

Look Up! When you are Anxious

Psalm 27; July 19, 2015

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Transition: Today we're going to look at a theme that is common to all us to some degree or another. That theme is fear, worry and anxiety. But before we jump into the Word to hear from God today, I want to take a few minutes to lay a groundwork for understanding fear and worry to prepare us to be in a position to better apply the Word to it today.

Understanding fear (from *Running Scared* by Ed Welch):

- *As we grow older, our fears and worries don't decrease, in fact, they increase. Why?*
 - We possess more things and thus have more things to worry about (cars, phones, houses, jobs, and so on).
 - We care about more people and thus we have more people to worry about (more friends, our own kids, then grandkids, and more friends, and so on).
 - We accumulate more bad experiences and thus we are aware of all of the potentially bad things that could happen to us (anyone watch the news this week?)
 - ◆ 5 killed in a random attack on marine's in Chattanooga, TN.
 - ◆ The sex scandal with Bill Cosby
 - ◆ The news of wildfires in California
 - ◆ We're confronted weekly with more and more things to potentially fear!
- *We must look in two directions in order to understand fear:*
 - **Look Outward**
 - ◆ There are real dangers (disease, death, war, economic collapse, etc.).
 - But not all fear is bad (there are times when we should be afraid). You want to be concerned about reckless drivers so that you will wear a seat belt and drive defensively, especially in Boston. You should maintain a healthy respect for certain animals (small and large).
 - ◆ But, we all have different responses to these possible dangers.
 - Why do some fears (even normal fears) cripple us and overcome us while others don't?
 - Why are some people even afraid of things that aren't really dangerous?
 - How do we explain this?

- **Look Inward**
 - ◆ We must also look inward. While fear could just be saying that you're in a dangerous situation, it could also be saying something so much more about you!
 - ◆ "Fear and worry reveal us. They reveal the things that we love and value" (Welch). What you fear can reveal what you cherish and treasure in life.
- *What is the solution?*
 - It would be tempting to think that suppressing your fears would be the way to conquer fear. But there's a better way. Welch suggests, "Rather than minimize your fears, find more of them. Expose them to the light of day because the more you find, the more blessed you will be when you hear words of peace and comfort."
 - The first step to overcoming fear is to expose your fears and then to take a hard look at yourself, instead of your circumstances, and ask:
 - ◆ What do your fears reveal that you want, crave and desire?
 - ◆ What do your fears reveal about who or what you're putting your trust in?
 - ◆ What do your fears reveal about who or what you truly love?

What do you fear? Seriously, pause right now and write down your top three fears (What are you worrying about right now? Thinking about? What's consuming your mind?)

- Disease, Sickness, Death, Eternal Life (what's after death), War, Money, Singleness, Loneliness, Finishing College, Getting a Job, People, Social Interaction, Failure, Rejection, Exposure, Your Kids

What do your fears say about you? What do they reveal that you really want? Value? Cherish? Love? What do they say is really important to you?

- You fear rejection and criticism because you value approval and acceptance.
- You fear physical pain because you cherish comfort.
- You fear rejection because you so desire to be loved.
- You fear becoming overweight because you crave admiration for your good looks.
- You fear the loss of money because you crave control and power. You crave control and power because you want to live a certain lifestyle when you retire.
- Welch notes, "Whatever you need is a mere stone's throw from what you fear."

Often at the bottom of all of your "wants" and "needs" is that you think these things will truly satisfy you and bring you lasting joy.

- You fear rejection because you want approval but why do you crave and value approval? Because you think that will bring you joy and satisfaction.
- You fear loneliness and singleness because you desire marriage but why do you want to be married? Because you think that will bring you joy and satisfaction.
- You fear poverty or economic loss because you desire money but why do you want money? Because you think that if you have money you can purchase everything that will bring you joy and satisfaction.

As we turn to Psalm 27 this morning, God is going to use the example of David to help us conquer fear and worry. King David had many reasons to be overcome by fear and worry, one of them being the attacks that Saul and his enemies continued to launch on him. But David was not overcome by fear and worry but rather turned to the Lord. David's words are presented to us today as an example to follow. Allow this psalm to be a prayer and vision for your life. There are four distinct sections in this psalm with four encouragements for conquering fear and anxiety.

I. Be Confident in the Greatness of God (1-3).

Some initial observations:

- David was confronted by some very real dangers in his life (v. 2-3). His enemies are portrayed as wild animals who are seeking to “devour” him.
- But notice that the terms “fear” (v. 1, 3) and “be afraid” (v. 1) are contrasted with “be confident.” David was not overcome by fear because of his confidence in the greatness of God. God is *my* light. God is *my* salvation. God is the stronghold of *my* life.
- One of God's most frequent commands in the Bible is: “Do not be afraid.”
 - If God commands this so frequently in the Bible, then it must be true that God is keenly aware of your fears.
 - Since God is a good and loving heavenly Father, he's not just commanding this to get you off of his back. In fact, he cares about you much more than you could even imagine.
 - Conclusion: your fears are not trivial to God.

When fear and anxiety come, they know what to run from but not what to run to. They know that they long for peace and rest but don't know where to find it. David's response in Psalm 27 confirms for us today that peace, comfort and rest lie in the knowledge of the true God. If you are going to conquer fear and worry in your life then you must learn to base your confidence on God's ever-present and unchanging character. The more you learn and know about the greatness of God, the more your faith and confidence in him will grow.

