

Living without fear

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[0 : 00] Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here. Father, thank you that you are with us by your Spirit right now.

Thank you you've given us your word. And so we ask for your Spirit's help to understand it with our minds and apply it to our hearts. That we might grow in our faith in you with a bigger vision of you and live life without fear.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Because that is the topic for today, a life without fear. And how we need to hear this message.

Because we live at a time where there is an epidemic of worry and fear. Not just in our own nation but across the Western world. I had an interview with the Tory leader.

I think it happened a week or so ago. And she was speaking there for a little while about the number of young people who are talking about having mental health issues.

[1 : 03] Because of the worry and uncertainty of life. It's the kind of worry that many of us will know at different times. The kind of worry that weighs us down. That leaves us weak and cowering.

Unable to think straight. The kind of fear that leaves us paralysed and helpless. Trembling because of what might come. And that's despite of course the fact that our nation has known peace for the last 80 years at least at home.

Unlike the men and women we remembered on Friday, the 80th anniversary of VJ Day. We haven't known enemies at our gates. We haven't faced a ruthless, cruel opposition that tortured its prisoners with amazing brutality.

We haven't been forced to flee our homes because of war. But that certainly doesn't mean that we're not subject to fear and worry. That so many people aren't overcome with it because that is the case.

Many are fearful for their family and fearful for their health. People fear their financial security and their relationships. Many people fear being rejected. Saying or doing or maybe even thinking the wrong thing that might leave them being excluded from their friends.

[2 : 20] We fear global warming and global war. Immigration and inflation. We fear being lonely yet we have a fear of people. Because we're not sure we can trust them.

Many more of us will live with a fear of serious illness or dementia. The loss of independence and death. And very often these fears do gang up around us.

They paralyze us. They take away our joy and they rob us of any sense of peace. Well, like us. David was faced with many kinds of things that he might have let overwhelm him entirely.

There are lots of things mentioned in this psalm, aren't there? That would leave us very afraid too. The wicked are coming to devour him. There's a possibility of war breaking out. Of foreign armies invading the land and besieging the cities.

Down at the bottom of the psalm there are things that are less violent. But no less dramatic and painful when they come. False witnesses, verse 12. Rise up against me spouting malicious accusations.

[3 : 23] What do we do in the face of these kind of things in our future? Well, according to the psalm here, it is possible to live without fear of the very worst of circumstances.

It's possible to say with David, Though an army besiege me, though war break out against me, though my family falls apart, though my reputation is in tatters, though my health is failing and death is looming, my heart will not fear.

According to the psalmist, it is possible to live a life without being overwhelmed by fears. How is that possible? How is it possible to be so confident that we can face whatever comes our way?

And there are some real things that might come and know that those things, whatever happens, they will not crush us or leave us trembling. How is it possible? Well, let me tell you what isn't, what David isn't saying to start with.

He isn't saying, If you have a faith in God and a strong enough faith, nothing will go wrong. He is not saying that. He's not saying that as long as he trusts in God, every little thing is going to be all right.

[4 : 39] It's not a promise here or anywhere in the Bible that Christians will enjoy health, wealth, happiness as long as we live. See, although David had known God's amazing blessing and protection in his early years in some amazing ways.

So think of the way we're told he battled with lions and bears as a shepherd boy. How he overcame Goliath with a sling and a few stones. How he led Israel into many successful battles.

How he escaped the prolonged attempts of King Saul to kill him. Despite God's protection, knowing that, David also knew defeat throughout his life.

His own son staged a coup against him. And David and his close family and friends were forced to flee the nation. There were times too when David ignored God's word and faced some painful consequences.

And he knew, as we all will in time if we live that long, what it means to get old and frail and to face death. David faced some real, real big things that might crush him and change his life.

[5 : 43] So whilst David is confident that God would act, and that he would at some level at least know the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, he wasn't expecting God to do miracle after miracle after miracle to make his life perfect.

He wasn't expecting enduring health, wealth and happiness. David faced real dangers. And he did not know how these things would turn out. And yet he continued to say, I know what's over there, but my heart will not fear.

So what does David have that helps him to respond to so many dangerous threats in this way? What is it that he has that helps him say, I'm not bowed, I am not crushed?

Well, it isn't a what, but a who. It's not a new way of thinking. It's not summoning up something from inside him or learning a new technique. What David has is a person.

You might have missed that. Have a look down at verse one with me. It's easy to miss there. What does he say? He says, the Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life.

[6 : 52] Of whom shall I be afraid? You see that? David isn't afraid of these things. He's not overcome and overwhelmed by fear because he has the Lord. He has God.

His situation is dark. Yes, indeed it is. But the Lord is David's light and there is no darkness that God cannot pierce with his marvellous light. David is in deep trouble.

The nation is in deep trouble. His enemies have real strength. They are gathering against him. But the Lord is David's salvation. And he knows that no person or power can snatch David out of God's hands.

David's comfort, his security, his reputation are all under threat. No matter. No matter. The Lord is the stronghold of David's life.

