

Worship in All Circumstances: Fear

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Watermark. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Alfie, and I'm one of the guys on staff here. And today you find us in the middle of a series going through the book of Psalms.

And we're looking at this as a prayer book, a guide to the ways in which we pray and reach out to God. And these Psalms, they go through and they explore different emotions, different feelings, different situations of life.

And our hope is that as we go through the Psalms, that they will guide us, they will shape us in the way in which we respond to life. That our lives wouldn't be lives that are thrown around by every struggle, by every trouble.

But instead, that our lives would be ones that worship God. That we worship Him in all circumstances.

So we're going to dive right into this Psalm 27. Growing up, it was one of my favorite Psalms to read, mostly because of the first verse. That's usually often as far as I would get because I get very excited when it said, The Lord is my light and my salvation.

[1 : 12] Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? And this Psalm opens up with this declaration of confidence confidence in God, in His ability to protect, to save, in His power.

And He goes on in verses 4 through 6 where He talks about His confidence in God's presence. But the tone changes a little bit as we get to verses 7 and onwards.

Because there, all of a sudden, His confidence gives way to fear and pleading. And He calls out to God. He's calling to God and He needs God to hear Him.

And He comes to the end in verses 13 and 14 where He is confident again. And He talks to Himself and He tells Himself that He knows that He will see God.

He knows that God will be His rescue. Today we're talking about fear and I think that's something that we all deal with.

[2 : 13] It's something that is all around. You know, we have fears and we like to categorize them and we label them. We call them phobias.

And there are all kinds of different phobias. There's, you know, arachnophobia, which is the fear of spiders. There's something called alluophobia, which is the fear of flutes. There's one very specific one called anatadophobia, which is the fear that somewhere a duck might be staring at you.

Now, I personally, I have a mild case of melissophobia. It's not the fear of people called melissa. It's the fear of bees. And the university students I work with will tell you that I cannot stand bees.

But, you know, screaming and, you know, funny names aside, fears are very real. You know, studies have shown that one of the biggest motivators of humans is fear.

In fact, fear and jealousy are the two emotions that a lot of television feeds off. Making you fearful of something, making you jealous of somebody else. And advertisers know this now, use fear to sell us things.

[3 : 23] Fear is in the modern mind very much today. There's a magazine in France which this week devoted an entire issue to this question.

How do we live with fear? As they face, you know, increasing terrorist attacks, how they deal with and live with fear is becoming a very real question that needs very real answers.

In the magazine, they interviewed different people who had lived in different trouble times in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka. And they asked these people, how did you live? How did you survive in these fearful times?

Fear is something that motivates a lot of politics. Whether it's the presidential race in the US, whether it's Brexit or Duterte's election in the Philippines, fear plays a really big part of that. But here in Hong Kong, fear also shapes our politics. It shapes the way that we interact and love different people. How much do you think that fear shapes the way that we respond to the Beijing government?

[4 : 35] How do you think that fear shapes the way that we, as Hong Kongers, relate to mainland Chinese people? Fear motivates us.

And not just politically, not just in the face of terror, but in our day-to-day lives. Fear is something that will cause a student who would normally procrastinate to stay up all night to finish their essay. Fear is that emotion that will drive someone to work late in the office because they fear what their boss thinks of them. Fear has changed the lives of many people in the Bible.

You see, Abraham, he feared what Pharaoh would do. And so when he entered Egypt, he lied and said, this is not my wife, it's actually my sister. Fear of shame is what caused David to kill his friend instead of confronting the reality of his sin.

Fear is what caused Peter to deny Jesus on the 90th, betrayed and say, I don't know that man. I have no idea what you're talking about. Fear drives our behaviors.

[5 : 50] It shapes our thinking. And whether we like it or not, it's here. It's real. It's in our lives. We need to deal with it. And my hope is that as we look through the psalm that it would show us something of how the psalmist David dealt with his fears, how he confronted those fears, and will shape the way that we do it.

So I don't know where each of you is today. I don't know what fears you are looking at. Whether that's going into work tomorrow and wondering if you're going to have a job by the end of the week. Whether it's that time where you're going to celebrate your grandmother's birthday, but you know that she doesn't like you or your spouse or your children or your job.

or maybe you have a hospital appointment and you don't know if the doctor's going to give you good news or bad news.