- **God is my light.**
 - “Bad things lurk in shadows, but the light exposes them and they flee” (Welch).
 - The powers of darkness should not be feared because God is your light.
 - This is an important one to remember because when you are tempted with fear and worry, you feel like you are walking into a dark and dangerous place. But when you draw near to God, he is your light, penetrating the darkness with truth and banishing evil.
- **God is my salvation (or my “victory” or “deliverance”).**
 - When David says this, he is referring to God as “saving” him from his immediate enemies. God is an ever present help in time of need. But God has not promised to save us from every earthly danger. He's promised that we won't face any earthly danger alone and that, in Christ, our hope doesn't end in the grave.
 - “The ultimate deliverance was not our rescue from the jaws of death, because any temporal deliverance from death meant only that death was postponed. The real

deliverance was the death of death secured by the death of Jesus Christ” (Welch). He continues, “The resurrection of Jesus issues the surprising command: don’t be afraid. Because the God who made the world is the God who raised Jesus from the dead and calls you now to follow him. . . . Believing in this God means believing that it is going to be all right, and this belief is ultimately incompatible with fear.”

- **God is the stronghold of my life.**
 - In other words, God is a refuge. He is a safe place. And if this is true, then he is where I should run to.
 - Why should God be your place of refuge? Because he is Mighty God, Sovereign God, Everlasting Father, Deliverer, Lord of Hosts, King of Kings, Rock of Ages, Faithful One, Good Shepherd and so much more.
 - “If God is for us, who can be against?” (Romans 8:31).

Whom do you trust and where is your faith? Will you stop worrying today and come to God and say, “Father, I’m yours.” You’re *my* light, *my* salvation and *my* stronghold.

II. Seek the Presence and Perfections of God (4-6).

“One thing”:

- This is one of the most single-minded statements in all of Scripture. Instead of scanning the universe looking for worries to accumulate, set the trajectory of your life on seeking after God.
- “Divided aims tend to distraction, weakness, disappointment. . . . Let all our affection be bound up in one affection, and that affection set upon heavenly things” (Charles Spurgeon).

The Presence of God

- Terms: “house of the Lord,” “his temple,” “his tent”
- Unhindered access to God’s presence in worship is the best of all gifts. This is where we find true delight and safety.
- Read Psalm 23:4-6 (Psalm 27 is a clear reference to 23:6).

The Perfections of God

- The background for David is God’s promise in Exodus 33
 - “And he said, ‘My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest’” (Ex. 33:14).
 - “Moses said, ‘Please show me your glory.’ And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you and I will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord’” (Ex. 33:18-19).
 - “The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin’” (Ex. 34:5-7).
- When Moses saw the glory of God he saw the beauty and perfections of God.
- David, here, is making a bold request for the very presence God. This is a presence that, in the OT, was only available to the high priest in the holy of holies in the temple. David

knew that God was beautiful and he wanted to be close enough to see it.

- God's beauty is what the faithful yearn to gaze upon and in God's presence is where safety is found. God's beauty and presence destroy fear and worry. Now in Christ, we have access into the beauty and presence of God.

There's a catch: when you seek the Lord, you can't just seek him as a place to rest without reorienting your life according to his ways (look ahead to 27:11).

- See Luke 12:22-34 and Matthew 6:25-34
 - "Do not be anxious" about your life, food, clothing, etc.
 - "Instead, seek his kingdom..." (Luke 12:31).
 - "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness..." (Matt. 6:33).

III. Stop Worrying and Pray to God (7-12).

Observations:

- David doesn't directly address God until here in verse 7. What can we learn from this?
- Before you jump into prayer with all of your requests related to the fears and worries in your life, spend some time meditating on and remembering the greatness, beauty and perfections of God.
- In your battle with fear and worry, prayer will be challenging? Why? The reason we worry is in order to gain control of a situation. We think that if we can worry enough, we can control it. But that's a lie. The reason prayer is hard is because when you pray you relinquish control. Prayer is the simple solution but we don't do it.

Here is how Jesus teaches us to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread..." (Matt. 6:9-11).

- Often worry is consumed with tomorrow but Jesus calls us to just pray for today.
- The more you learn about God the more you will actually spend time talking to him than thinking about fear. God hears, he is near and he is able to deliver.

IV. Be Strong and Wait for God (13-14).

Observations:

- David concludes this psalm with the same confidence in which he started it. He's convinced that he will "look" or "gaze upon" the "goodness" or "beauty" of the Lord in the land of God. Most likely David's words are linked to God's promises to Moses and Joshua of entering the promised land (cf. Deut. 31:6-7; Joshua 1:6-18).
- Additionally, he invites there other worshipers to join him in this same confidence.
- God calls us to wait for him with trust and confidence. It requires faith. While worry and fear prefer immediate deliverance, God calls us to confident trust.
- In conclusion, fear and worry becomes a problem in our lives when it doesn't follow the outline of Psalm 27.
 - Be Confident in the Greatness of God (1-3).
 - Seek the Presence and Perfections of God (4-6).

- Stop Worrying and Pray to God (7-12).
- Be Strong and Wait for God (13-14).

The Point: Do not be anxious or fearful but rather seek the Lord and find comfort, peace and rest in him.