And no power exists that can break down God's walls. David's hope here is in a person. The Lord God Almighty himself. The God of infinite power and strength.

[7 : 49] And that's why he's not crushed by these threats and overcome by fears of what might happen. He's not burying his head and closing his eyes. He's not imagining that they're all not there.

They are there. But he's not letting the thought of them crush him. Notice though that David isn't saying that his faith will save him. It's a fact of life that the strength of our faith rises and falls from time to time.

There are times, depending on our circumstances, when we feel very close to God. And other times when we feel further away from him. At times our faith seems solid and sure. Other times there are doubts that rage in our minds.

David isn't trusting in his faith. He's not saying, I feel close to God now, therefore I will be all right. His hope is in God. When David faces these very real dangers, he knows this.

Since the Lord is mine and I am his. Since the Lord is my light, my salvation, my stronghold. Even though vast numbers of enemies may rise up against me.

[8 : 52] Even then, I have nothing to fear. Because I have the Lord. He has the Lord. Now David was not just a king and a poet.

He was a prophet as well. He had an astonishing insight into God's character. And into his plans for bringing salvation to the world. Yet David didn't see everything in full technicolor.

You and I, or whatever you think yourself comparing yourself to David. All of us here are in a far better position than David ever was. Because we have the final revelation of God through Jesus.

We have the New Testament witnesses telling us all about him. So we know, don't we, that through repentance and faith in Jesus, we become part of God's close family.

That through that repentance, God, the Lord of hosts of all those heavenly armies becomes our father. We know that Jesus, our saviour and Lord, becomes our elder brother.

[9 : 53] We know that the Holy Spirit comes to live in us. So Jesus' spirit is our spirit. So for the Christian, God is not simply out there somewhere watching over us.

He is in here, working out his purposes. Living with us, having fellowship with us. As believers, we are in God and God is in us. That means we can say with Paul in Romans 8, If God is for us, who can be against us?

Shall trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Can they drive us away from God? No! In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels or demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

David doesn't let his fears overwhelm him because he has the Lord. There is an intimate relationship there. An intimate closeness, deep fellowship.

[11 : 01] It's not just intellectual. It's not just religious observance. David doesn't fear because all he is, body, mind, soul, and spirit, is wrapped up, protected, joined to the Lord of hosts.

That's why he isn't crushed by these very real dangers that are there. Fear will not overwhelm him because he has the Lord. Fear will not overwhelm him because he has the Lord of hosts.

Fear will not overwhelm him because he has the Lord of hosts. So if that's what it takes to be without fear, to be able to smile through the storms of life, to be able to face down any enemy, how do we get to the point where we have that kind of relationship with God?

What David tells us. David tells us. I think there are four steps that come up in this psalm. Here's the first one. Verses four to six, we are to deeply desire God.

Then, verses seven to ten, we are to actively seek God. Verse eleven, we are to willingly obey God. And then lastly, we are to repeat all of those until we see Jesus face to face.

[12 : 09] Four steps. Deeply desire God. Actively seek God. Willingly obey God. And repeat until we see the Lord face to face. And the more we do these things, the more they define our relationship with the Lord, the less our circumstances will drive us to fear.

So let's dive in. What do I mean by deeply desire God? We're just going to touch the surface of these things this morning. It's interesting, isn't it, that David doesn't pray that the Lord would take away his fear.

Did you notice that? As if peace within is what he desires most. David's desire, the thing he is most passionate about, is that he might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life and gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and seek him in his temple.

So why does David desire God? I think there are two reasons that the psalm implies for us. The first is that he sees his own weakness and need. There is a humility in David's heart towards God.

He knows that despite his position and power, despite all those natural abilities, no one could throw a stone like him. David knows that he cannot stand firm under these threats.

[13 : 24] He knows his own weakness. They will crush him. He knows he is weak and needy. He knows that he is a sinner in need of a saviour, that he's a child in need of a father, a creature needing his creator to take care of him.

There is humility from David. He sees his own weakness. But he also recognises God's greatness. You read through the psalms, you see that David has a big vision of God.

A big vision of God in all his power and strength and might. But he also knows of God's grace and mercy and love. A grace, mercy and love that not only would allow David to come to him, but would draw him, draw David into a close fellowship.

Here and across the psalm, David is captivated by God's glory. It overwhelms him. And he deeply desires to know him more. That's what it means to deeply desire God.

Friends, the one who can live without fear doesn't simply come to God to get something out of him. And that's it. God has some glorious gifts to give us.

[14 : 37] But the one who can truly live without fear comes to God, seeking after God, longing to know him, to see him as he is. If you want to live without fear, then that desire needs to grow in you, to know God more.

Deeply desire God. But it can't just stay there. It's one thing to desire something. To say, oh, that's my ambition. If only I could have that, but then to do nothing about it.

No, no. Second thing David does is actively seek God. He actively seeks him. In one sense, God is easy to find, isn't he?

His glory is revealed in creation. His existence and law at a deep level are written on our hearts. In this country, at least, there are churches in every village and town. There are Bibles in every bookshop.

