

God's steadfast love: security and joy in any circumstance

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. I'm going to be speaking this morning about resilience as I introduce these sounds, but perhaps a really lovely form of resilience is Alan and Christine here before us this morning, celebrating 50 years of marriage on Friday.

So. Well, resilience. Resilience and the need to build resilience has become very, very popular in recent years, especially in response to the pandemic and terrible bushfires and floods and things like that.

We even had a commissioner for resilience at one point. So what is it to be resilient? Well, I think to be resilient is to be able to deal with whatever life throws at me.

Trauma, tragedy, adversity, threats, significant sources of stress that might come to us from verbal attacks or from relationships.

It means being able to absorb the blows that are part of everyday living. But not only to absorb the blows, but actually to bounce back from them and be able to thrive in life.

[1 : 31] And so I think buried into resilience, there's the notion of happiness. That is a sense of being secure, a sense of being safe, a sense of being content and enjoying life.

That's got to be part of resilience. And I think also then resilience needs a sense of peace. We need to feel as if there's some order in life.

There's some sense of control. Some sense that there is a pattern, a plan, a peace in the life in which we live.

And particularly in our inner landscape, in our hearts and minds. And so here's where it gets really practical because resilience is spooked at the moment from every level of society.

Right from governments, all the time talking about the need for resilience. Right down to early childhood teachers are being taught now to teach children resilience.

[2 : 36] It's the buzzword. But as I listen into these conversations, I get the feeling that resilience is not much more than a new word for old-fashioned self-reliance.

Self-interested commitment to, dare I say, hassle-free living. Wanting to blend in. Demanding acceptance and perhaps even avoidance of conflict.

And so if I'm right in that, then the irony for us again as a nation and as a culture is that the very notion of resilience that is being pushed and built is actually at odds with the realities of life.

And so I think people can chase resilience in terms of how our society is teaching but never actually be able to be resilient. Because the way they're building the resilience just doesn't work.

It's an odd sort of thing, isn't it? In sharp contrast, I want to suggest this morning, in Psalm 11, 12, and 13, we have three pictures of God's character, God's beauty.

[4 : 01] Three perspectives which will deliver incredible resilience in times of crisis and attack. Whether it's from external sources or from the internal source of our own hearts, our own minds.

And in the end, I keep saying that's why I'm drawn back to the Psalms regularly. They really are my go-to piece of scripture. Why?

Because I easily identify with David's struggles. I easily identify with his confusion at circumstances. Fear in the face of threats.

Weariness in the daily struggles for faithfulness to the Lord. And yes, I have to say, even frustration. Frustration with God.

As I try to make sense of my life from my perspective. And I think the point is this. As I come back to the Psalms, I think I've learned this from them over many years.

[5 : 09] And that is, sometimes we only see God's answers when we actually ask the right questions. Put it the other way around.

Put it negatively. Sometimes we wonder what God's trying to say to us. And that's because we're not asking the right questions. So, this morning, I want to put before you and bring you with me into these three Psalms, these three poems.

What is it to lean into the Lord for true resilience in these three circumstances? What is it to lean into the Lord for true resilience when, first and foremost, we're fearful and intimidated by the real threat of physical violence?

Now, Simon's going to come up and read Psalm 11. And then we'll repeat this process over two more Psalms. So, Simon, if you'd come up and read Psalm 11 to us. Thanks. Psalm 11.

To the choir master of David. His eyes see.

[6 : 37] His eyelids test the children of man. The Lord tests the righteous. But his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let him rain coals on the wicked.

Fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. For the Lord is righteous. He loves righteous deeds. The upright shall behold his face.

So, David's starting point in this Psalm is a decision that he's made at some point in the past. The Lord is my refuge. In other words, David's already decided that the Lord is his place of safety.

His place of shelter. His place of protection. That's what a refuge is. It's a beautiful picture. And the important thing here is that that decision in the past shapes his response in this time of extreme crisis.

The immediate perspective before David is his faith. The Lord is my refuge. And the appealing but unacceptable option to David of flight.

[7 : 54] The situation seems to be that ruthless, wicked enemies are on the attack.

They're determined to be rid of King David. And determined to be rid of everything that King David as God's person represents. It seems to be the threat of unexpected attack is constant.