Or maybe you're one of those people who actually isn't too afraid of many things. And I'm incredibly envious of you. Because I have a lot of fears. But there's one fear that we all must face.

[7 : 04] There's one fear we all must deal with. And it's the fear of death. At some point or another all of us are going to be in a situation where we look at death and we need to deal with that fear.

There's a missionary in 1851. His name was Alan Gardner. And he was traveling to reach out to people in the Amazon. But his ship was wrecked on a desert island just off the coast of South America.

This island had no food. It had no water. Now, unless someone was going to come by and see them, which there wasn't, he and his crew were all going to die.

We're all going to end up in a situation like this. And it may be on a desert island. It may be in a hospital bed. It may be like so many people under the shadow of terrorism.

But each of us needs to figure out how are we going to deal with our fears, our fear of death, our fear of shame, our fear of other people, our fear of the circumstances in our life.

[8 : 19] And so I think there are four things that I'd like us to see today. One, that fear is normal. Fear is normal. Secondly, we're going to look at David's responses to fear.

We're going to see his response of crying out to God. We're going to see his response of looking at God. And we want to see how we can respond to our fears.

How we can be guaranteed hope when we look at our fears. So the first thing is fear is normal. All right, we don't like that it exists, but David experiences it.

We don't have a lot of historical background into the situation that he is in when he's writing this psalm. But he says that he's in trouble. He says that enemies are all around. They're trying to devour him. David had plenty of enemies.

He had his predecessor, King Saul. He had enemies on all sides, the Philistines, the Amalekites, the Moabites. And even at one point, his son tried to overthrow him and chased him out of his own home.

[9 : 25] He had many things to fear. Unlike us, David's fears carried swords with them. And he needed a way to deal with this.

But unlike many psalms, other psalms, in which they ask, what's going on? Why am I in trouble? Why are my enemies at my door? Why are these things going on? David doesn't ask any of these

questions.

If you look at verse 5, he says, for he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. In the day of trouble, David expects fear.

He knows that these fears are real. And he knows that at some point, he's going to deal with them. He writes this psalm fully expecting that he will face fear in his life.

He's a king, so obviously that would have, that would be some cause for fear. There are people who would want him and his life. They would want his throne, his riches, his things.

[10:34] But for David, this knowledge of fear doesn't come from his position, but it comes from what he knows about God, what he knows about the world. It comes from what he read in God's word about where this world comes from and where its troubles are.

David knows the story of the Garden of Eden. He knows that God created a world without fear, that was perfect and beautiful, where man lived in relationship with God.

David knows that into this garden a snake came in and told lies, deceived Adam and Eve, told them that God couldn't be trusted, and fear enters the heart of man, the fear that maybe God doesn't want what is best for us, the fear that God is hiding things from us, the fear that God is withholding good things from us.

And so Adam and Eve, they go to the thing that they think will cure their fear. They go and they grab the fruit from the tree and they say, if we eat this, we'll be like God and we'll have nothing to fear.

But instead, new fears enter their life.

Now, they feared shame and they hid themselves from each other. They feared God and when he walked into the garden, they hid from him. And from the beginning, this distrust of God opened their hearts to a world of fear.

[12:04] David knows this story and so he knows that he's going to face a day of trouble. So when he writes this psalm, he says, I know it's going to happen. I know these fears are real.

I know they're normal and I know I need to go to God. fear is normal in your life.

It's normal in my life. It's normal in David's life. Or perhaps it's abnormal. It's not the way that it was supposed to be. The normal fear that we face day in, day out is not the way it was meant to be.

And David saw this and recognized this. And so, he responds. The first response I want to look at is David crying out to God.

Which is different from many responses which we see in the world around us. I think psychologists would often say that sometimes the cause of fear is not a real trouble or a real threat.

[13:09] But it's an irrational enlargement of our pessimism. That, you know, if we were a bit more optimistic then we wouldn't have to face fear.

That the things we're afraid of probably are not going to happen. And so, the best course of action is just to ignore it. Oprah takes a similar route and she talked about this acronym for fear.