Even our laws and culture are riven with references to the scriptures. And whether we know it or not, this book, the Bible and the God, it reveals. God has shaped our lives and our nation.

[15 : 42] God is everywhere. But so are distractions. When life is good, when danger is far away, when we feel that we can cope with life on our own, that there is nothing to fear, well, seeking God falls a long way down our to-do list, doesn't it?

I heard a statistic this week from a rather an old study. But apparently when asked, about 85% of people said that they thought more about God after a time in hospital than they did before.

That shouldn't really surprise us, should it? When life is difficult, our thoughts turn to God. But so often we keep him at arm's length.

And that's often true of many people who are in church week by week. We know a little about God. We know enough to say one or two prayers off by heart. We think, oh yeah, it's comforting to know that there's a God out there somewhere.

Just to give us a little dash of faith. But a faith that doesn't interfere with our lives. We will never face our fears in the way that David does, if that is the limit of our knowledge of God.

[16 : 52] Now, if we want a deep, intimate relationship with God, the kind that helps us face danger and disaster without falling apart, then we need to actively seek him.

We need to pursue him. That means reading his words. Regularly. And it means believing what God has said about himself. It means taking the time to pray and meditate on God's word, that his word would settle into our hearts and change us.

It means making the time to spend with fellow believers an unbreakable priority. That means energy and time needs to be reordered so we can be active and earnest as we do those things.

And if we're not prepared to do them, if we don't draw close to God, then we won't be able to face danger and threat in the way that David does. We need to desire to know God.

We need to actively seek him. And thirdly, it means we need to be those who willingly obey him. Teach me your way, Lord. Lead me in a straight path, David says in verse 11.

[17 : 58] See, a real faith that flows from a close, warm relationship of deep fellowship with God always shows itself in obedience.

In letting God's word enter into our lives and teach us and shape us. Even when the scriptures force us to examine the way we are thinking. Cause us to change our ideas and live in a different way.

It's shown too in costly and sacrificial love and service. In forgiving the wrongs that others do to us. In patient suffering. In a willingness to let God lead us where we would have us go.

Can't expect to know the closeness of a fellowship, a deep fellowship with God and wilfully ignore his commands. We won't ever know God's peace and have the kind of confidence David has in the face of real threats by seeking to live life our own way.

And David knew that. There were times when he disobeyed God and he reaped the consequences. God's old people, Old Testament people knew that too. The disobedience of God leads to distance from God.

[19 : 14] It moves us out using the picture in verse 1. Disobedience robs us of joy and moves us out of God's stronghold of protection.

And there is no peace or security. No way to live a life free from fear when we are distanced from the Lord. David isn't fearful of these things because he has the Lord.

Because he deeply desires him. He actively seeks him and he willingly obeys him. And here's the last thing that David does. It's implied, I think, in those last couple of verses.

He repeats these things again and again. He keeps doing them. I don't think there's a secret to a long and happy marriage. Not really. It's simply to continue to do the things that cause love to flourish in the first place.

So it's about desiring your spouse. Cherishing them above all others. It's about continuing to woo them. Seeking their pleasure over yours. It's spending time with them.

[20 : 19] So your knowledge of them grows deeper. It's showing your love in active ways. Caring, serving, forgiving, providing, protecting. Living in such a way that they know that it's clear to everyone that you love them.

And then repeating those things day after day. Year after year. That's what it means to be a child of God. To live in that way towards our heavenly father.

Knowing that nothing and no one will take his place. You see, ultimately the fear that crushes us is the fear of losing that which we love the most. To put it another way.

It's the threat that we might lose the thing or the person that has the prime place in our lives. The object of our deepest desire. The thing that we actually worship. It's the threat of the fear of losing that that brings the kind of fear that paralyzes us and robs us of our peace.

If that thing is our spouse, then the fear of their death will crush you long before it happens. And you won't recover when it does. If that thing is our popularity, then the fear of not being liked or being rejected will control you.

[21 : 33] And you'll be worried in every conversation that doesn't go the right way. If the thing that you treasure most of all is your job or your health, your abilities, then the fear of losing them may well drive you out of your mind with worry.

Because those things will fade in time. But if you truly belong to God, if the Lord is the one you worship, if he is your greatest joy, if your hopes for the future are grounded on him and in him, then there is nothing to fear.

Why is that? Because God is stronger than any enemy. He is brighter than any darkness. He is more loving than any spouse. More gracious than any friend. Wiser than any counsellor.

And nothing, not Satan, not even death itself, can separate you from God and his power, his love and his presence. David knew all that.

That's why he didn't fear. And it's why we need not fear either, no matter what life may lead to. No matter what dangers we can see out there in our futures, we need not fear.

[22 : 43] But to do that, we need an intimacy with God, a deep fellowship with him that is found through desiring him, through seeking him, through obeying him.

But as we draw near to God, so his perfect love floods our hearts. And it is his perfect love that drives out all fear. May we know that.

Deep down. And may we live like it. For the glory of God. Amen.