

Courage for the New Year

Psalm 27

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Fear is one of the most universal human experiences. Fear of loss. Fear of enemies. Fear of rejection. Fear of the future. Fear of being abandoned. Even faithful believers are not immune to fear. However, here's the issue with fear. Fear isn't a "*thing*" – it's a response to a prior experience or to an idea or an invention of our minds.

For example, you have a bad experience with spiders, and you might fear spiders the rest of your life, like me. I don't even like watching videos of spiders. They simply creep me out. However, for you, it might be snakes or heights or flying or dogs or getting a shot at the doctor's office or germs, or death, and the worst of all, public speaking.

Did you know the top two fears are death and public speaking? Death is #2, and public speaking is #1. Which means at a funeral, you would rather be in the casket than giving the eulogy. Here's the bottom line: Fear may not exist as an entity, but the experience of fear is very real.

Psalm 27 is remarkable because it holds together two realities that we often think cannot coexist: Unshakable confidence in God and an honest admission of fear.

David begins Psalm 27 with a bold confession of faith in the face of his fears. Then his prayer moves to intense pleading, which culminates in resolute hope. This is not naïve optimism he is expressing. David's faith was forged in the fires of the trials that he faced, and they gave rise to some of his most intense fears.

Throughout his life and reign as king of Israel, David battled not only his fear but also his real enemies. Verses 2-3 tell us that he was anxious about "*evildoers*," "*adversaries*," "*armies*," and even "*war*" breaking out against him or the nation. Verse 5 tells us that he was concerned about "*the day of trouble*" that may come while he reigned. Next, v. 9 tells us that he even feared being *forsaken* by the LORD. Verse 10 tells us that he feared that his own family might *abandon* him. Finally, vv. 11-12 he feared *his enemies* might tell lies about him and incite *violence*. So, the bottom line is that David battled real fears in his life. Being king and the anointed one to lead the nation didn't exempt him from the battle that raged in his heart and mind.

None of us knows what the new year will bring. Yet, as Christians, we hope to enter it with courage and confidence because our faith is in our risen Savior who conquered death. This means that no matter the challenge, trial, or tribulation we face, or the heartbreak we may experience, we have hope because Jesus conquered death. We serve a God who raises the dead, and because Jesus lives, it means nothing is too hard for the LORD.

So, whatever it is, the illness you may face, or the death of a loved one, or how to help and care for your aging parents, or parenting teenage kids, or parenting adult kids, or losing your job, or starting a new job, or perhaps it's something I haven't named, because Jesus is our risen Savior we can go into 2026 acknowledging our fears, and yet make a bold confession of courageous faith in Christ.

Here's the big idea of Psalm 27: *Because the Lord is our light, salvation, and stronghold—fulfilled perfectly in Christ—we can live with courageous faith, practice single-minded worship, and make honest prayers while patiently waiting on the LORD.* Let's get to work on Psalm 27. I have four application points to help us work through and apply Psalm 27.

I. Confess your confidence in the LORD in the face of your fears (vv. 1-3)

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 eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. ³ Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

Throughout Psalm 27, we will see fear of situations and people pitted against having confidence in the LORD. So, it is not surprising that, immediately in Psalm 27, we learn that fear seeks to take control of a person's heart.

I've explained what the word *heart* means in the Bible in previous sermons, but let me give you a brief reminder. The heart is the control center of a person's desires and inclinations. We might call the heart the control center of a person's will, directing the decisions he or she makes. It is the seat or center of a person's affection and emotions that drives a person's life.

So, when King David wrote in Psalm 27, "*of whom shall I be afraid,*" and "*my heart shall not fear,*" and then he flipped it around and said, "*yet I will be confident,*" he is fighting *fear*. He does not want to allow fear to control his heart.

How did he fight against fear? Verses 1-3 tell us he began with a very strong confession of faith in the LORD, who fights for him.

It's like this: Fear is almost personified in Psalm 27 as an entity that seeks control over a person's heart. So, let there be no doubt, at some point in your life, fear will assault your heart like an army. It will wage war on your heart and mind. It wants to slay your emotions and hold you captive with your anxieties standing as its guards.

Yet, the LORD does not leave our hearts unguarded. First and foremost, He gives us Himself. This is the key to fighting fear and really all that is needed, but v. 1 goes on to teach that the LORD gives Himself to us in three ways to guard our hearts and help us fight fear. We learn in v. 1 that the LORD is our *light*, our *salvation*, and our *stronghold*.

The *light* of God's presence in David's life is his security. Even as he walked through the valley of the shadow of death in Psalm 23, the LORD was his light.

