

PSALM 27:7-14
HOW CAN I EVER SMILE AGAIN?
I HAVE BEEN DESERTED!

“Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;
 be gracious to me and answer me!
You have said, ‘Seek my face.’
My heart says to you,
 ‘Your face, LORD, do I seek.’
 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!
For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
 but the LORD will take me in.

“Teach me your way, O LORD,
 and lead me on a level path
 because of my enemies.
Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;
 for false witnesses have risen against me,
 and they breathe out violence.

“I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD
 in the land of the living!
Wait for the LORD;
 be strong, and let your heart take courage;
 wait for the LORD!”¹

Hank Williams, Sr., keened:

I’ve never seen a night so long
When time goes crawling by.
The moon just went behind a cloud
To hide its face and cry.

Did you ever see a robin weep,
When leaves began to die?
That means he’s lost the will to live;
I’m so lonesome I could cry²

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Hank Williams, Sr., “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry,” ©Sony/ATV Acuff Rose Music

What does it mean to be lonesome? What are the causes of loneliness? How should a Christian answer the challenge of loneliness? Loneliness is one of those emotions that cannot be strictly correlated with the presence or absence of people. It is not uncommon for people to seek solitude in the midst of hurried lives; alone with their thoughts, those who deliberately seek such blessed quietness cannot be said to be lonely. On the other hand, we can be in a crowd and yet be lonely; we can be surrounded by noisy throngs and yet be desolate. To be forlorn and friendless is to be lonely. Undoubtedly, the greatest sense of aloneness comes when we believe we are rejected by kith and kin. Loneliness, then, is not related to the number of people in our vicinity; rather, loneliness is a condition resulting from a lack of connectedness.

Prisoners, isolated from family, perhaps even deserted because of embarrassment, feel alone. In fact, our current correctional system uses isolation as punishment because we know that being alone can induce real pain. The elderly are often ignored by family, and because of removal to nursing homes and the passage of time their circle of friends is diminished. Those suffering from extended illness commonly feel lonely because of their isolation. Time weighs heavy on the heart of those who are isolated as result of the vicissitudes of life.

While there is no “cure” for loneliness, there are responses that will soothe the lonely heart. There are responses outlined in the Word of God that will make those who look to God less susceptible to the prolonged weariness and debilitation that attends the periods of loneliness that come to each of us. A review of the Psalm that is now before us will prove beneficial in providing encouragement for the one who looks to God as a refuge and a help.

GOD’S GRACIOUS INVITATION — This Psalm divides naturally into two parts. In the first six verses, David exults in God’s goodness and deliverance. Listen to those early verses.

“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?

“When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.

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

“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.

“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.

“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.”

[PSALM 27:1-6]

It should not be surprising that a number of scholars have argued that there are actually two Psalms, joined in a rather clumsy fashion. In addition to the differing moods of the two sections of the Psalm, there are differences in the construction of the Hebrew in the two portions. The first part of the Psalm is confident, the Psalmist exultant; the second half of the Psalm—our text for the message this day—consist of a moving prayer. In the first half, God is referred to in the third person; whereas in the second portion of the Psalm David addresses the LORD directly.

We are left with the impression that this Psalm was written in praise for divine deliverance at some point in David’s military career. He speaks of evil doers assailing him [verse two] and of an army encamped against him [verse three]. He also speaks of being hidden in the day of trouble and of being lifted high [verse five]. However, as noted, with the seventh verse, the tone changes; the Psalmist entreats:

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

Such pleading is more common for the Psalmist than we might imagine. Think of some of the other Psalms where we witness the urgency of his plea.

“Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!
 You have given me relief when I was in distress.
 Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!”

[PSALM 4:1]

“Give attention to the sound of my cry,
 my King and my God,
 for to you do I pray.
 O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
 in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.”

[PSALM 5:2, 3]

“Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry!
 Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!”

[PSALM 17:1]

“Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy,
when I cry to you for help,
when I lift up my hands
toward your most holy sanctuary.”

[PSALM 28:2]

In the verses just cited, take note of the Psalmist’s repeated cry within the same verse. His repetition is not exceptional—it is a common feature in the Psalms. The repetition is an indication of the fervency of the Psalmist’s plea—of the intensity with which he has searched his soul and his sense of the greatness of his need.

The transition from the first six verses to the second portion of this Psalm makes it almost seem as though the Psalmist is writing at a different time and from a changed perspective. However, reflection makes it seem more likely that the verses of our text serve as background for the confident assertions of the earlier portion of the Psalm. In other words, the verses provide context after the fact for the bold, assured statements of faith with which this Psalm begins. The Psalm actually speaks to our human experience as at the same time the Psalmist is both confident and anxious. Isn’t that our experience so very often? At the same time we believe in God’s direction, but we don’t know the precise steps we will take. We are confident of His presence, but we can’t say that we *feel* protected by His grace.

