



Week 3: Psalms of Trust

Day 1

Psalm 27:1-6, 11-12, 14

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

² When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.

³ Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

⁴ One thing I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.

⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

⁶ Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

- ¹¹ Teach me your way, O Lord,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.
- ¹² Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.
- ¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!

Commentary

The first week of this series, we studied psalms of thanksgiving. Psalms of trust are similar to thanksgiving, and are categorized together by some scholars. But there is one big difference between the two. While psalms of thanksgiving usually come after trouble has passed and the Israelites wanted to thank God for getting them through the storm, psalms of trust are occasioned for the midst of trial and suffering. They are not declarations of victory, but rather recommitments to faith and hope. They generally recall promises of God or past events in which God has proven that God is faithful.

The structure of psalms of trust generally follows this pattern (though the order is sometimes varied and some parts are omitted in certain psalms):

Declaration of trust

Invitation to trust

Basis for trust

Petition

Vow to praise

Interior lament

For example, these are the verses that correspond to the patten set out above in the 27th Psalm:

1-5 – Declaration of trust (“whom shall I fear?... Yet I will be confident”)

14 – Invitation to trust (“Wait for the Lord”)

11 – Petition (“Teach me your way, O Lord”)

6 – Vow to praise (“I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy”)

12 – Interior lament (“false witnesses have risen against me”)

Reflection Question

What promise of God do you need to remember to help you trust God with it?

Day 2

Psalm 121

A song of ascents.

I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

Commentary

Psalms of ascent were songs that were sung by the Israelites as they ascended the mountains around Jerusalem on their annual pilgrimage to the City of David for Passover. Because of the treacherous terrain, those making the journey were at risk of being robbed by thieves. The psalmist that wrote Psalm 121 reiterates his trust in God to keep him safe throughout the psalm.

From the beginning (“from where will my help come?”) the psalmist is acknowledging that he cannot make it without help. In the second verse, he attributes that help to the Lord, the creator of all. The psalmist is saying, if God is powerful enough to create the heavens and the earth, then God can give help to a human.

Through whatever troubles and perils the psalmist may face, he *trusts* in God to not let his feet be moved, to protect him from evil, and keep his going out and coming in. Essentially, he trusts that God is always watching over him, which gives him confidence to complete the ascent.

Reflection Question

What does it mean that God wants to help us? How has God helped you in your life?

Day 3

Psalm 131

A song of ascents. Of David.

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.
O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time on and forevermore.

Commentary

There are so many things we just don't know. Science explains a lot, but there are miracles of nature that cannot be easily rationalized. Human emotions are all over the place, and sometimes we fall victim

to someone's whims and unexpected responses. We have no idea why some people seem to always suffer while others never seem troubled. It is puzzling why children get sick and loved ones die without warning.

All of these things are beyond our comprehension, but as God says to Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?" We are not God. It behooves us to remember that.

And so, as David did, we do not occupy ourselves with things too great and too marvelous for ourselves. If we spend our time trying to figure out the unexplainable or unknowable rather than trusting in God, we will be frustrated. Because we know that God's character is good, we can rest in the trust that God will only do good. As the author Lydia Brownback wrote, "Because [David] was humble, gaps in his understanding didn't undo him."

Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch woman who helped many Jews escape during the Holocaust, said, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." We may not know a path forward, but God certainly does.

Reflection Question

Is there an issue or situation in your life that you are having a hard time trusting God with?

Day 4

Psalm 20:6-8

Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven
with mighty victories by his right hand.
Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses,
but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God.
They will collapse and fall,
but we shall rise and stand upright.

Commentary

When you are backed against a wall and you feel like you have no options... where do you put your trust? Are you looking around for allies? Do you trust in your own abilities? David, the author of this psalm, put his trust in God.

The historical context of this psalm places it as a song of trust for the Israelite army in the midst of a war. Before entering battle, they are reminded that God is their true armor and shield. David writes that some people put their trust in military might (chariots and horses), but his army will put their trust in God. He knows that those who put their trust in worldly things will be disappointed (as he writes, they will collapse and fall), but those who trust in God will rise and stand upright. After all, God is much bigger than any military force.

Reflection Question

What can you do today to remember how big God is rather than how big your problem is?

Day 5

Psalm 118:5-9

Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.
With the Lord on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?
The Lord is on my side to help me;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.
It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to put confidence in mortals.
It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to put confidence in princes.

Commentary

Our society tells us that we have to be strong enough, sufficient enough, smart enough, and powerful enough for every situation that we may encounter. We are supposed to have the resources, the strength, and the wherewithal to get through anything life throws at us. But anyone that has lived long enough knows this is impossible. We cannot, alone, conquer all of our problems. This psalm reiterates that it is God in whom we should put our trust rather than in mortals or princes or ourselves.

One thing that often gets overlooked is that the psalmist didn't just run into scary or anxiety-inducing circumstances and decide to trust in God. His faith has been established and practiced. When we barely pay attention to God or only go to church when it is convenient or forget to pray until we are in grave trouble, we do not have a strong relationship with God that undergirds trust. In the same way that we trust family and friends with whom we have longstanding relationships, it is easier to trust God when we have invested the time in nurturing our faith.

Reflection Question

How does the decision to trust God affect your emotions in times of trouble and fear?