False evidence appearing real. And she said that the opposite of fear is love and that to deal with fear we need to recognize that they're probably not real and we need to meditate and accept our own fears or accept our emotions.

And when we love ourselves and accept our things that all our fears will melt away. Similarly, her friend Rhonda Byrne who wrote *The Secret* a self-help book says that the universe works in this idea of attraction that we fear things because we have negative thoughts and they attract negative things to us but instead if we have positive thoughts happy thoughts that we can attract happy things to ourselves that we can do away with our fears because they won't be coming to us anymore.

But David doesn't respond that way. David doesn't believe that. In fact, the Bible tells us that's not the way that we deal with fear. And I think in that sense he would fit in Hong Kong where I think for many people here in Hong Kong we don't think that those are real practical ways to deal with fears because our fears are in our face.

[14:48] They won't be thought away. Our positive emotions won't magically increase our GPA. Our positive thoughts won't fix the things that are wrong.

They won't give us our jobs back. Fear is real. And David knows this but he doesn't respond like most people in Hong Kong do. I was having dinner with a friend of mine recently and she told me about how she had figured out how to deal with the way the economy is going where it seems to be trending towards the slump and she said insurance.

Insurance is the way. And so she got insurance for everything in her life because she knew that if she had enough insurance everything would be okay. She could deal with anything as long as her life was ensured.

But David doesn't do that either even though he was capable of that. David was renowned as a giant slayer and he surrounded himself with these 30 mighty men, 30 soldiers who were equally as accomplished and renowned as he was.

If there was any fear, any swords that were coming against him, surely David could have taken care of them himself. but he doesn't do that.

[16:04] He doesn't try to ignore his fears. He doesn't try to make them go away with positive thinking. He doesn't try to insurance them out of existence. Instead, he cries out to God and it's a call that is full of desperation.

You read verses 7 onwards and you can feel his agony. You can see that he longs for and he needs God. His response to fear is calling to God.

He says, hear when I cry aloud, be gracious to me. Answer me, God. Don't turn your faith away from me. He calls out to God and he calls and he says that I can deal with anything, God.

I can deal with enemies. I can deal with struggles. I can deal with my parents forsaking me. But I need you, God. God. I need you.

And he has this odd confidence in God. We see in verse 2 where he says, even though my enemies come against me, I know, God, you're going to take care of them.

[17:13] Verse 3, he says, war and armies, I'm not afraid of them because I am choosing to call to you, to call out to you, to reach to you because I know in God's shelter, I will be safe.

David sees that his strength, his abilities are not going to save him from his fears, but God is the one who will.

Because the reality is that no amount of insurance is going to save us from illness. loss of life.

That no amount of positive thinking is really going to deal with what's in our hearts, our fear that comes from not trusting God.

He knows that God can never fail. He knows that God will never decay. He knows that when he is kicked out of his house by his own son, it's okay.

[18:27] Because he can call to God. And he knows that God is in control. David's second response is looking at God.

He looks towards God. In verse three, he asks for one thing. He says, all I need is one thing. Which is a bit different from the way that we approach life.

I think sometimes we say it's better to diversify your investments. To not put all your eggs in one basket. But David says, I only need one basket. I only need one thing.

Because I know it's not going to fail. In verse three, he says, one thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

For the thing that's going to help him with his fears is one thing, and it's God.

[19:29] He says, I want to live in his house. But at this time, before David, there was no temple. So he wasn't talking about a physical temple. He wasn't talking about a real place. He wasn't a Levite, the tribe of priests.

So he couldn't live inside the temple. So he must have been talking about something different. And he shows us what that is. He says that dwelling in God's house means looking at the beauty of God and inquiring in his temple.

Gazing at God's beauty. Inquiring in his temple. These are two kinds of looking at God which we're going to explore a little bit. So gazing at his beauty.

Other translations talk about delighting or marveling. It's this looking that involves the heart and the emotions. He wants to gaze at God and enjoy him.

I've had several friends who over the past couple of years have gotten engaged. And a couple of them I've gone with them ring shopping. And they walk into the store and there are all these rings and they don't know what to do because they've never bought rings before.

[20:40] And they're just amazed and overwhelmed by different metals different types of diamonds and stones and shapes and sizes and colors. But when they figure out which one they're going to get they see it and admire its beauty.