We “walk by faith, not by sight” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:7]. This is the intent of the Apostle’s teaching when he writes, “We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” [2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18].

In the eighth verse, David reminds the LORD of the divine invitation to seek His face. David is speaking as any worshipper of the True and Living God who prays in time of distress. Surrounded by enemies, the Psalmist casts himself on the Merciful God who had promised to be faithful to the king, and at the moment it was not clear how God would fulfil His promise. This is not a cry of self-pity; this is the deliberate act of one who believes the promise of the LORD as he casts himself utterly on the mercies of God. Recall the divine promise God made to David.

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” [2 SAMUEL 7:8-16].

There is a significant truth here that I urge you to take home: David remembers God's invitation to seek His face, and because of past piety he is bold to seize that invitation. Should we do less? "Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" [MATTHEW 11:28], is the Master's invitation to His weary people. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God, through Peter, invites believers, saying, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" [1 PETER 5:6, 7].

Long years before these invitations were issued, God spoke through the Psalmist:

"Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him, and he will act."

[PSALM 37:5]

"Cast your burden on the LORD,
and he will sustain you;
he will never permit
the righteous to be moved."

[PSALM 55:22]

The Psalmist is prepared to abandon himself to the LORD on several bases. First, he remembers the divine Name—the covenant Name by which the LORD God revealed Himself to His people [verse seven]. This is the God who is the Great "I Am." His own devotion to God in the past [verse eight] encouraged him to now cast himself on the mercies of the LORD. God had not failed in the past; He would not fail now. Just as David had been committed to God in the past, so he remembered that God had been committed to him during that same period. The Psalmist recalled that the LORD had been his helper [verse nine] and the God of his salvation [verse nine]. Moreover, God's past acceptance of the Psalmist gave David great courage now to commit himself to the LORD [verse ten].

Dear people, your experiences with God are preparing you for the day of trial. As you learn of His love and dependability now, so you will discover even greater confidence in the day of trial. I do not say there will be no anxiety; but, in the momentary doubts that arise you will discover greater confidence than you have ever known before. Adversity may make you "feel" as though God has lost interest in you, but if you are His child you may be assured of His love.

Among the rich promises that are given to us is this which Isaiah delivered.

"Can a woman forget her nursing child,
that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.
Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."

[ISAIAH 49:15, 16]

Committing one's self to the Living God in the present prepares for commitment in the day of trial. Those who ignore God in time of ease may be surprised when they attempt to seek Him in the day of trial. Surely that is a disturbing scenario that is presented in the Proverbs!

“Because I have called and you refused to listen,
 have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,
 because you have ignored all my counsel
 and would have none of my reproof,
 I also will laugh at your calamity;
 I will mock when terror strikes you,
 when terror strikes you like a storm
 and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
 when distress and anguish come upon you.
 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
 they will seek me diligently but will not find me.
 Because they hated knowledge
 and did not choose the fear of the LORD,
 would have none of my counsel
 and despised all my reproof,
 therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way,
 and have their fill of their own devices.”

[PROVERBS 1:24-31]

That warning is issued to dissuade the unwary from presuming against God, but also to encourage the godly because they can depend on Him, as the Wise Man states.

“The simple are killed by their turning away,
 and the complacency of fools destroys them;
 but whoever listens to me will dwell secure
 and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.”

[PROVERBS 1:32, 33]

RESPONDING TO THE FATHER’S INVITATION — Reading the text, most of us focus on the tenth verse; in particular, we are drawn to the statement of desertion. I suppose the reason this statement is so arresting is that desertion by a parent would be so terribly poignant for anyone. It is also possible that the statement makes such an impact as we read it is that so many of us have experienced disappointment from a parent in greater or lesser degree. Wouldn’t it be great if we who are parents were always fair and without fault? However, we know that we have not always acted wisely in raising our children. Moreover, each of us could undoubtedly recall some disappointment from our childhood when we felt emotionally deserted by a parent.

Today, because of the emphasis on acquiring “things,” many children are emotionally abandoned by their parents. As I prepared the message for this day, I read an article that provoked considerable thought. The article challenged by asking the thought provoking question, “What would you trade for money?”³

The author related the account of a woman who attended a Bible class she was teaching. This woman stated that she wanted to stop working outside the home so she could be home with her children. Mrs. Bates, the writer, encouraged her to just do it! She stated that she was confident that with her husband’s income there was enough money to support the family.