Psalm 27 is the only Old Testament passage in which God describes Himself as light. Elsewhere, it says He *created* light, *gave* light, and *shone* with light, but nowhere does it describe Him as light. However, as we move into the New Testament, James tells us that God is the *Father of Lights*.¹ Then John tells us in 1 John 1:5 that "*God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.*"

Yet, when we think about the idea of the LORD being our light in Psalm 27, pastor and scholar James Johnston gets to the heart of the issue. He said:

*Most significantly, Jesus Christ is himself light. John says about Jesus, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it . . . The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:5, 9). Jesus is our light, the very radiance of God himself. And as the light, Jesus is our security. For us on this side of the cross, the confidence and courage of Psalm 27 starts with Jesus, the Light of the world. He protects us from the dangers of darkness.*²

So, the LORD, as our light, points us directly to the person and work of Christ. Jesus, as the Light of the World, was crucified in the darkness of the world in order to pay for the darkness of our sin. So, by our faith and repentance in Him, the Apostle Peter tells us that we *have been called out of darkness and into His marvelous light of salvation*. The question is: Have you answered that call? Have you come out of the darkness? Are you living as a child of the Light? Does your life shine with the light of Christ?

¹ James 1:17.

² James A. Johnston, *Preaching the Word: Psalms 1-41*, Vol. 1, 283.

Next, David says the LORD is his “*salvation*.” David’s confidence was not in his military skill or political power but in God’s saving action. *Salvation* is also understood as *deliverance* or *rescue*, but here is the deal. God doesn’t merely rescue His people – He is their *salvation*.

Salvation is God giving Himself to us because Jesus gave Himself for us. So, like *light*, the idea of *salvation* points beyond David’s deliverance to a greater salvation we have in Christ.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes how powerful the *salvation* and rescue is that we have in Christ in Romans 8:31-39,

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This great salvation we read about in Psalm 27 finds its fulfillment in Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul lays out for us this great salvation that we have in Christ.

Lastly, David continued his confident confession of faith by calling the LORD his *stronghold* or *refuge*. David knew the purpose of a *stronghold*. Many times when he was under attack from King Saul, he retreated to one of his *strongholds* for *refuge and safety*.

Yet, David was not saying he would never face an attack. He knew that he would continue to be attacked. He anticipated it. So, he was saying that when those fearful times came, he knew who his Protector was. He didn’t have to find a cave, for he simply turned to the LORD in prayer, in His word, in worship, and sought the LORD’s presence for refuge. So, even when his enemies advanced, and armies came against him, David’s heart remained steady—not because his circumstances were calm or he didn’t feel fearful, but because he knew the God he worshipped was immovable and that He was with him.

Friends, fear loses its power in your life when Jesus becomes intimate and personal to you. When you can make a heart-level, intimate confession of faith in Christ, as David did in Psalm 27, your relationship with Christ becomes deeply personal, so that fear has no place in your heart. Remember, knowing Jesus is more than confessing facts about him and a lot of head knowledge.

Listen, as you enter into the New Year, what kind of relationship do you have with Jesus, the Light of the World? Is it one of confident, courageous faith, or is it simply one of head knowledge and no heart knowledge? Merely repeating the words of a confession of faith is not enough. You must be born again by the Spirit of God. Your heart must be transformed.

When this happens, you will have an appetite for the things of God and the light of Christ. Then the word of God becomes food for your heart and soul, as we will see later in Psalm 27. I hope this year you will commit to investing more in your relationship with Christ through prayer, the word of God, and corporate worship, so that you can say, with confidence in the face of your fears, that Jesus is your Light, salvation, and stronghold.

II. Confess your one true passion in the face of your fears (vv. 4-6)

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon 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 lift me high upon a rock. ⁶ And now my head shall be 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.

Now David moves from the LORD being his light, salvation, and stronghold to saying the LORD is his sanctuary. The LORD's presence is what David most wants in his life. Listen again to what he says:

One thing have I asked of the LORD...that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.

David was literally obsessed with living in the LORD's presence. It was his one great desire and ambition, and therefore, begs the question: *Is God your one great passion and desire?*

David wants to behold the beauty of the Lord. He desires to be in the presence of the LORD in His sanctuary and bring his prayers and petitions to him there. In other words, David longs to worship the LORD and be in an intimate relationship with Him.

