places the qualities and characteristics of God alongside the great affirmation '*of whom shall I be afraid*' (27:1) not once, but twice! The repetition is so much more than poetic, for the Hebrew poetry is designed to lead the reader from one to the other, building us up in our appreciation of God's power first to save, and then to give us security. This is confidence indeed!

In church life, people will often quote characteristics of God in the context of worship; they might say, '*God is our Rock*' (Duet 32:4, 1 Sam 2:2), for example, and there are many more. Verse 1 here adds other pictures of God as '*light*' and '*stronghold*', and they illustrate who God is with great power and meaning. We should however, be clear about the difference between these illustrations, and those words used consistently by Scripture to describe His essential and unchanging character.

Words such as '*Saviour*' or '*Creator*' are more basic and fundamental to God's salvation plan for the world, which He has been working on since the earliest of times (Genesis 3) and which will be complete when He completes all things at the end of time. It is because God is our Creator and our Saviour that we can use other descriptive words such as those we find in psalm 27, and honour Him by so doing. But bear in mind the difference between describing God and His essential nature, and using these great analogies by way of praise.

### ***God is a God of love and faithfulness***

After the years of trouble and strife in Israel before the time of David, this great leader brought God's people together not just militarily and functionally, but spiritually. He did it by writing songs that spoke of God's love, safety, protection and power (see other psalms including psalm 23, 32, 60 etc). Here in verse 1, David speaks of God's faithfulness and trustworthiness.

The main point of these verses is that because of God's trustworthy and faithful nature, His

presence will save His people. David has rediscovered and confirmed to the people what the Bible in general calls God's 'Covenant' love and faithfulness for His people. This message brought Israel together, and it can do the same today and give us great hope.

The other main feature of the passage is the background of war and battle (27:2). But look carefully at what David says here, for although he may have had military battle in mind when he wrote, he also had something more spiritual in mind. It was the duty of Israel's king to consult with their God before battle, to go to the Tabernacle or to the Temple (in later years) to seek God's will for His people before engaging in battle. In so doing, David sought God's protection for battle and the ultimate victory of God's people (27:5,6).

Now today, when Christians engage in 'spiritual warfare', they may feel it immediately right to enter into battle. The advice of David is more circumspect, and it is to go and enquire of the Lord about which battles to fight and which to leave to Him!

### ***Dwelling in the Lord's presence***

In general, verses 4 to 6 of Psalm 27 speak in different ways of being in the Lord's presence. The poetry of the psalm invites us to think of the idea of God's presence in many different ways; providing, that is, we have walked the path of the first three verses of the psalm and come to a place where the fears of the world are overcome, and we trust in God completely.

Verse 4 speaks of dwelling in the 'house of the Lord all the days of my life'. It was not possible for anyone to do this on any kind of permanent basis except a priest who worked and lived in the Temple. This was not an option, and was only possible for Levites and priests who had that right by family, and the sentiments of the psalm are not focussed on them. The whole idea, including the latter part of the verse which speaks specifically of the 'temple', is not focussed on buildings or the earthly evidence of God's presence amongst His people, its true focus is on God's spiritual presence, prophetically announced through this psalm, and possible for us now through Jesus Christ.

### ***Differing ways to rely upon the Lord's presence***

If you try to sort out the references in the psalm to the places where the Lord meets His faithful people, you get into a mess. We have already looked at the complexity of references to the 'house of the Lord' and the 'Temple' (27:4), and the fact that in verse 5, David refers to the 'tent' of the Lord, otherwise known as the 'Tabernacle'. But in addition to this, the different pictures of the Lord's help and guidance are even more complex. Being hidden in a tent is quite a different thing to being exposed 'high upon a rock' (27:5)!

But if we are to understand this psalm properly we must remember that it is poetry. It describes many aspects of living in the presence of almighty God, each of which may be relevant in different ways at different times. If we live our lives close to the Lord, then we will sometimes find solace and privacy within His care, and at other times, He will place us 'high on a rock' and ask us to make our faith known publicly, trusting in Him for the consequences. Nothing can prevent the praises of God coming from the one who is so blessed, even when surrounded by enemies.

### ***Connecting with psalm 23***

This section of the psalm concludes with a verse which strangely makes some quite strong connections with the last three verses of psalm 23 ('you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies ... surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life ... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord ...' 23:5,6). The common themes are; being lifted up above enemies, and worshiping the Lord in His 'house' or temple.

These connections with Psalm 23 are another reason why some believe that Psalm 27 is written by David, because it is almost without doubt that psalm 23 is written by David. However, it confirms our interpretation which is that the path to security in the midst of all the

troubled circumstances of life is found through living in the presence of the Lord.

## **Discipleship**

### ***Application***

#### ***Living in God's presence***

I long for the day when God's people discover again what it means to live in the presence of the Lord, and find that they have nothing to fear. Throughout my own life I have spent hours with people who are a part of the life of the church and yet find it hard to embrace what it means to trust in the Lord, and often it is because they cannot yield all things to Him. Neither do they easily accept that there is an enemy who must be dealt with and fought in the Lord's strength if faith is to be victorious, or that as David does here, we must consult Him about such things. Too many regard these things as excessively religious, as if Christianity were little more than an extension package for being a human being.

Our eternal destiny is important, and with the Lord, there is absolutely nothing to fear from what can happen in this life, because the victory has already been assured. This is surely the reason for our praises of Almighty God. Anything less is a sham, mere religion or social fashion. The last important feature of this Psalm is that what it describes is not tied down to 'the house of the Lord' as a building. If we think in terms of the Lord's presence with His people, then the Psalm makes sense, but not in terms of buildings. Therefore, should we not hear a message that whilst buildings may be important for some parts of our work as God's people, there is a danger if our worship of God is identified too strongly with them. When the worship of Almighty God is openly evident in the lives and actions of His people, then the world will sit up and take notice!

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- Facing one's fears is a hard path. The trouble is that we often do not face difficult things when we need to; we bury them as much as we can, until we can leave them no longer because they threaten to make life impossible. Part of Christian discipleship is the discipline of facing our problems regularly, and allowing the Lord to work by His Spirit in our lives in a way which keeps us ready for action. The simple question is this; how do you face your fears? Do they find you out, or do you face them and give them over to the Lord? It is your choice, but there are consequences!

### ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. When have you felt fear? Was your faith able to keep that fear in its place? Was there some other good reason for the problems generated by that fear?
2. Do you feel threatened by the idea of living continually in the Lord's presence? Is this, for you, a matter of trust, or anything else?
3. What pictures or images come to your mind when thinking about God's presence?

## Final Prayer

Gracious Lord, calm my troubled heart when it is seized by worry and anxiety. Soothe my soul with the gentle touch of Your Spirit, and lead me to where I can recover my composure. Then, with Your assurance, help me to fulfil my calling, confident in Your ever present care and sustenance. Glory be to You, O Lord.