

Hear Me, Teach Me

by Steve Zeisler

In Psalm 27, King David addresses two circumstances which all of us face at one time or another in our lives. People who are lonely and abandoned, who feel a need for intimacy that has not been met, will find a friend in David as he reflects on that very need in this psalm. And second, people who have felt overwhelmed by the demands, the pace, the questions and the confusion of life will find that they too have a friend in David, as he also addresses that issue in this psalm.

Psalm 27:

**The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the defense of my life;
whom shall I dread?
When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,
my adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.
Though a host encamp against me,
my heart will not fear;
though war arise against me,
in spite of this I shall be confident.**

**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.
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.
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.**

**Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice;
and be gracious to me and answer me.
When Thou didst say, "Seek My face,"
my heart said to Thee,
thy face, O Lord, I shall seek.
Do not hide Thy face from me,
do not turn Thy servant away in anger;
Thou hast been my help.
Do not abandon me nor forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
but the Lord will take me up.**

**Teach me Thy way, O Lord;
and lead me in a level path,
because of my foes.
Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and such as breathe out violence.
I would have despaired unless I had believed that I**

**would see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.**

**Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
yes, wait for the Lord.**

It is obvious that there are two very different points of view expressed here in Psalm 27. In verses 1 through 6 we have as beautiful a statement praising the sovereignty of God and speaking of the changed heart that comes about as a result of contemplating the greatness of God as there is in Scripture. These verses are a remarkable statement, spoken not as if David is seeing through a glass darkly, but as if the power and sovereignty of his God had become crystal clear to him.

Verses 7 through 14, however, express a very different note. Here David is plaintively calling out for help. He recognizes that this world is a very dangerous, difficult place; the issues he faces threaten to overwhelm him. David's call to God suggests that he was involved in spiritual warfare. That happened in his day as well as ours. I'm glad David put these two points of view back-to-back, uttered them in the same breath, as it were. This demonstrates a maturity from which we can all learn.

Some people say that maturity is demonstrated by faith that never struggles, by rising above the tide of this grimy world and living in some kind of exalted plane where you are never uncertain, never afraid, never assailed. There are others who are convinced that this spiritual life is tough, that we need to be in the trenches, fighting the enemy, that unless we are ever more vigilant the cause will be lost. But it's hard to find people who can say that although their God is the sovereign ruler of this universe, and they have absolutely no questions about that, yet they are called to live in a wicked, hurtful, difficult age, and they are constantly aware of that fact.

In the last hours of his life, Jesus was alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweat pouring like blood from his brow, agonizing with the spiritual war he was fighting. He called out to God to free him, but he was willing to face what he was called on to do. Yet just a few short hours earlier, in the Upper Room discourse, Jesus uttered this tremendous expression of confidence that God will win the victory, that nothing will be lost, that his Heavenly Father is in control:

Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee, even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life. (John 17:1-2)

Betsie ten Boom must have believed that Ravensbrück Prison was hell on earth, but she was never overwhelmed by the darkness around her. She was so certain that the light of the gospel was greater than the darkness of the enemy that she could say to her sister, Corrie:

"The most important part of our task will be to tell everyone who will listen that Jesus is the only answer to the problems that are disturbing the hearts of men and nations. We shall have the right to speak because we can tell from our experience that His light is more powerful than the deepest darkness . . . How wonderful that the reality of His presence is greater than the reality of the hell around us."

Those words are a beautiful condensation of what David is saying in Psalm 27.

We will be spending two Sundays looking at this psalm. But we will begin our study today by looking at the second part, verses 7 through 14, first. I usually experience everything in life that way -- backwards. As far as my reaction to this psalm is concerned, I most often find that I first become aware of the difficulties of the particular spiritual battle I am facing at any given time, but then, as I am reminded that God is faithful, become aware again that God is still in control, that he is a sovereign Lord.

These verses, 7 through 14, contain two petitions, two great longings, which form the outline for this section. The first petition is in verse 7: "Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice." "Hear Me, Lord," is David's cry. The second is in verse 11: "Teach me Thy way, O Lord." David says, "Teach me, Lord." David then takes each of these petitions and expands on it. He tells us what it was that hurt him and caused him to call out in his need.

