

## Psalm 27 – “I Need Light”<sup>1</sup>

**Before the Lesson:** Print the handout “David Vs. Goliath” to be read by a class member in the Information session. Have blank paper and pens to be used for the Transformational Exercise.

**Fellowship question:** (Use *one* of these to break the ice, begin some discussion, and lead into the study):

How many light bulbs do you have in your home?

How many flashlights do you own?

### Information

It is hard for us to imagine life without electric lights. We might experience this while on a camping trip or when our community is darkened by trees falling on wires. But, none of us automatically goes to bed when the sun goes down. If necessary, we light candles for short-term use. We take for granted the comfort that flipping a switch gives us when we walk into a dark space. Pre-electric civilizations knew the value of candles and oil-filled lamps. From our earliest days, we’ve desired light over dark.

- Have a class member read Psalm 27:1.

Israel had dark days and light days. One of those dark periods was when Israel lived under the threat of the Philistines. David, who is said to have written Psalm 27, was a child when his country was being terrorized.

- Have a class member read these selections from I Samuel 17. Verses 2-4, 10-11, 32, 37, 40-51. There is a handout with these verses. Print it out for a class member to read.

It may have been a while since you’ve heard this story. Because this reading was selected from the entire chapter, some of the story was left out. Still, did you hear anything that you had forgotten or not heard before?

We can imagine how dark these days were for Israel and King Saul. Then along comes the golden child with a sling and a deep trust in God. Suddenly, there is light. (And, in all the excitement, Goliath became light-headed!)

This story may have been in David’s mind when he penned this song.

- Have a class member read Psalm 27:2-6.

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2023. More lessons may be found at [greatbibleteachers.com](http://greatbibleteachers.com).

In this psalm, there is trust in God and there is a need for help. What is the relationship between trust and need?

If there is more need, are we more likely to trust God? Why or why not?

How are prayers for help and intercession signs of trust in God?

David says he'd love to "live in the house of the Lord" and to "inquire in his temple."

Do you remember the song, "If I Were a Rich Man" from the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*? The main character, Tevya, sings: "If I were rich, I'd have the time that I lack to sit in the synagogue and pray. And maybe have a seat by the Eastern wall. And I'd discuss the holy books with the learned men, several hours every day. That would be the sweetest thing of all."<sup>2</sup>

Maybe David means this literally, as Tevya did. More than likely, however, he is speaking about living in God's presence. When we "go to church", we worship God, but we are also experiencing other things that are very intertwined with worship.

In *Reflection on the Psalms*, C. S. Lewis illustrates this with the farm worker who attends worship after the harvest season:

"You would do him wrong asking him to separate out some exclusively religious element in his mind from all the rest – from his hearty social pleasure in a corporate act, his enjoyment of the hymns (and the crowd), his memory of other such services since childhood, his well-earned anticipation of rest after harvest or Christmas dinner after church. They are all one in his mind. This would have been even truer of any ancient man... He never heard of music, or festivity, or agriculture as things separate from religion, nor of religion as something separate from them. Life was one."<sup>3</sup>

Do you experience "life is one" – or does worship/church feel like a separate element in your life ("life is many")?

Up to this point in our psalm, all is well. God is a shining divine light. God is nearby when we are in need. God is close by and concerned.

It is wonderful when life is in that place. However, in real life, things are not always so smooth. Psalm 27 takes a sudden turn now – so sudden that many scholars are convinced that this is a separate psalm. Verses 1-6 are one psalm, verses 7-14 are another, in this view. Verse 6 ends with the psalmist offering shouts of joy, "singing and making melody to the Lord." In verse 7 and following, the psalmist is making very different sounds.

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<sup>2</sup> If I Were a Rich Man lyrics © Jerry Bock Enterprises, Times Square Music Publications Company, Trio Music Company Inc., Trio Music Co., Inc.

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 47.

- Have a class member read Psalm 27:7-12.

“In verses 7-14, assurance is but a memory and God’s presence a distant dream. In the classic form of a lament, the psalmist longs for a sense of God’s presence and pleads for God not to turn away, as if he or she feels abandoned by the same God who once had felt so close.”<sup>4</sup>

Our spiritual journeys are not straight highways to heaven. Life demands that there be detours, speed bumps, and U-turns. Usually, we see these things as bad. They frustrate us from going in the direction we want to go and at the speed we want to go. We lose confidence in our way. We grow fearful that we may not get back on our happy journey or reach our joyful destination.

Listen to this quote about losing our confidence.

“The beauty of finding out where we lack confidence or what is the cause of our own fear(s) is that we may then discover how to face them or navigate a way through them. Madeleine L’Engle in reflecting on confidence wrote, ‘It’s a good thing to have all the props pulled out from under us occasionally. It gives us some sense of what is rock under our feet, and what is sand.’”<sup>5</sup>

Has this been true in your life? Was there anything good about “having all the props pulled out from under” you? How did it affect your faith?

In spite of his troubles, or maybe as a sign of trusting in God because of his troubles, the psalmist ends this song on a hopeful note.

- Have a class member read Psalm 27:13-14.

“Waiting for the Lord” could mean being passive, remaining inactive until God does something or gives some direction. It could also mean sitting on edge, prepared, ready to act when the opportunity presents itself. Which do you think the psalmist means?

### **Transformational Exercise**

[Distribute paper and pens.]

I mentioned that scholars debate whether Psalm 27 was originally a single psalm or two psalms that were, for some reason, merged.

“The combination of two psalms, one of trust and one of lament, may also be seen as an intentional reminder that we all face ups and downs in life. There are times when we feel strong, close to God, and confident in our faith, as in verses 1-6. There are other times when we struggle with various difficulties and feel far from God, as in verses 7-14. In those times, we can look back to former experiences and trust that God’s face will again look to us in favor; we have only

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<sup>4</sup> Tony Cartledge, “Who Needs the Light?,” *Nurturing Faith*, February 21, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Paul O. Myhre. [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1544](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1544)

to wait for the Lord with strength and courage, trusting past experience for the promise of future deliverance.”<sup>6</sup>

Our life does have ups and downs. There are “the best of days and the worst of days.” There are days of wonderful light and there are days of somber darkness.

On your sheet of paper, create a map of your faith journey. When did you experience fear? When did you experience confidence in God? When did you experience light and darkness? When did you experience feeling connected to God or disconnected from God?

[Give time for class members to create their spiritual journey map. If there is time, invite them to share their journey with a fellow class member.]

[Close in a prayer something like this:] *We trust that you are present with us, God, in the best of our days and in the worst of our days. Give us the faith to wait on you. Strengthen our souls. Encourage our hearts. Amen.*

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<sup>6</sup> Tony Cartledge, “The Hardest Question: Is Psalm 27 one psalm or two?” *Nurturing Faith*, February 21, 2016.

## David vs. Goliath

(I Samuel 17:2-4, 10-11, 32, 37, 40-51, NIV)

<sup>2</sup> Saul and the Israelites gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks against the Philistines. <sup>3</sup> The Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. <sup>4</sup> And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span...<sup>10</sup> And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together." <sup>11</sup> When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid...<sup>32</sup> David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." ...<sup>37</sup> David said, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you!" ...<sup>40</sup> Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

<sup>41</sup> The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. <sup>42</sup> When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. <sup>43</sup> The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. <sup>44</sup> The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." <sup>45</sup> But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. <sup>46</sup> This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, <sup>47</sup> and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."

<sup>48</sup> When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. <sup>49</sup> David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

<sup>50</sup> So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. <sup>51</sup> Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.