They're lining up to shoot in the dark. It's a terrible situation for him to be in. And verse 3.

It's not really easy to decide what the foundations are. But it seems like things are so bad that the foundations, perhaps the foundations of the nation, that is God's covenant, appears to be under threat.

It seems like everything is about to fall over. And God's covenant was about God's special people being ruled and protected by God's anointed king in the context of peace and justice and righteousness.

[9 : 04] And things have come to such a point that David fears that all of that is just about to be swept away, to be lost. And then into that situation, it appears that King David's advisors said, listen, this is the time to pack up and run for the hills.

So if you look at the end of verse 1, where it says from flee like a bird to the end of verse 3, that's an inverted quotation mark. So David is actually interacting with and reflecting back advice, well-intentioned advice he's got from his advisors.

And what's his advisors saying? Well, the situation's lost. Hanging around is futile. Wicked have the upper hand.

So King David, the best thing we can say to you is head for the hills and hide. Protecting yourself at this point is paramount. Now David's response to that is really quite intriguing.

And then halfway through verse 1, he says, How can you say to my soul, in other words, guys, I appreciate your advice, but how can you be telling me to flee? How can you say to my soul, flee?

[10 : 30] Flight was unacceptable. And perhaps, depending on how you read the text here, I think even offensive to David. Now, what would his concern be here?

I don't think he resisted the urge to fly because he was frightened of being considered cowardly as a soldier or as a king. Now, I think why he resisted flight here is because he didn't want to be considered unbelieving or untrusting in the Lord of the covenant, the one who had actually placed him there as God's covenant king in God's special people.

So for David to flee, I think in his mind, was to trash God's honor and God's reputation. It wasn't about David, I think, if we can read between the lines.

His safety wasn't paramount. God's honor was paramount. And so in verses 47, we see that David opts for faith over flight.

And that's the picture, I want, of leaning into the Lord as his refuge. Now, let's jump to verse 7 and then we'll come back and unpack it. Now, here's the situation. Terrible crisis.

[11 : 45] Immediate threat. Real threat. Threat of life. So how can somebody like David so consistently opposed, hated, and attacked, how can he say in verse 7 with conviction, the Lord is righteous.

He loves righteous deeds. The upright shall behold his face. That beholding his face is just a technical term throughout the Old Testament of being aware of God's presence, being full of a sense of God's goodness and grace and protection and care.

In other words, the upright will know God to be a refuge. So how can he say that? Well, the answer is because David's got a much bigger perspective that he's living in the light of.

And that is longing to experience God's love and commitment and beauty. Verse 4. David leans into his knowledge of God's character.

And he does so by picturing heaven or God's city, if you want to call it that. The foundations of David's city are shaken. The future is looking terribly uncertain when David pictures in his mind's eye heaven.

[13 : 01] Nothing shaky or uncertain about heaven. God is in his temple. God is in his throne. His temple symbolizing his presence among his people.

His commitment to dealing with sin. God is on his throne. God is in his throne, symbolizing the complete sovereignty and power and ongoing rule of the Lord.

Again, it's hard to know what the whole thing with eyelids is. But the best I can come up with is that, you know, something like, the Lord is so powerful in this big world that seems to be so out of control that just with a mere glance or in the blink of an eye, God knows exactly what is happening, where and when.

That's how much control he has. And it's in contrast to David's shaggy, vulnerable world.

Verse 5. It's quite clear, I think, that David is totally in the dark as to God's purposes in his circumstances. And we can well understand that.

- [14 : 16] But this is what David hangs on to. That every one of his circumstances is being used by the Lord for his good. That's the idea of God testing. Testing, by definition, is evidence of God's love and commitment and grace.

And testing actually helps us lean into the Lord with a new confidence in his goodness and his power and his love and his care.

Now, again, in the Psalms work on contrast all the time, verse 6. Those who are David's enemies are also in the dark about God's purposes in their immediate circumstances.

They think they've got the upper hand. But in the reality, they are being used...

Sorry, God will bring judgment on them. They don't understand that however things appear, they cannot succeed, they cannot win.

- [15 : 27] They will not even survive. Because the picture there is the picture of Sodom and Gomorrah. And how just, again, in an eyelid, in a blink, in an instant, God's judgment fell from heaven and wiped away a whole generation, several generations, in those two cities.

