

Prayers

To God

Ask the Lord to heal you of any hurts that have come your way. We all do many things to deal with hurts; we get cross, we go quiet, we speak to others about the problem or we try to make sure no one can be angry with us. But nothing compares with setting our issues before the Lord and receiving His healing power and His blessing when we confess all to Him.

For myself

Listen for what the Lord would say to you today. Try listening to some Christian music or perhaps even classical music or other music without words, and wait on the Lord for what He has to say to you. Be expectant!

For others

Weekly theme: embracing change

We praise You Lord God for the constant change that takes place in our world, and for the many different ways You work in the world to achieve Your objectives. May we, like Jesus, see You at work in this world and give glory for Your creative power. May we, like the first disciples, listen to Your wisdom and teaching and receive it into our hearts. May we, like the Christians of the early church, receive the Holy Spirit with power and do the work of the Kingdom of God in this world. Bless us we pray, Lord God, **AMEN**

Meditation

Grant us patience, Lord, with everything, and in everything:

We can be impatient with time, and want more of it;
But you have given us just so much, and no more.

We can be impatient with ourselves, and crave what others have,
When we have not used what You have already given us.

We can be impatient with those we love, and wish they were perfect;
Yet they are not, and we are wrong to make such judgements!

We can be impatient with the church, which is infuriatingly difficult;

But we must learn to honour Your Body, Lord Jesus.

We can be impatient with You, seeking answers to our prayers;
So failing to trust You for our future, which You have planned.

Give us patience, O Lord, that we may wait on You for all things.

Bible Passage

Psalm 27:7-14

- ⁷ Hear my voice when I cry out, O LORD;
show favour to me and answer me.
⁸ My heart says about You, 'Seek His face!'
Therefore, LORD, I will seek Your face.
⁹ Do not hide Your face from me.

Do not turn away Your servant in anger;
You have been my helper.
Do not leave me or forsake me,
O God my Saviour.

- ¹⁰ Even if my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me.

- ¹¹ Teach me Your way, O LORD;
lead me on a level pathway
because of those who spy on me.

- ¹² Do not hand me over to the will of my foes,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
breathing violence.

- ¹³ Yet I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

- ¹⁴ Wait for the LORD;
be strong and bold of heart,
and wait for the LORD.

Review

In yesterday's study (27:1-6) we discovered the first half of psalm 27 was the prayer of a king. It was probably written by David, asking for the Lord's help as he fulfilled his duties to protect Israel. Significantly, David prayed for the Lord's presence using a poetic picture of the Tabernacle (later, the Temple). Because of this, we can read the psalm today as one that encourages and develops our spiritual relationship with God.

However, the second half of psalm 27 is different, and begins like a prayer, '*Hear my voice when I cry out ...*' (27:7). David pleads with the Lord to help him, as if in anxiety; e.g. '*Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger ... do not reject me or forsake me*' (27:9). He also hints about the problems of leadership, saying: '*false witnesses have*

risen against me, breathing violence' (27:12). We might not have expected this from a psalm, the first half of which was full of confidence and praise to Almighty God (27:5,6)!

To understand what is going on here in this psalm, we must look at how the different themes are grouped together. Yes, the psalm begins with six verses of prayerful confidence in the Lord (27:1-6), and it ends with two similar verses proclaiming strong faith; *'I will remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living ...'* (27:13,14). Yet the middle verses of the psalm (27:7-12) reflect David's more personal concerns. He began his prayer time in confidence and praise of God (27:1-6); then revealed his heart to the Lord (27:7-12), and lastly, finished with more adoration and praise (27:13,14)!

I would go further, and suggest that David's heart is most fully revealed in verses 11 and 12. After making his feelings known (27:7-10), he asks the Lord to protect him from his enemies (27:12) and lead him on a pathway of what we would call discipleship (27:11)! Surrounding the king were many court officials trying to influence him, as in any ancient oriental court. But David knew where real wisdom lay, and in this prayer, he sought God's love and justice. Psalm 27 reflects the concerns of a true leader of God's people, who must walk with the Lord so that he can lead God's people properly, according to the Lord's ways.

