

Series: Seek
Title: Seeking God
Text: Psalm 27:8
Date: April 16, 2023

In life and in pastoring, I've noticed a strange phenomenon that seems to occur as people age. For some reason or another, it seems like some gradually develop an expectation that other people — friends, family members, and the like — have the responsibility for maintaining relationships. Such people often become perturbed when others don't reach out to them. Perhaps you have had experience with such things. Older individuals can sometimes complain, "No one ever calls me!" Or, they might say, "No one cares about me anymore!"

A lot of the problem with such things rests in the nature of older age. As life slows down, people have more time on their hands. Boredom tempts them to think unhealthy thoughts (Proverbs 18:1). They may assume everyone else has the same type of schedule they do. Or, they may develop unrealistic expectations of those around them.

Another problem with the aforementioned scenario is a lack of personal initiative in maintaining a relationships. When aged parents have complained to me about children who don't call enough, I've sometimes asked, "Well, how often would you like to hear from your children?" Most will say, "At least once a week would be nice." I usually then counsel such people to take the initiative and call their children at least once a week.

For any relationship to succeed, each party must play a part. The same is true when it comes to our relationship to God. To know Him and glorify Him, we must own our responsibility to seek after Him. The entire canon of Scripture gives witness to this reality. As we have already seen, the Bible is replete with admonitions for God's people to seek God and Christ's kingdom.

When we approach the Psalms of David, we learn more about this subject. In particular, Psalm 27 contains great truth about our pursuit of God. The Psalm was contained within a trilogy of songs (Psalm 26, 27, 28) in which David pour out his heart concerning suffering he endured. In the midst of his three painful songs, the king sang of his commitment to pursue the Lord in worship.

THE HEART

In examining the lyrics of David's song in Psalm 27:8, we are first drawn to the word "heart." The king sang, "My *heart* says this...." His reference to the heart is significant to our study. It reveals that the pursuit of God involves much more than outward, mechanical displays of religion. It demonstrates that the soul of man is involved in the seeking of God.

The Hebrew language of the Old Testament used the word *lēb* in Psalm 27:8. The term was used in David's day to refer to the physical heart. In fact, the king implemented the word in such a way in one of his other songs. In Psalm 38:10, he used it to speak of the fleshly organ that pumps blood throughout the body, saying, "My *heart* races, my strength leaves me...."

The Hebrew word for heart often referred to the physical muscle in the human chest. However, it also spoke of an unseen, non-physical part of human nature. It was often metonymically applied to the immaterial part of the human constitution, that part of our nature that we sometimes call "the soul." Used in this way, the term referred to the "...mind, soul, spirit, self, i.e., the source of life of the inner person in various aspects, with a focus on feelings, thoughts, volition, and other areas of the inner life."¹

The heart is that part of humanity that makes humankind different than the animal kingdom. Pardon the pun, but the heart is at the heart of what it means to be human. It is

¹ Swanson, James. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew, Old Testament*. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

through this non-material part of the human constitution that one relates to God. The heart is fundamental and foundational to what it means to be made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).

David understood correctly that his pursuit of God involved a setting of the heart upon God; thus, he sang, “My heart says this about you: ‘Seek his face’” (Psalm 27:8). Commenting on the nature of the role of the human heart in the worship of God, the Puritan Richard Sibbes once said:

The heart is between God and our obedience, as it were, an ambassador. It understands from God what God would have done, and then it lays a command upon the whole man. The heart and conscience of many is partly divine, partly human. It hath some divinity in it, especially if the man be a holy man. God speaks, and the heart speaks. God speaks to the heart, and the heart speaks to us.²

Notice Sibbes’ unique analogy. He likened the human heart to an ambassador that stands between God and man or woman. The heart, or soul, is the means by which God’s people relate to Him (John 4:24).

In one of my pastorates, I served in a military town. Through the course of my service, I met a number of people from other countries. Driving on post at the local Army base, I often saw flags from other nations flying in front of homes. I learned that allies of the United States often send representatives to our military installations for the purpose of training and maintaining healthy interaction between allied countries. During my pastorate, I became acquainted with soldiers from Germany, Brazil, Italy, and other nations who represented their respective nations within the United States Army. According to Richard Sibbes, we can think of the human heart performing a similar function. It serves as a spiritual “ambassador” between us and God.