³ Judy Woodward Bates, “What would you trade for money?”, Baptist Press, July 21, 2010 (<http://www.bpnews.net/BPFirstPerson.asp?ID=33390>) accessed 21 July, 2010

The woman demurred because she wouldn't be able to make the payments and provide the insurance on a new car her oldest daughter was driving. So, Mrs. Bates urged her to go home and discuss the matter with her daughter.

The woman did attempt to discuss the matter with her daughter, telling her that she was considering leaving her job to be a stay-at-home mom, though this would mean selling the new car and finding a less expensive used car. The daughter's response was that she would "absolutely die from embarrassment" if she had to give up the new car. Mrs. Bates observes, "The values [that mother's] life had been teaching had rubbed off on her daughter. Her daughter was willing to trade her mom for that new car and insurance."

Though many people would deny that they are abandoning their children, when possessions are valued above children, the children are experiencing emotional abandonment. Now, the message isn't about emotional deficits, but about God who will not leave us in such a condition. We may rage like a spoiled child because we believe God should accede to our desires, but we have the promise of the Word that the Father will always be a good parent to us.

David is forthright in stating what he is seeking from God. Reviewing his words, we find the ways in which God is a good parent. What do we seek from a parent? We want a parent to accept us, to listen to us, to provide guidance for us, and to protect us. That is precisely what David seeks from God.

We seek acceptance. This is a fallen world, and rejection is common in this world. Friendships reflect the fickle attitude of our society. We are lonely because we want to believe that people will stand with us in the tight spot; however, inwardly we know that when the storms come we will likely stand alone. Tragically, we live in a world in which it is not uncommon that children reject parents—the lonely elderly in nursing homes give evidence of this tragic truth. We live in a world in which parents frequently reject children—the explosion of street kids and door latch children testifies to this sorrowful truth. Each of us experiences rejection in multiple ways: emotional and physical abandonment by spouses, erstwhile friends, potential employers, even neglect by fellow worshippers who refuse to stand firm on biblical principles.

However, God does not desert us. David prays to the LORD, "Hide not Your face from me ... Cast me not off; forsake me not" [verse nine]. He is confident even as he prays that God will not forsake him. He is able to assert,

"My father and my mother have forsaken me,
but the Lord will take me in."

[verse ten]

The great Baptist divine, Charles Spurgeon, comments thusly on this verse, "These dear relations will be the last to desert me, but if the milk of human kindness should dry up even from their breasts, there is a Father who never forgets. Some of the greatest of the saints have been cast out by their families, and persecuted for righteousness' sake."⁴ Unlike some parents, God does not abandon His child.

We seek someone to listen to us. Children want a parent's attention; they want to know that they are heard. It is a sorrowful fact that oftentimes parents permit themselves to become so busy that they fail to hear their children. We imagine that they want us to answer, when frequently all they want is to be heard.

⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David (Psalms 27-57), Volume 2* (Logos Research Systems, Inc., Bellingham, WA 2009) 4

You know very well that God is never too busy to hear us. Why don't we speak to God more? The reason is not that God is too busy; we are the ones who permit ourselves to be ruled by the tyranny of the urgent! We become too busy to speak with God. Other times it is because our sin has intervened. Isaiah confronts this cause for divine silence when he writes:

“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,
or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;
but your iniquities have made a separation
between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you
so that he does not hear.”

[ISAIAH 59:1, 2]

Surely the reason we do not pray is not because we do not believe God hears! Our Master has encouraged us to pray; He invites us, saying, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” [MATTHEW 7:7, 8].

We seek one who will provide guidance. None of us have ever been through this life previously; we don't know precisely where we are going. We formulate plans, but we don't truly know how life will play out for us. Dr. Boice succinctly states, “We no more know how to live our lives for God than children know how to avoid danger and care for themselves and others.”⁵ Children need to be taught, just as we need to be taught. We need guidance. This is the reason David prayed as he did when he cried out,

“Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path.”

[verse eleven]

Specifically, the Psalmist makes two requests: “teach me ... lead me.” It is tempting to imagine that the level path he seeks is the way that is right in the sight of God. More likely, it refers to a path from which obstacles have been cleared. The Psalmist is seeking a firm path on which he will not turn his ankle and thus fall. He needs to walk in the company of a trustworthy companion because there are people watching in order to take advantage of any misstep he may make. The word that is translated “enemies” comes from a root word that conveys the thought of watching; so there are people watching him to seek him harm. Therefore, he needs guidance. “Guidance, therefore, must inevitably involve protection against those who are maliciously bringing false accusations against him, witnesses prepared to perjure themselves to ensure that he will meet a violent end.”⁶

We seek protection. Children also seek protection from their parents. How tragic when a child is not protected from evil by a parent because the parent is unwilling to invest time in the child, or because a parent has misplaced priorities, or because a parent is incapable of protecting the child. The threat of attack by others was the basis for the Psalm. Recall the opening words:

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 2005) 243

⁶ Robert M. A. Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, MI 1998) 98

“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?”