Big perspective. Neither seems to know what's going on. One, those circumstances for King David, circumstances for good, for growth.

The other, imminent judgment and destruction. Simon's going to read verse... Psalm 12, my voice. Thanks.

Psalm 12. To the choir master, according to the Shemineth. A Psalm of David. Save, O Lord, for the godly one is gone.

For the faithful have vanished from among the children of man. Everyone utters lies to his neighbour. With flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts.

- [16 : 44] Those who say, With our tongue we will prevail. Our lips are with us. Who is master over us? Because the poor are plundered. Because the needy groan.

I will now arise, says the Lord. I will place him in the safety for which he longs. The words of the Lord are pure words. Like silver refined in a furnace on the ground.

Purified seven times. You, O Lord, will keep them. You will guard us from this generation forever. On every side the wicked prowl.

As vileness is exalted among the children of man. David's starting point in this poem is that God saves.

God is a saviour figure. God delivers from the horrible, destructive expressions of sin and rebellion. That's all around us in life.

- [17 : 45] God delivers from that into the good life of truth and right that God's image bearers were created to enjoy. God delivers from the good life of truth and right that God saves.

God delivers from the good life of God. God delivers from the good life of God. And David longs for that because his world is filled with debased stuff. Damaging, horrible, worthless words and communication.

And we can again identify with David's world and David's situation. It seems to David that lies and deceit and manipulation and threats are what make the world go around.

Are the key to success. While truth and righteousness is swept aside. And those, quite literally, those who seek the Lord are a very critically endangered species.

As David sees it. But then he starts to dig into what he sees. And behind that facade of society niceness.

[19 : 05] Political correctness as we would use terms today. David sees something really ugly. That is, when push comes to shove, people hate each other.

They compete with each other for permanence. And achievement. They're two-faced. Double-minded with each other.

Saying one thing and doing something completely different. And they do so, verse 4, with incredible arrogance.

Both with respect to those around them. And especially with respect to God. They boast that they will set their own pathway. And that their own words will define and control that pathway.

And ultimately, they will not answer to anybody except themselves and their own words. It's an incredible confidence.

[20 : 12] It's an incredible arrogance. And yet, David here sees it as totally debased. And if we step back from it for a minute and ask the question, well, what is it about language and reason that's so horrible when it's used like this?

And I think the answer is this. This is at least the answer I can come up with this week. That is, the two greatest gifts that the Lord gave his image bearers, by which we can reflect his character, is the gift of words or language, and the gift of reason or thinking.

These are creative things that most reflect God's character. But these two things are what's used most to destroy other image bearers.

To assert autonomy against God. To build community and relationships which exclude God. And make self a demigod.

And so, when we see words used like this, it's particularly offensive, I think. Particularly damaging. Because something so good has been turned. And therefore, because of its creativity, in a sense, excuse me, in a sense we can say that people are really creative in how they wound and destroy one another.

[21 : 49] I'm sure we identify with King David's alarm at the collapse of truth. So again, a question. Given that situation, how could David in verse 7 and 8 then say, you, O Lord, will keep them?

You will guard them from this generation forever. Even as he says, on every side the wicked prowls, as vileness is exalted among the children of man. How can David say that?

How can David say that when he's so caught up in the daily evil of verbal wickedness and violence?

How can he remain confident of God's salvation and deliverance and protection and vindication? Well, once again, it is confidence in God's character.

And it's expressed more clearly, most clearly, in that phrase, pure silver words. The words of the Lord, verse 6, are pure words, like silver.

[23 : 02] Pure silver words, which are powerful and effective, and which are God's currency of communication. And again, verse 5 and 6, I think David is reporting what his advisor has said to him.

Only this time, his advisor is the Lord himself. And God says, I will now arise. I will place him in the safety for which he longs.

God is stirred to action by the plight of those destroyed or damaged by false destructive words. And what does God do?

God speaks. And the result is, salvation is delivered. God saves through his word. Silver, in those days, was the currency of choice.

It was something that was easy to demonstrate. It was pure. It was the genuine article, you might say. In currency and communication, it got things done.

[24 : 27] Well, I think that's the picture. God's word is his currency to get done what he determines to do in his world.

And what does his word do? It exposes debased words. Sinful rebellion.