When David says, "Hear me," he is pleading with God to be his intimate friend, for God to draw near to him, to listen to him. David recognizes that every human heart was made to be in communion, to feel secure with someone. All of us long to have a relationship in which the commitment remains firm no matter how badly we foul things up, someone who will listen to us when we need to be listened to, someone who will seek us out and care for us. David is reflecting that need for intimacy when he says, "Hear me, O Lord."

There is an emotionally-laden aspect to David's call in these verses. He used the word, "forsaken," in his request that God hear him. David is saying that human relationships ultimately will fail, that if we count on any human being to be our unfailing intimate we will find ourselves forsaken. When he says, "My father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up," he is really saying, "If anybody ought to be able to remain committed to me it should be my parents, but even they fail me. If God is not my lover, if he will not listen to me, then I am utterly lost. I am forsaken."

Consider David's life. His father didn't think enough of him to invite him to meet Samuel on the day the prophet came to sacrifice. Seven sons were brought before him and Samuel finally had to ask, "Isn't there another?" ("Oh, you mean the boy out with the sheep? I forgot about him. I do have an eighth son, don't I?") Later, David would offer himself in service to King Saul, whom he cared for, only to find that all his service and concern generated such a rage in Saul that in fits of insanity Saul tried to kill him. David developed a friendship with Jonathan that is as beautiful, deep and impressive as any friendship I have ever read about, yet David lost Jonathan through death. Human beings cannot finally be counted upon because they die. David lost a baby, Bathsheba's son, whom he loved, to death. His own son led a rebellion against him and tried to kill him. David's wife ridiculed him in public. He learned the hard way that even the people he should have been able to count on could not supply the kind of intimacy he longed for. So in these verses he is saying, "Lord, I am deeply lonely. Please don't forsake me."

John W. Hinckley, Jr., the man who came within a hair's breadth of killing the President of the United States, was arraigned this last week. In the accounts of his life in the months prior to his attempt on the President's life which were pieced together by detectives and reporters, it was just devastatingly sad to read that in all that time they could find no one who had even the most casual conversation with him. They found that his apartment where he lived and ate alone was strewn with wrappers from fast-food places. That loneliness developed in him a fantasy about a relationship with a teenage movie star, and one of her movies gave him the idea that he ought to kill the President. This man acted irrationally, erratically, psychotically, if you will, in his battle with loneliness. But mentally healthy people cannot meet the need for intimacy apart from God either.

When we finally learn what life is about all of us need to recognize that people will let us down. What we long for deep within ourselves only God can meet. God may have given you the gift of a loving wife or husband, of children whom you are close to, of good friends who have stood with you over a long time. You ought to be very thankful for those things. But even the best human relationship is going to fall short. Here David is on his knees, seeing life as it really is and saying, "Lord, I am so hurt. I am in such need. If you forsake me I am utterly forsaken."

David makes a second petition in verse 11, where he says, "Teach me Thy way, O Lord." If verse 7 is a call for intimacy with God, we need to see verse 11 as a call for wisdom. David was a very talented, very able man. In his book, "Out of the Miry Clay," John Herkus describes David the child this way:

The kid was a genius. Brilliant . . . with an IQ of 150 ish. . . . the musical talent of a Beethoven and the poetry of a Shakespeare and the hand-and-eye coordination of a Babe Ruth and a military genius that has never once reappeared in all history .

Yet David is saying in this psalm, "With all my ability, with all that I've been given, with all the opportunities I

have I cannot handle life by myself. It's too much for me." His prayer to God is, "You need to make a level path for me because if you don't I'll fall. I'm not smart enough, I'm not strong enough, I'm not able to carve my way through this world by myself. If you are not my wisdom then I'm in desperate shape. Create a level path for me, Lord." Again, there is a note of urgency, a depth of concern here. This is a real issue for David. He knows that life is hard. He knows he will fail if it is up to him to provide all that it takes to handle life.

David asks for wisdom to handle two specific areas. First, he says, "Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me." One of the reasons life is too hard to handle is that there are a lot of liars out there. The world is a devious scene. It is filled with people who are deliberately false witnesses, but it's also filled with people who are false witnesses without even meaning to be, I suspect. That is my experience anyway. Looking back on my life I hate to realize that I have been a flatterer, I have operated on innuendo rather than truth; I have tried to maneuver people to my advantage without ever directly telling boldfaced lies. Nevertheless, essentially I was lying to them. And I consider myself to be one of the "good" people! I am one of the "nice guys." Yet, I must frequently be cast as a "false witness," making life more difficult and more dangerous for people because of my contribution. But certainly, lies told in a deliberate attempt to take advantage of someone are even worse.