Christian author Mike Myers has noted how the world seems to have a fixation with the heart. It tells us to “listen to” our heart or to “go with” our heart. However, such encouragements are misguided. Our fallen and sinful natures make it unwise to allow our hearts to blindly direct us. We need the grace and knowledge of our Lord to direct our hearts. Myers quotes the Puritan John Flavel who said, “The heart of man is his worst part before it be regenerate, and the best afterwards; it is the seat of principles and the fountain of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it.”³

If we want to truly pursue God, we must understand that such a pursuit is not primarily physical. It is spiritual. Pursuing God involves a setting of the heart upon God. It involves soul work wherein our inner-man or inner-woman becomes fixated on the Lord and His heavenly realities. It is for these reasons that Solomon instructed his son, saying, “Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

THE ANOINTED ONE

Psalm 28 is a companion psalm to Psalm 27. As I mentioned earlier, many Bible scholars believe that David wrote Psalm 26, 27, and 28 as a trilogy of songs.⁴ Combined together, they expressed the man’s confidence in the Lord in the face of great fear. The first song began with the following lyrics — “Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering” (Psalm 26:1). David’s theme of trust in the Lord is

² Spurgeon, C. H. *The Treasury of David: Volume II, Psalm XXVII to LII*. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1983), 16.

³ Myers, Mike. Reflections on the Heart. *The Banner of Truth Magazine: 713*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2023), 21.

⁴ Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 1-72*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1973), 135.

continued in Psalm 27: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 27:1). The exact nature of David’s enemies is debated, but it is commonly believed that David wrote Psalm 26, 27, and 28 in the face of great threat from adversaries.

By the time David reached his third song in his trilogy of deliverance songs, he expressed great trust in the Lord. His confidence reached a crescendo as he sang, “Blessed be the Lord, for he has heard the sound of my pleading. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. Therefore my heart celebrates, and I give thanks to him with my song” (Psalm 28:6-7). David knew the Lord would rescue him from his enemies. He had no fear. He had an absolute and steadfast confidence.

Why was David so secure? Was his confidence misguided? Could one accuse him of being overconfident in the face of enemy threats? Not hardly.

If his confidence would have been in himself, David would have been misguided. But his confidence was not in self. Nor was it rooted in an earthly matter. Instead, David’s confidence was in the Lord. More specifically, his confidence was in the Lord’s covenant promises.

“Anointed” One

We see a clue concerning the root of David’s confidence in Psalm 28:8. In the midst of his singing, David proclaimed, “The Lord is the strength of his people; he is a stronghold of salvation for his anointed” (Psalm 28:8). The last word in the lyrics of verse 8 is significant. It was the Hebrew title that was eventually used of the Messiah — Jesus Christ (Daniel 9:25)!⁵ Why did David feel it was appropriate to use such a title in reference to himself? He did so because he knew he was the recipient of Messianic promises.

As early as the Garden of Eden, God promised that a Deliverer would be sent to Earth to provide forgiveness for humanity’s sin. Though the first man and woman rebelled against God’s Law and brought spiritual death to all humans, God promised to send one from woman who would undo the consequences of their transgression (Genesis 3:15). The perfect fellowship Adam and Eve had previously experienced in the Garden of Eden would be restored to mankind (Genesis 3:8).

To fulfill His promise, God raised up a nation to deliver His foreordained Deliverer. He appointed a man named Abraham, a pagan who had previously worshipped the moon (Joshua 24:2), to be the Father of a great nation. God selected the man for Himself, He made a covenant with Him, and He told Him that all the nations of the Earth would experience salvation through His seed (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-20). God’s promises to Abraham concerning a seed were rooted in the Lord’s promises concerning the fruit of the woman in the Garden of Eden.

In time, God’s promises became more specific. The Lord appeared to David, a descendent of Abraham. While David was King of Israel, he desired to build a physical house for the Lord. Though a vision, the Lord revealed He had different plans. He intended to do something far greater for the man. He planned to make his kingly reign an everlasting one! He promised David, “When your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up after you your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom” (2 Samuel 7:12). Though the Lord’s promise had a near fulfillment in the reign of Solomon, it ultimately pointed to the coming Messiah — Jesus Christ!

Drawing Near through Jesus

This is why David was so confident in all of his praying — he knew he was an heir of promises related to the Messiah (Mark 12:37)! He didn’t despair in the day of difficulty because his soul rested on God’s promises. As enemies encircled him, he turned his focus toward Jesus. He didn’t trust in his abilities, his reasoning capacities, his military prowess, his allies, or any other earthly source of strength. His faith was firmly fixed on the coming King!

⁵ Kidner, 141.

David's experience is instructive for us. When it comes to the pursuit of God in our own lives, we should learn a lesson from the king. Our ability to approach the Lord comes through the Anointed One, Jesus. Our confidence in times of calamity should be rooted in Christ and His cross.