Life built around lies and deceit and exploitation and autonomy. And brings it to account. And it delivers.

It delivers those who long to see God's name honored, who long to serve him in truth and righteousness. It delivers them into that very place they want to be.

The safe place of the good life lived under the Lord, in his truth, by his words. Psalm 13. Psalm 13. Psalm 13.

[25 : 22] Psalm 13. Psalm 13. Psalm 13. Psalm 13. Psalm 13.

To the choir master, a psalm of David. How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.

Lest my enemy say, I have prevailed over him. Lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. But I have trusted in your steadfast love.

[26 : 26] My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. So, leaning into the Lord when fearful and intimidated.

Leaning into the Lord when battered and bruised. And this Psalm 13. Leaning into the Lord for his true resilience when weary and distressed by persistent inner turmoil of heart and soul.

David's starting point in this poem that he believes God's promise of steadfast love.

He believes the promise. But he's struggling to have any real or practical experience of it because of inner turmoil.

It seems like in this Psalm, he's just struggling. He's overwhelmed with despair.

[27 : 39] He's feeling at the point of this, the battle in his heart, in his mind, is lost. He feels as if he's actually shaken to the very core of his being, the very core of his faith.

And I think we know only too well the threat of external violence.

We know what it is to be battered by rubbish words. But there's something also equally powerful about our own internal struggles, aren't there?

It's pernicious. It just chews away at you day and night. Persistent gives you such black thoughts and very little relief.

And King David describes this raging battle so well. The bleakness. The incredible persistence with which that inner struggle can present.

[28 : 42] And as I say, he's shaken to the very core of his faith in God. And it's in that point that these questions start to come out. Questions that are absolutely scary to be even entertained in our mind.

Has God forgotten me? That's a terrible question to form in your mind, isn't it?

Has God forgotten me? Has he just got tired of me? Because that's what we mean when we say we've forgotten somebody. We just get tired of their failures or their whinging or whatever else.

We get tired and we move on to somebody else that we perceive to be better. Could God do that to me? Or is God hiding his face from me?

And again, we think, look, I'm trying, I'm trying, I'm trying every day. I want to be connected to the Lord. I want to have a sense of richness and joy and peace and calm before him.

[29 : 51] But no matter how hard I try, it seems there's no connection. I just can't get a sense of his personal presence. There's no felt experience of his goodness or his grace or his mercy.

It's just darkness. And run those two questions together and they become a super scary question.

That is, am I truly and completely loved as God's word promises I am? And friends, there's an equally scary answer that goes to that.

And that is, if we go with our feelings or our circumstances or our experience, then the answer may well be, no, I'm not loved like I thought I was.

And so then the question becomes, in Psalm 13, again, the question comes out in the last two verses, five and six. How could anybody like King David so weary and distressed by such terrible inner turmoil say in verses five and six, I will sing to the Lord for he has been good to me.

[31 : 13] Are those just empty words? Is it just saying the right thing but feeling something totally different? I think that, again, only comes from a perspective of overflowing with a new sense of unshakable joy and delight in the Lord and his constant love and goodness.

The battles on the inside in our hearts and mind and our soul. And my friends, that's where the battle is won also. And it's won by focusing on what is true alongside horrible feelings and terrible fears.

If you look at verse three and remember that David is in the midst of this raging internal battle and yet he still speaks relationally to the Lord.

Consider and answer me, O Lord, my God. David does not give up his constant belief that he is known personally by God and indeed in the blackness of where he's at in his internal struggle, that notion that he's loved by God is the pinpoint of light at the end of a very black dark tunnel.

And verses three and four, he remains confident therefore that the Lord will act to protect his reputation. Not David's reputation but the Lord's reputation. The Lord will act to protect his own glory against any who will oppose him.

[33 : 01] And what that means for David is that however his experience and his circumstances feel, it means he will never be abandoned. No matter how tormented in mind he is, he knows he will never be abandoned because he is the Lord's and the Lord is his.

And verses five and six, he's believed in and enjoyed and been satisfied with God's love in the past. past. There's a real personal sense of God's presence and comfort and beauty and delight in the past.

And again, we see that perspective that comes through so often in the Psalms that what he's believed in the past and what he's known in the past becomes the frame and the reference point for interpreting what he's feeling and struggling with in the present.

