

## Safe Space

### Psalm 27

*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 evil men advance against me to devour my flesh,  
When my enemies and my foes attack me they will stumble and fall.*

*3 Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;  
though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.*

*4 One thing I ask from the Lord, this is what I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,  
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.*

*5 For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling;  
he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.*

*6 Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me;  
at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy;*

*I will sing and make music to the Lord.*

*7 Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful to me and answer me.*

*8 My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek.*

*9 Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger;  
you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Saviour.*

*10 Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.*

*11 Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.*

*12 Do not hand me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me,  
Breathing out violence.*

*13 I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

*14 Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.*

### A Safe Space?

Is God a safe space for us? We'd like to think so! We'd like to think that the love and grace of God make us feel safe and give us space to be ourselves. That's true. God is someone to rely on deeply; God is faithful and dependable. But sometimes that sense of being safe with God is challenged – God appears to have turned His face away from us, or not to answer our prayers and far from being a safe space, that can be a very disturbing space. So what are we to do? Someone once talked about the longest 12 inches in the world: that is the distance between the head and the heart. In our heads we know certain things to be true, but in our hearts what we know is often tempered by the experience of life. We know in our heads that God forgives sin, for example; but our hearts often find it hard to accept that God forgives *our* sin!

Psalm 27 makes that 12-inch journey from what the man of faith knows and how his faith is shaped by his experience of life. There are 2 keywords in Psalm 27: “confidence” and “seek”; both of them appear twice in these verses, but they move; they are changed. The first time these words appear they are bold and strong words, but when they come back later, they are shaped differently by the psalmist’s experience of life. The beauty of many of the psalms is that the experience of the writer so often mirrors the experience of the reader; is our story here too? The Psalm is in 4 parts: in parts 1 and 4 the keyword is “confidence” and in parts 2 and 3 the keyword is “seek”. At the centre of the whole Psalm stands God, the safe space.

*“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?” (verse 1)* These are bold, confident statements about God; they come from someone who is sure of his faith and is confident in what God is like and what God can do. “Light” is a picture in the Bible of everything that is good and positive about God; Jesus is the light of the world, showing us what God is like and showing us how to live our lives. Truth and goodness, joy and vitality are depicted by light. This is what God is like; this is what God gives; this is how God gives us a solid foundation for life and faith as if to emphasize that the notion of God as the “stronghold” builds that sense of confidence. God is our Edinburgh Castle, impregnable and dependable on its rock. Confidence is a hard word for us: we’re not sure we can be confident; there always seems to need to be space for uncertainty! But confidence in God is absolutely a good thing to have. God is our light; God is our stronghold; God is positively good for us.

So we seek God. *“One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” (verse 4)* Our man of faith is seeking God “at home” as it were. He talks about God’s house, His temple, His dwelling, tabernacle, tent and fortress – all different pictures to describe finding God at home and sharing that space with God. Seeking God is a joyful thing, a delight; seeking God brings joy to the heart because in Him we find our life, our salvation and grace. I love the notion of finding God at home and of Him inviting us in to share home with Him, the genial host welcoming the visitor to share hospitality. Home is the one place where we should be ourselves, able to relax and feel at peace, but it is not always like that; if God is our “home” then can we feel at peace with Him? We might think of this building as our safe space, but it is only a safe space for us when we encounter God here and find our joy and delight in Him.

For the man of faith, that seeking is good, but then has to be seen against a troubled background. He seeks God because God invites him, but there are dangers ahead. He has enemies; there are people who tell lies about him, who oppress him, who breathe out violence against him. When that happens, there is a deep fear in his heart that even God’s face will turn away from him and that even God will forsake him and be angry with him. From David’s story we know that these experiences are part of his story along with his deep fear that God would reject him because of his faults and mistakes. The seeking for God that was a joy and delight, now has a dark background and there is more alarm in his voice. Now he needs courage in his faith and a clear sense of God with him.

Confidence has not gone; now confidence is tempered by his experience of life. *"I am still confident of this: that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."* (verse 13) His expectation of God has not gone; he still expects to experience God's goodness, but that comes against the background of hardship and suffering. Life has not taken away his confidence and indeed may even have made it stronger, but perhaps he is more wary, more willing to wait and trust and hope in the Lord, given the tough things that life has thrown at him. *"Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."* (verse 14) There's something about these words that say "resilience" to me; faith is there; the light is not dimmed, but the light is shining against dark clouds, a black background, and a place of fear and anxiety.

Confidence is not a word that comes easy to us. It smacks of a dangerous presumption, or a claim to be right all of the time, so sure of ourselves, and somehow opinionated or dogmatic. But confidence is a good word. We're not talking self-confidence here, a cocky arrogance; we're talking confidence in God. We look at God and His promises and we're sure that He can be trusted! We look at Jesus and His willingness to walk through dark places and suffer and we believe Him. We seek God and His grace and what we find is altogether good, a delight to our heart. God is a safe space for us because He loves us as we are; He loves us unconditionally; He promises to be with us and to protect us. Our experience of life challenges that confidence, but if anything can make it deeper, more rounded, less cocky, less arrogant, but more humble and more reliant on God which is where it always should be.

The centre of our confidence always has to be Jesus. We trust Him. It is never confidence in ourselves, because that will always fail. Our confidence is in Jesus as the stronghold for our lives; we are set upon a rock that will not fail. Jesus is the light of the World; Jesus opens up the way for us to seek God and find Him; Jesus is with us through all the trials, troubles and struggles of life; He is able to save us completely. Jesus stands at the centre of our confidence; our confidence is in Him. He will never let us down. We wait on Him: sometimes that answer comes easily and quickly; sometimes that is a sooner-or-later answer. Nevertheless, He is our safe space: we can be bold and assured in our faith, or we can be full of questions, doubts and anxieties, and He will listen to us and give us grace for everything.

Safe space – a place where nothing can harm us but we can feel at home, we can be ourselves without fear of discrimination or damage. God is our safe space? We can be at home with Him and enjoy His presence; we can be ourselves in His presence because He knows us inside out anyway and still loves us. We can say whatever we like to Him when we pray: express our confidence and our doubts, what delights us and what makes us angry. We can be grateful for His goodness and we can long for His love. *"The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?... I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living... (and so) wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."* (verses 1,13,14)