Consider today's widespread acceptance of the "Playboy Philosophy." What a phenomenal lie that is! What an incredible, expansive, articulate, glossy lie! It tells us that pursuing pleasure, living for yourself, aggressive materialism, drugs and sex will make you happy. This lie is told so artfully, so well. But that is only one example of the kind of devious, dark, confusing things this world throws at us. David is saying, "Lord, if you don't make a level path for me I'm going to be fooled. The liars are out there and I need help."

Secondly, David says that he is calling out to God to help him because the false witnesses are those, "such as breathe out violence." David was not so naive as many of us who think that the world is basically fairly safe and happy. But just take away the top layer, the covering, and you find that the world is simmering with violence. A nice San Jose neighborhood with nice people, family people, church people, was recently discovered to have in its midst a man who chained up little girls in his basement and abused them sexually. Everybody liked this man; all the kids in the neighborhood called him "Pop"; he worked in a Silicon Valley industry. But here was a deviant, violent man right in the middle of the nicest of neighborhoods. We are told that our prisons are time-bombs waiting to explode. Men and women are being crowded into conditions that are producing a horrible, violent upsurge. The abortion statistics in this country alone ought to make us recoil with horror at the kind of violent society we have become. David says, "Lord, if you don't create a level path for me the devious, the liars and the violent will overcome me" -- "false witnesses such as breathe out violence. "

Jesus once gave a summary statement of what the devil was like, and we see the same ideas reflected in David's writing. Speaking to some of the leadership of his day, Jesus said,

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

The devil is a murderer and a liar -- "False witnesses such as breathe out violence." This world is too much for those who are not on their knees saying, "Lord, create for me a level path because I am not big enough or strong enough to do it for myself. "

Let me summarize what we have seen so far. There are two halves to this psalm. After speaking the praises of God in the first half, in the second part David talks about the very real, painful, frightening world in which we are called to live. Not for once is he fooled, not for once does he gloss over the difficulties that this world has in store for those of us who are caught in a spiritual war. With a deep note of concern, an emotional sense that things are really bad, David asks for help in two areas. First, he says, "Lord, my need for love, for intimacy, my need to have somebody understand me who will not forsake me is tremendous. Unless you will be that one, unless you

will hear me when I cry, unless you will stand by me, then I am forsaken."

Secondly, David prays for wisdom. He says, "Teach me, Lord. Lead me on a level path." I don't think David is teaching the people in verse 14. He is speaking to his own heart, saying, "Heart, take courage." The hard thing about trusting the wisdom of God is that God sometimes takes his time about answering. I am often required to wait. "But Lord, I recognize that if I do not have you leading me I am not strong or capable or wise enough to take on life by myself. Hear me, Lord, I require intimacy. Teach me, Lord, I require wisdom."

There are a couple of ways in which we can apply to our own lives what David is saying here. One way is to learn from the hard knocks of life, as he did. If we ever are tempted to think that any human being, spouse or child or anyone else, can ultimately love us at the depth we were made to be loved, then we are fooling ourselves. God may give us those people as a gift, and if he does we should praise him, but we need him to be our lover. If nothing else, these people will die. But we need an intimate friend who will never forsake us. If we have not yet learned that lesson, let us learn it from David. Let us fall on our knees as he did and call out to God to draw near to us and hear us when we speak.

Secondly, let us learn, with David, that however capable a man is he still faces a world that is too hard to handle. If we think we have got what it takes we ought to stop thinking that. If we do not become the kind of people who are on our knees asking God to help us make sense of things then we are fools who will be taken advantage of by the murderer and the liar himself.

But further, let me say that the same man who was concerned about these things is the same man, as we will see more closely next week, who wrote verses 1-3:

**The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the defense of my life;
whom shall I dread?
When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,
my adversaries and my enemies,
they stumbled and fell.
Though a host encamp against me,
my heart will not fear;
though war arise against me,
in spite of this I shall be confident.**

Despite all the difficulties and the struggles of the world, David had total confidence that God was sovereign and that no foe could damage him.

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First Message
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