And they look at it. In fact I had one friend who used to come home from work every day before he proposed open the box and just stare and admire the looking at God seeing his beauty admiring it

enjoying it.

The next thing he says is that he wants to inquire in God's temple. This word inquire in Hebrew it's almost like study and studying is something we're really good at in Hong Kong. And this is the kind of looking that my friends wouldn't do but the kind of looking that the jeweler would do.

As he looks at the way he sees things about their clarity and their color the four C's and he looks at it and he studies it and he gets to know more about this diamond and his looking is different from the looking my friends because it's a studious kind of looking and that's what David is talking about he wants to sit before God he wants to know God he wants to learn about God and he kind of puts these things together and he says it's not just looking at God's beauty and being amazed and awed by it but it's seeing what it is about him that is amazing to be awed at I think many times at church we as Christians we like to separate the two you know you say I'm going to you know worship God and that is very separate from him and dig out deep bridges we separate the two but David doesn't do that he puts them together he says dwelling in God's house is both the worship and the admiration of God's beauty but it's also the studying of God's characteristics there's a pastor and musician in the US called Shilin and he talks about this he says that if we spend all our time just studying God just studying and studying our faith becomes cold dead and dry but he says if all we're doing is just staring at beauty then it's just this random expression of praise that there's no real substance about it he says that to truly worship God to be dwelling in God's house like David talks about in this passage is both the study and the admiration of his beauty that our worship that the emotions that come in our heart in response to God the songs that we sing are not just out there and random but are informed and are given shape and are made full by what we know about [23 : 45] God and David knows God's word he studies God's word and he says that he can trust in God's promises God's promises that he will always be there for him God's promise is that he will never leave his people God's promise that he will be their savior and it's not just that this looking this studying is separate but it's connected to his calling because when he cries out to God he cries out for the very same things that he wants when he's dwelling in God's house he cries out for God's face he wants to see God's beauty in verse 11 he says he wants to know God he cries out to God to teach him to show him the ways David cries out to God because he is confident in God's goodness in God's power in

God's salvation David cries out to God because he has looked at him and he has studied him and he has admired him and he knows that God is the real deal he knows that God is his light that God is his salvation that God is his stronghold he doesn't try to minimize his fears he doesn't try to fix them by himself instead he comes to God fully honest fully honest crying crying out to God with how he really feels that God has turned his face away from him that his parents have abandoned him that his enemies are going to destroy him he calls out to God with these feelings and he rests and he waits in confidence to God in verse 13 we see the end of this the sermon that he preaches to himself he says my enemies are devouring me armies are against me fear is all around but I believe that I will look at the goodness of God in the land of the living he tells himself wait for God he tells himself be strong and let your heart take courage so David deals with his fears he calls he looks at God he dwells with God but what does that mean for us what does it look like in our lives because I look at David and I see this amazing man of God a man after God's own heart who trusted God who could stand firm in God's face in front of a nine foot giant who could face armies and say God is in control who could deal with being cast out of his own house by his own son and trust God but I don't know how that works because

I don't know how to take what David's done and put it in my own life because I've done the Bible studies and I've been to church and I've been in my community group but these fears sometimes seem too real that this idea of trusting in God isn't as strong isn't as solid as what David seems to be talking about and I realize that we don't need an example so much as we need a guarantee we need something to show us that when we do call God will answer that it's not just this hypothetical maybe but real certainty that when we cry out we're not alone that when we cry out God hears us I think we can find this in Luke 22 towards the end of Luke Jesus is on his way to the cross and he stops at the garden of Gethsemane on the

Mount of Olives and he kneels in front of a rock and he prays Jesus calls out to his father and he says I am afraid I don't want to die it's going to be painful I don't have to deal with this shame that I'm going to have to face in this trial that he knows is coming back I don't have to deal with the shame and the hurt that comes from being betrayed by one of my disciples and he calls out to God

and he says take this cup away from me in his next breath he says but your will be done God because Jesus' fears are not removed he's still betrayed he still goes through trial he's still crucified but he knows that something far greater is accomplished because in Jesus crying out to God in [29 : 05] Jesus calling to God we see something amazing because on the cross death and sin are broken the things that cause fear in our lives their power is taken away there is no space for fear because death and sin is gone he's dealt with them he's taking care of them in his death the curtain of the temple is torn means that now man can come to God there is no need for a priestly intermediary we can go straight to God we can go straight to his face straight to his presence we can look at his beauty we can look at his facets and shape we can look at the fullness of God and be confident because God has made a way he's torn away the things that separate us from him he's torn away the things that give us fear on the cross