Going Deeper

Stanza 1, verses 7-9

Verses 7 and 8 are David's way of approaching God, and he wants to ask God to hear his prayer. He calls out to God in verse 7 and asks for His favour. Then in verse 8 he asks for a direct audience with God; *'my heart says ... "seek His face!"* But the last line of this stanza comes not at the end of verse 8 but in the first line of verse 9, which reads; *'do not hide Your face from me'* and this is the obvious conclusion to his prayer in verse 8. Looking at this stanza as a whole, we ask why a king such as David might need to seek God's favour, when it was his job to come before the Lord to seek His guidance on the affairs of the people of Israel? Why would God hide his face from the king? The answer is probably that David knew as we all know that sin was a possibility in his own life, and he therefore needed to come before the Lord carefully, and without any presumption that he was acceptable to God. He was right.

Stanza 2 - verses 9,10

A similar theme is carried over into the next stanza, made up of lines from verses 9 and 10. This begins *'do not turn away from your servant in anger'*. This Hebrew phrase is almost untranslatable, but says, literally, *'do not extend your nose in the direction of your servant'*! We are left wondering what this might mean; but there are clues even today within the way we talk about anger, such as *'snorting in anger'*, or other expressions of disdain. These ancient words express God's anger at sin, and all people, including the king, stand in fear of God's righteous anger at unholiness and sin. Consequently, the stanza continues with an appeal to God not to dismiss the cautious, humble approach of the king; *'do not leave me or forsake me'* (27:9). David then speaks of the fear of rejection by a parent - a terrible thing in any age. He just does not believe that God, the one he serves, is capable of rejecting him just as parents might reject a child. It is a strange allegory, but David uses it to state his belief that God will be faithful.

A way of coming before God

It may be difficult for us to understand this, but what is happening here is that the king is building up to an important request to God, and he has to make it in the right way, not

presuming upon God's generosity or any righteousness of his own. Hence the strained language and repentant manner. The two stanzas in verses 7 to 10 are in fact a type of formal ancient address to God.

Now traditionally, to 'address' someone means to attract their attention; many psalms begin with forms of address to God in which He is called to listen (5:1,2, 61:1, etc.). But we must now add to this idea something else with which we are unfamiliar, and this is the idea of deference. In ancient times, the way in which any form of address was made reflected the social standing of the person spoken to. Everyone, including God, was addressed according to their place in society, and this is what is meant by 'deference'. In many societies even to this day, rules of deference say that respect must be shown to those in a superior position through how they are spoken to or 'addressed'. Because people were ready to accept their place in society, deference did not have the negative implications it has today!

Verse 9, in particular, reflects the deference due to Almighty God, and this was required even of a king. He should not presume that God would hear him, but be grateful for any response or reaction from the great King of Israel. In particular, in a society where it was commonly assumed that one could not see the face of God and live due to His very holiness and the unholy nature of humanity, how could anyone possibly request that the Lord do anything other than turn His face from those who were unholy? In general, scriptures talk on the one hand of people being consumed by the presence of God (see Numbers 11:1 and several other places in the 'Law'), and in other places it reports occasions when leaders of God's people were acceptable to Him, and met God 'face to face' (Ex 24:10f.) because of such factors, verse 9 exhibits the 'will He, won't He' nature of a prayer of deference to God by a king. The two stanzas are a polite way of coming before God with something very important, and asking for the proper permission to be heard.

David's level pathway.

It may appear that verses 11 and 12 are almost insignificant after all that has gone before, but they are not. When David said '*teach me Your way O Lord*', then for him, it was a sincere prayer asking for God's guidance for the governance of his people. We might remember that David was one of the few kings of Israel who managed to keep both the northern and the southern tribes of Israel together in a united Kingdom of God's people. David was a special king and the Lord answered his request; he was enabled to walk a '*level pathway*' (27:11) and keep the peace of his kingdom, despite many difficulties (e.g. See 2 Sam 16,17 and 1 Kings 1&2). There is considerable evidence within the story of David that he had to watch his back and deal with all manner of court espionage and intrigue, and even his own sinful nature (2 Sam 11f.). Throughout everything, this prayer, and others like it, were perhaps his solace and strength before God.