Because of Jesus, we have access to God. Hanging on the cross, he was separated from God so that we don't have to be separated from God (Matthew 27:46). He tore down every form of hostility that existed between us and the Lord, paving a way for us to have direct access to our Creator (Matthew 27:51). It is for this reason that Scripture tells us, "...since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water" (Hebrews 10:21-22).

Perhaps an example will help illustrate this truth. I have been a lover of sports for years. I enjoy visiting ballparks and sports stadiums. Over the years I've been fortunate to have a number of friends who have season tickets to games. Some tickets come with "all-access" privileges. At times, I have enjoyed VIP lounges with special foods, desserts, and refreshments. On one occasion, the lounge area was so nice that it was tempting to miss the game, stay in the comfort of the lounge, and just enjoy the food and posh furniture!

My friends' tickets and passes have brought me access to nice perks and privileges. Without their generosity, I would not have been able to attend games, and I certainly wouldn't have been allowed into a VIP area. When you think about prayer, remember that you have been given access to God because of Jesus. He has secured immediate access into the holy presence of the Lord. David was aware of these realities. He had confidence in prayer because he was aware of the Lord's covenant promises. You too can be confident as you seek the Lord, knowing that Jesus has granted you access to God. Remember the admonition of Scripture: "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8)!

THE INVITATION

Before we close our discussion of our current topic, it is critical that we note an important concept in all of David's singing and seeking. It seems the king was motivated by an invitation from the Lord. Bible scholars debate the exact meaning of the first half of Psalm 27:8 and the words "Seek his face." Some think the original language contains a summons from the Lord, as if the Lord Himself invited David to seek Him. Others see the words as belonging to David, as if David was instructing his heart to pursue the Lord.

The original Hebrew of Psalm 27:8 is rather forceful. English translations do not convey the abruptness of David's words. In the Hebrew, the verse contains a command — "Seek my face..."⁶ No matter which interpretation one takes — whether one believes David was talking to David or whether one believes the Lord was talking to David — it is clear that David saw himself as having an open invitation to seek after the Lord. The king was gripped by an awareness that he had the blessed privilege to pursue after the person of God.

The words of Richard Sibbes are helpful for us once again. The Puritan remarked on Psalm 27:8, saying, "God is willing to be known. He is willing to open and discover himself; God delights not to hide himself. God stands not upon state, as some emperors do that think their presence diminisheth respect. God is no such God... The more we know of him, the more we shall admire him." According to Sibbes, David's words reveal that God is a God who "... desires to reveal himself."⁷ In all generations, God's people should be aware that there is an open invitation to seek the Lord.

God is a God who is always desirous for His people to pursue Him. Other passages of Scripture make such things clear. In Isaiah's day, the prophet was witness to great disaster for his nation. The people of God were taken off as captives to a far-off land because of their

⁶ Spurgeon, 14.

⁷ Spurgeon, 14.

disobedience to the Lord. Despite such things, the Lord promised to be faithful to His covenant. He announced future blessings for His people. In doing so, He reminded them of His past faithfulness to communicate His Word to His people and He summoned His people to seek Him, saying, “I have not spoken in secret, somewhere in a land of darkness. I did not say to the descendants of Jacob: Seek me in a wasteland. I am the Lord, who speaks righteously, who declares what is right” (Isaiah 45:19). Even in the midst of great apostasy and immorality, there was an open invitation for God’s people to seek the face of God.

When we read the New Testament, we find a similar invitation. In the book of James, we are told of an immoral people who had committed spiritual adultery toward the Lord (James 4:1-4). Prejudicial treatment of others, physical fights, and worldly values marked the assembly of God’s people. Despite such things, the Lord made an open appeal for His people to seek Him. Through James, He said, “Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:7-8).

Both the Old Testament and New Testament’s alike reveal that our Lord desires for His people to seek after Him. None needs to be timid or insecure, wondering whether or not God desires fellowship. The witness of Scripture and the character of the Lord make it plain — the Lord invites all to seek His face. If there is ever a breakdown in man or woman’s relationship with God, man or woman is at fault, not God.

Conclusion

David’s words in Psalm 27:8 reveal several important truths about the pursuit of God. As we close, be aware that the Lord invites you to seek Him. He wants you to know Him, His character, and His works. Nowadays, many settle for a religion that is negligent concerning such things. It is marked by religious practices, principles, programs, and personal effort, but it is devoid of a real, personal knowledge of God. One author has poignantly remarked, “It is not good for us to pretend to understand the things of God better than we do.”⁸ May we cultivate the spirit of King David and say to the Lord, “My heart says this about you: ‘Seek his face’” (Psalm 27:8).

⁸ Peterson, Robert. *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 311.