Jesus doesn't guarantee that our lives will be free from suffering but what he does guarantee is that for those who trust him that they have God by their side that God is walking with them like Psalm 23 says in the valley of the shadow of death that God is walking with us into our difficult work God is walking with us into that meeting with our boss God is walking with us as we're studying for exams God is walking with us when there's storms on every side God is walking with us when we are afraid Paul tells the church in 2nd Corinthians 3 that right now we see God and it's vague and it's this glimpse of him but we are moving towards a joyful day a day when we see

God fully and clearly that now we see in part but soon because of Jesus we will see God in whole and like David says we can know that we will see God's goodness in the land of the living so what do we do when we are discouraged what do we do when things are difficult at World War II a German pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer he said don't do it alone he wrote in his book Life Together that for many Christians the Christ in their heart is weaker than the Christ in the heart of others that our hearts are uncertain but the hearts of others are more certain he wrote that this is the goal of Christian community that as we encounter one another we speak of God's salvation of his hope of his conquering to each other and

I know this as I know that I fear many things but I know that the little Jesus in my heart I know that in my friends the big Jesus in their heart speaks to me and grows the Jesus in my heart that when I'm with my community group that they tell me the truth that my fears are not big in comparison to God that my fears can be dealt with because I can trust God I can trust what he has done if God has done the big thing and torn away death and sin on the cross then I can trust him with my job with my relationships with my finances don't do it alone call to

God look at God and get your brothers and sisters to call with him call with you and look at him together our fear our fear is real we can't minimize it and we ought not to try to deal with it by ourselves but God is calling us to himself he's calling us to study him to gaze at him he's calling us to be confident that he is more than able to carry us through our fears that we can be assured of his goodness if you're here today and you're not a Christian this will mean a big change because calling on God means trusting him it means putting aside the things that you put your hope and trust in and saying that

[34 : 19] I want Jesus to be that thing I want Jesus to be the one thing that my hope is in and for Christians here today that means examining our hearts because many of us and this is myself included we live as functional pagans where we say that we trust God but really we're trying to fix things and sort things out for ourselves God God God God says you do not have to fear God says the opposite of fear is not courage the opposite of fear is not bravery or strength the opposite of fear is a trust in the God of the Bible and a trust in the God who has done all things to make sure that we can be safe and secure in him that our lives are hidden with him that our lives are protected by him that we can know that when we hide in his shelter when we look on his beauty that there is no fear that can defeat us

Alan Gardner the shipwrecked missionary eventually he died and several years later some explorers found the island on which he was shipwrecked they found his body and next to it his journal where he wrote on the last page he had written out Psalm 34 verse 10 he says the young lions they lack they suffer from hunger but those that seek the Lord will not want for any good thing and below that his last words I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God Alan Gardner was not insane as he starved to death as he died of dehydration he wasn't crazy he had an overwhelming confidence in

God that his hunger wasn't going to go away but his fear would because he trusted in God completely I look at verse 3 and I wonder to myself how often do I ask this how often do I ask that the one thing I want more than anything else more than financial security more than freedom from suffering and pain is God how often do I ask that I would only have God church let's pray oh God I need you I need you more than I realize God I confess that you aren't that one thing in my life that I hold on to so many other things that I make idols of them and I worship them in hopes that they will save me that they will protect me from my fear God I pray for myself I pray for us I pray for this church that we would look at you that as we gather in our communities as we sit by ourselves in your word that we would look at you and see you that we would be amazed by your goodness and your faithfulness that you show us in your word that we would be certain of your salvation that we would be sure of your ability to defeat our enemies and our fears God many things have become our one thing we pray that you would be the only thing I pray for us this week at work at home with our families I pray that we would look to you that we would be captured by your amazing goodness that we would be overwhelmed by your goodness God I pray this in God's name Amen