Verse 4 really is the heartbeat of Psalm 27. It lays bare the true intentions and desires of the heart. *Is God your one great desire, or is something else sitting on the throne of your heart?*

Yet, while v. 4 is the heartbeat of Psalm 27, vv. 5-6 remind us that David still battled fear. Listen, here's the deal: *Fear works like a magnet to pull our attention away from God, our one great desire, and toward our fears, worries, and anxieties.*

When fear takes root in the heart, it seeks to replace God. What happens is that your fears get all of your attention and, we might say, worship. Instead of gazing on the beauty of the LORD in His sanctuary, we sit in a pit of despondency, gazing on the horror of our fears. We worship at the feet of our fears instead of at the feet of Jesus because all we think about is our fears.

Think about the LORD being your *one desire* this way. If the LORD offered to give you whatever you asked for, what would you request? What would be the *one thing* you most want? Would you ask God to take care of your fears, or would you ask what David knew was the *one thing* he knew he needed? Remember what he said:

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.

What we need to understand is that the gift of receiving God Himself is the greatest gift of all. God's presence in your life is fear-crushing. It is more satisfying, more enjoyable, wiser, and more rewarding than anything the world can offer.

David spoke of the LORD, who was his one great desire, in different ways throughout the Psalms. Remember what David said about the LORD in Psalm 16:11,

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Then in Psalm 84:10 he says:

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

David knew that in the presence of God was the only place where he would be truly satisfied and safe. Listen to his words from Psalm 63:1-3,

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. ² So I have

looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. ³ Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

Friends, God Himself is the greatest gift we can receive. The greatest joy in life comes from loving and gazing upon the beauty of the LORD in His word, in prayer, and in worship with the body of Christ.

However, what if the thought of God isn't very appealing to you? If this is the case, then something is wrong. Perhaps one of your fears has replaced God on the throne of your heart. Perhaps you simply have no desire for God. If this is the case, you need to do some heart work to identify the problem. It may be an issue of discipleship, in which case you need discipling or even counseling, or it may be an issue of conversion, in which case you need to be born again by the Spirit of God.

The presence of God that David so longed for and that we need today is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. John Piper, in his book *God Is the Gospel*, says:

The best and final gift of the gospel is that we gain Christ, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8). This is the all-emcompassing gift of God's love through the gospel—to see and savor the glory of Christ forever.

This kind of "one desire" for Christ crushes fears that seek to overwhelm your heart and life. I pray that in 2026, we all have a laser-focused passion for Jesus Christ.

Well... let's keep working through our text. Notice what David said in vv. 5-6. He connects his "one desire" with safety. He said:

For he will hide me in his shelter... he will lift me high upon a rock.

Friends, God's presence does not *remove* trouble, but it does *redefine* it. The safest place in the world is not the absence of enemies but the nearness of God.

The way we can be in God's presence and near Him is because of what Jesus did. Christ was crushed on the cross, separated from God at the hands of His enemies, to pay for our sins that separated us from God. Now, by the blood of Christ through our faith and repentance in His work on our behalf, we can be brought into the presence of Christ. As the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:13,

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Listen, our fears will bombard us and make us feel as if we have been separated from Christ and as if we are unworthy to enter into His presence. When this happens, we need to remind ourselves of what Christ has done to defeat our fears and bring us into the presence of Christ. Hebrews 10:19–22 tells us:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² 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 with pure water.

The "one thing" that David desired in Psalm 27 is what we experience through the person and work of Jesus as it is applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit. Jesus becomes the great "one thing," that one great desire when you know Him as your Lord and Savior.

After v. 6, Psalm 27 shifts from a *prayer of praise* to a *prayer of pleading and lamenting*. Let's look at vv. 7-12.

III. Pray honest prayers to the LORD in the face of your fears (vv. 7-12)

Following David's longing to be in the presence of the LORD, he now cries out for deliverance. Listen to what he wrote in vv. 7-12:

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸ *You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek."*

⁹ *Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger,*

O you who have been my help.

Cast me not off; forsake me not,

O God of my salvation!

¹⁰ *For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in.*

¹¹ *Teach me your way, O LORD,*

and lead me on a level path

because of my enemies.

¹² *Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;*

for false witnesses have risen against me,

and they breathe out violence.

David's prayer shows us the reality of his suffering and the battles he fought against the fear that sought to consume his heart. David's struggle teaches us something crucial: *Faith does not silence fear; instead, we learn to bring our fear to God so that He may defeat it*. Verses 7-12 teach us to do two things.

First, in vv. 8-10, we must be people who earnestly seek the LORD. Here's the deal: *Fear is a liar!* Fear tempts us to believe things about God that are not true.