And so focusing on what he knows to be true about God and God's character pushes the darkness of his inner struggle back into godly perspective.

Now, what I'm not saying is that it doesn't push away the struggle, doesn't make the struggle cease, it pushes it into a godly perspective. And this is something I think we shortchange ourselves on.

[34 : 22] The Bible is realistic about life and especially realistic about the inner turmoil and struggle that we have all the time or lots of the times.

And the Bible encourages us to believe that this darkness can last a long time and it can cause real distress.

darkness. The Bible never promises anywhere, as far as I can see, that that darkness will be relieved in just a short period of time. It will shake us from time to time to the core of our faith.

It will threaten the overwhelm us. But here's the rub, my friends. Darkness is also a mercy. mercy. It's a horrible place to be in one sense, but in another sense it's a wonderful mercy.

How could I say that? Well, there's no better place to learn new appreciation of God's love and mercy and grace than in darkness.

[35 : 36] There's nothing that will help us appreciate the light of life than the darkness of our inner struggle when we feel as if we're on our own.

Because by very definition, light shines into darkness. That's what the New Testament tells us. Light gives us comfort that the tunnel will end.

It may be a ways ahead of us, but there is light at the end of the tunnel, and that light is life. That light is God. That light is Jesus. And ultimately, that light that is coming toward us will totally dispel darkness because the two can't coexist.

And that, my friends, is the outcome for King David. Focusing on God's character has lifted him above his fears. Hasn't totally removed his fears.

Doesn't change his circumstances or the inner struggle. But it lifts him above those fears and allows him to have a godly perspective on them again. And that is where he gets his comfort and joy in the tunnel, in the darkness.

[36 : 59] happiness. And there's a delightful anticipation, therefore, that he will once again see God's face, that he will once again have a real and immediate practical sense of God's presence and God's goodness and God's grace and God's love.

So, friends, just moving to the conclusion now, I want you to take away from this morning that true God-shaped resilience is in knowing that God's righteous character is my refuge.

He is my safety, he's my security. He gives me a peace that's even greater than physical safety or physical peace. God's enduring word is my salvation.

Quite literally, God saves me and delivers me by his word, the Lord Jesus. The pure word, the true word, the word that will never be debased. It saves me, it defines me, it keeps me, and it builds me to maturity.

And God's love for me is unfailing and generous. And when we grasp that perspective then, as David himself experienced, we overflow.

[38 : 30] What do we overflow with? Joy. We overflow with joy or happiness, praise. Why? Because we've seen the face of the Lord.

And what do we see? Something that's incredibly comforting, something that's incredibly beautiful, something that's incredibly desirable, and something that's incredibly satisfying.

And when we have those things all tucked up in our inner landscape, quite literally, hell, we can be going to hell in a basket, as it were, to use a colloquial term about the awfulness of life.

And we can have joy and peace and security. And all of that means, my friends, that Jesus is our ultimate source of resilience. resilience. As I've said, quite literally, he is the word of truth and life.

He renews us from the inside out. He puts us in the place of safety and refuge, the very place we long for. He enables us to experience joy and demonstrate the good life of God's true word.

[39 : 43] I think, my friends, I just want to sum up with Matthew 11, verses 28 and 29. Jesus says, come to me. Come to me, all you who struggle and are weighed down with the struggle of life.

And I will give you real rest, real resilience. Come alongside me and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Happiness, joy, freedom, and delight. All I give you will be helpful, good, and satisfying in comparison to anything the world offers you.

So, friends, let's remember to preach that gospel to ourselves. The gospel of Psalm 11, 12, and 13, made clear in the Lord Jesus Christ. rest. And let's remember to move from our circumstances to engagement with God in prayer.

That's what it is to lean in to the Lord. Rehearse his character. Find new confidence and rest in his true word.

[41 : 06] Lord, let that be the shaper and interpreter of your circumstances. Let your perspective be his security and his joy and his delight and his satisfaction.

My friends, that is the resilience that we all long to have in the challenges of life. Pray with me. Lord, keep us from going around the old circle time and time again of self-reliance and trying to create our resilience from our own resources.

For, Lord, that will just continue to disappoint and frustrate. For we cannot deliver to ourselves, Lord, that which we long for. Help us instead to lean into you, your character, your love, your satisfaction, your delight.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.