For us today, these verses (27:11,12) are an important form of guidance for those who walk the pathway of discipleship. They describe a believer asking the Lord for teaching, and seeking His guidance in spiritual warfare. When God answers such prayers and a faithful person is able to learn truly from God and defeat the wiles of the enemy, then great things are done in the name of the Lord.

Confidence

The final two verses form a proper conclusion to a psalm or prayer of this nature. In common with many psalms, they express confidence that God will indeed act not just in heaven, but on earth; '*I remain confident of this; I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living ...*' (27:13). Some find within these verses any echo of resurrection, but David does not speak here of a land beyond the living. He asks that God will show His power '*in the land of the living*' (27:13). He expresses a great confidence that God will act in this world for the good of His people, especially when a leader of God's people works in sympathy with the Spirit of God and according to the teachings of Scripture (27:11). It is perhaps a prophecy of

Christ's work on earth, but it does not exactly prophesy Jesus' rising from the dead; that is left for other Scriptures.

The work of God in this world together with that of the leaders of God's people, are a source of great hope and joy for all God's people; '*wait for the Lord; be strong and be bold of heart, and wait for the Lord*' (27:14). This last verse of Psalm 27 is fascinating because it contains a rare instance of a repeated phrase within a single sentence; '*wait for the Lord*'. This is the bold statement of faith of one who has come before the Lord, asked for help, waited and received that help. All waiting in the future is now a matter of confidence, for the Lord is known as a God who responds to His people.

Discipleship

Application

The importance of prayer

There is great need in our own day for godly leaders who are prepared to give the highest priority to coming before the Lord in all honesty and integrity to seek His guidance for the leadership of God's people, just as David did. If psalm 27 is an example of an extended prayer of such a leader, including praise (vv1-6), approach and deference (vv7-10), as well as a request for right guidance and teaching, then it is one that should be part of the model of leadership for God's people even today. Church Leaders need guidance and teaching, and are often the subject of intrigue and dispute, and this psalm can be a major form of guidance.

Deference to God

The part of the psalm we have looked at today tells us a little about deference, something that is not part of modern culture, at least, formally. We may like to think that deference is not part of our modern secular culture, but if you look carefully enough, you will find that even now, people like to be 'respected' according to their perceived standing within society. When it comes to God and our approach to Him, there is a huge difference between Christians who do not like to think that we should pay any 'deference' to God, and those who feel it is essential. On the one hand, are people of a more 'low' church opinion, who would not even think about changing clothes in order to attend worship, for example, and would not be worried if the building in which they worshipped had no Christian decoration whatsoever, perhaps not even a cross. Others would not consider coming to worship at all without wearing their best clothes, and would find it hard to worship Almighty God unless a building was properly prepared, decorated and consecrated for this worship.

Attitude of the heart

Several things are worth noting. The attitude of the heart is reflected in what we do (Matt 15:18f.), and although we know we have freedom of access to the Father through Jesus Christ, we always come to worship the Lord as unworthy sinners living in a world of sin, and in need of His forgiveness. The simplest courtesies of deference might suggest that the manner in which we come to worship, our dress, and the preparations we make for worship, for example, say a great deal about our inner attitude towards God. Each of us should think carefully about what we demonstrate by what we do in worship and what we say to God; for our respect of Him is demonstrated to others through what we do and say.

Ideas for what to do

- How easy do you find it to express confidence in the Lord in what you do and say? Sometimes, we think we have given God the honour for something when all we have done is to think, 'thank You God', but do very little or say little to anyone. We need to ask questions of ourselves such as these so that what we say and do is a true reflection of what we believe; we can all point the finger at those who we feel say one thing and do another. But are we guilty of the same, from the perspective of others? I leave you this challenge to think about, as you are led.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. After reading what I have written, do you feel that the psalm is more positive or more negative? Can you say why?
2. How important is 'address' to the way in which people speak today? How important is deference to the way we approach God?
3. Is it possible to be over-confident in the presence of the Lord? What kind of maturity and humility is required to be able to come before the Lord and expect Him to answer?

Final Prayer

Strengthen my family ties, O Lord I pray. Renew those that have become weak, and mend those that have been broken. Repair those connections that I have ignored, and make me more aware of what is going on in my family. Bless my family and make us one in You, I pray, in Jesus' name: AMEN