[PSALM 27:1]

Doctor Boice was again perceptive when he said that David’s enemies are “the bullies of the neighbourhood, and David needs the protecting presence of God just as a small child needs his father in such circumstances.”⁷ I was pleased when one of my daughters stated a few years back, “We always knew that our daddy would protect us.” Wise parents will not rescue their children from every incident, but they will always be ready to intervene to deliver their child.

THE BELIEVER’S HOPE — Did David have what he sought from the LORD? The answer is obviously and emphatically, “Yes!” This becomes evident when we note the conclusion of the Psalm.

“I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living!
Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!”

[PSALM 27:13, 14]

As stated earlier, I hold to the thought that the initial portion of the Psalm was based upon the latter portion. The verses we have looked at in this message are the basis for the confidence witnessed in the first six verses. David did look to God in the time of trial. When he was surrounded by enemies, even by people who had presented themselves as friends and supporters though they sought to harm him, God delivered him. God was that good parent who accepted David, giving him a listening ear, needed guidance and divine protection.

Just so, God is prepared to give to you the same demonstration of fatherly love. Even when your friends have deserted you, God gives us His Son “who sticks closer than a brother” [PROVERBS 18:24]. When you are deserted by family, God will ever stand with you to lift you up. With David, you can speak with confidence:

“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.”

[PSALM 27:6]

Even when your church family chooses personal comfort and compromise over standing in the gap with you, know that God stands with you. You may feel deserted, just as Elijah felt alone after the contest on Mount Carmel; but God always stands with that one who looks to Him. All that we need and all that we seek in a parent, God gives in abundance.

⁷ Boice, *ibid.*

Did you imagine that this was love deferred? Did you imagine that God would forever delay answering His child? David says that he anticipated an immediate answer. He writes:

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

[verse thirteen]

What is not obvious in our translations is that David uses a rather common word when he says “I believe.” We use the very same word, but in a different manner. The word David uses is the Hebrew word “amen.” If you will, he is making a strong statement of affirmation. “Amen! I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.” It is not a mere hope that he expresses, but a statement of confidence. God will show him divine goodness!

Similarly, God is pledged on His sacred honour to give answer to the need of His child. God promises through Isaiah that when His people honour Him, He will honour them. He will ensure that their light breaks forth and that they are healed of their griefs. Moreover, He promises that their righteousness shall precede them whilst the glory of the LORD shall guard them from behind. Then, He makes this glorious promise:

“You shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’”

[ISAIAH 58:9]

This promise is iterated through Jeremiah when he writes: “You will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will hear you. You will seek Me and find Me” [JEREMIAH 29:12, 13].

David could speak with such confidence because he was committed to God; he walked before the Lord and sought His glory. Elsewhere, the Psalmist has written:

“I will walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.”

[PSALM 116:9]

“I cry to you, O LORD;
I say, ‘You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living.’”

[PSALM 142:5]

There is a final truth I ask you to remember. The things for which David prayed, which are truly the things we should seek, are not guaranteed to come according to our schedule. Yes, David anticipated an answer in the land of the living, but that didn’t mean that it would happen according to his own timing. Therefore, he wrote:

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

[verse fourteen]

HOW CAN I EVER SMILE AGAIN? I HAVE BEEN DESERTED!

If your request should be delayed, should you lose heart? Not at all! If God does not answer according to your schedule, does that mean that He is displeased with you? One should never draw such a conclusion. God is pledged to give you an answer, and you should wait expectantly. If He has promised to give you aid and deliverance, you must watch in anticipation of His appearance. It is not wrong to say that it is our privilege to wait for Him because He will be glorified in giving answer to us as His children. God knows the timing that will glorify His Name and which will be of the greatest benefit to us when we call. As I have often said, God is too wise to make a mistake, and too good to needlessly hurt His child. Knowing God, we can indeed be strong and our heart can take courage.

My question to you is whether you know this God. He offers life in His Beloved Son to all who will receive Him. Jesus died because of your sin and rose to declare you right before the Father. The way to the Father's heart is through His Son. The invitation of the Living God is: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." I never tire of reminding all who are willing to hear that, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**]. I trust that you are one who has received this gracious gift of life, and that you are secure in the Father. Amen.