David was fearful that God would abandon him. He says his father and mother have abandoned him, and while we have no evidence that this happened to David, he wrote what he wrote. Perhaps it was rejection by his father, mother, and family, or something else he was referring to. We don't really know.

Nevertheless, here is the point: Many come to faith in Christ, and because of their new faith and the changes Christ makes in their lives, their families and friends reject them. Others come to faith in Christ from other religions and experience this very thing. Their family rejects and abandons them. What can eventually happen in their hearts is that the pain of that experience can be projected on the LORD, and they believe that the LORD might reject or abandon them, too. *Friends, fear is a liar!* It seeks to consume and destroy your faith in Jesus.

If you have ever experienced abandonment, you know what I am talking about. Abandonment is a painful experience that leaves a deep mark on your heart. Once you have experienced abandonment, you very easily project abandonment onto other relationships. In this case, David feared his covenant LORD would forsake him.

Friends, fear is a liar, and to fight this fear, we must become people who consistently and earnestly seek the face of the LORD. We must desire to seek the LORD's will and desire His will be done in every situation. Following God's will may not be easy, but it brings peace to our hearts.

Listen to me! Here's what you need to know. The world may reject you, and your family may abandon you, but the LORD will never forsake you. He will take you into His family and adopt you as His son and daughter. We know this to be true for the Son of God went to the cross to pay for our sin of rejecting God. He was forsaken on the cross so that we may be accepted and adopted into the family of God.

You must remind yourself of what Jesus has done to redeem you and bring you into the family of God. So, when fear assaults your heart, preach the truth of the gospel to crush that fear. *So, in the face of your fears, be an intense seeker of the LORD in 2026.*

Second, we must become students of God's word. We must study the word and ask God to "*teach us His ways*" as he said in v. 11.

Fear fights against us to keep us from being students of the word of God. Fear works like a prison guard and seeks to imprison us to keep us from escaping to the truth of God's word. Fear will lie to us about God, His word, and His will.

Spending regular time with God in His word and prayer is the best way to crush your fears and live in the freedom of the truth, for the truth will set you free.

Spending time in the Word of God is where we dig deeper into how to apply the gospel to our lives and then preach the gospel to ourselves when fear makes war on our hearts. *So, in 2026, in the face of your fears, be a diligent student of the word of God.*

IV. Confess your hope in the promises of God even in the face of your fears (vv. 13-14)

Psalm 27 ends on a wonderfully encouraging note. Listen to v. 13:

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!

David returns to the quiet confidence he had at the beginning of the Psalm. His confession in v. 13 may mean he expects God to rescue him in his lifetime, or that, through his death, he would live again in the glorious presence of God. The point is that he doesn't expect death to separate him from the presence of God. Job expressed the same confidence in life after death in Job 19:25-26,

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.

²⁶ *And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.*

David ends Psalm 27 with this final challenge in v. 14:

Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

David challenges us to not simply wait but to take heart, take courage, stand firm, and wait for the LORD to rescue us. As the LORD says in Isaiah 40:28-31,

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

*The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.*

²⁹ *He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.*

³⁰ *Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;*

³¹ *but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.*

God will meet us at our point of need, NOT simply with solutions, but with His presence. When the presence of the LORD invades your heart, He will drive out all fear, anxiety, and pain.

Conclusion: I don't know what 2026 holds for you, me, and even our church. There is one thing I can safely say: The enemy will assault you, and your fears will make war on your heart. The question is, what will you do when that time comes? You may be sitting here this morning, and that is how you felt when you walked into the church building. You are barely into the new year, and already fear and anxiety are making war on you.

But here is the question: *Why do we so often lose the battle to fear?* It is because we so often fix our eyes on the problem, the pain, or the fear, not on the Savior. Often, we tend to seek comfort and relief rather than by faith, taking up our cross and taking the next step He leads us to take.

Brothers and sisters, because of Christ, fear no longer has the final word; God's presence is permanently ours, and our waiting is filled with hope. So, when fear rises in our minds, we say with confidence in our hearts: *"The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?"*

Don't just wait – wait and be strong! Take courage in 2026, stand firm in your faith in Jesus, and wait for Him. With Christ, you have everything. He is your light, your salvation, your stronghold, whom shall you fear? So, fear not – Jesus is for you! Do not be anxious, for He is your God. He will strengthen you. He will help you. He will uphold you with His righteous right hand.³

This is the heartbeat of the gospel. It is not *"do more and try harder but behold the salvation we have in Christ. Behold Him who went to the cross for you so that you may have Him as your Light, your Salvation, and as your Stronghold. Behold Him as your great One Desire!"*

³ Adapted and applied from Isaiah 41:10.