



Israel's Greatest Hits Vol. II-Part 6
Fearless
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Well, there's no doubt that life can be scary. But you imagine if you didn't live here in the 21st century? Say you lived in a place like Nigeria or Ukraine or Lebanon. I mean, there are compounded daily threats that you would face, certainly economically, politically, socially. I mean, this would all be multiplied. And yet as the New York Times recently reported Americans are significantly more anxious. Those are the three words they used, "significantly more anxious than..." this report was about the populations of Nigeria, Ukraine and Lebanon. That we are more anxious than they are. Time magazine had a whole issue reporting the problem of Americans being worried and anxious as epidemic these days. World Health Survey released a report speaking of Americans as being more fearful and more anxious than the 14 countries that they were studying in this report released not long ago. Of course, you probably heard the statistics of the unthinkable amount of money that Americans spend, over two billion dollars every year, on anti-anxiety medication. It's a problem, obviously, in our day. It is a problem and it seems to be a growing problem to live in our culture in the 21st century and not be bombarded with temptations to be anxious and worried.

And yet you sit here today, many of you, as Christians. You are disciples of Jesus Christ. And there is for the disciples of Jesus Christ an unambiguous and very comprehensive statement, a command, of the Bible that says, "Do not be anxious about anything." I mean, that is a huge command. It's not just a New Testament expectation, it's been an Old Testament expectation all the way back to the beginning. I mean you see in Scripture the characterization of the difference between non-Christians and Christians, we would call them, God's people and those who are not God's people, saying things like Proverbs 28:1 saying listen, "It's the wicked who flee when no one pursues them." I mean the rustling of leaves sends them running. They're anxious, they're worried. But "the righteous are as bold as a lion."

I mean, that's the distinction that God would expect between his people and the people of this world. And yet that is a very high calling. It's not something you're going to decide to do at a church service and just kind of once for all, you know, eradicate fear and worry. To be a bold and courageous person, a fearless person as the title of this message indicates, is a constant struggle. It's a battle for us. It is something that we need to deal with every single week of our Christian life. It's something that we're going to need to put some things in place to make sure that we get this as a regular part of how we live our lives. The kinds of things that we're going to talk about this morning need to be essential ingredients to what we see as our objectives every week as we become more and more faithful followers of Christ.

Now, if you want to talk about reasons for fear and anxiety I suppose you could go back to the ancient Near East and imagine being in a position of power, a prominent position of power. To be an ancient near eastern king would certainly be the grounds or the context, the environment for a lot of things that could make you worry. And certainly, David was no exception in the 10th century B.C. David knew what it was to have a lot of people gunning for him even before he became officially the king. He was official in God's mind when Samuel poured that flask of oil over his head and named him to be the next king of Israel. But he spent, I mean, as many as, depending on how you calculate the numbers, 12 years it seemed on the run from Saul running from place to place in fear of his life, or at least that's the

disposition you'd think he would have, running from cave to cave and even going into foreign territory to try and hide from Saul and his men as he sought him out.

Not to mention the things that he had to deal with all the time once he became the king. He was named the king of Judea in the south and it was seven years of civil war before he actually ascended to a position of peace over all of Israel. Most people don't think about that. I mean, that's almost 20 years of a lot of incessant problems that would leave most of us, you know, trembling with fear or certainly staying awake at night wondering what's going to happen to my job, my leadership, not to mention his life. And his own son, as we learned recently in our study of the psalms, Absalom, became someone who was seeking to get his job. A coup d'état was foisted upon David and he ended up successfully putting enough pressure on David to send him out of Jerusalem as a fugitive and again he's in fear of his life or at least that would be the disposition you would expect.

And yet David, as imperfect as he was, certainly sought to live as a bold and courageous follower of God, a fearless person who trusted in God. In Psalm 27 where I'd like to turn you this morning is a psalm that gives us a statement of that resolve. Not only that, you'll find embedded in this psalm great practical ingredients to get us there. We may not be dealing with the same kinds of physical threats or political threats that David faced, but I think we can all identify with these 14 verses and find many things, certainly in our day, in a culture that seems to be, you know, it's pandemic, the anxiety and worry in our culture. We can certainly look at this and say there's a lot I can learn about how to get my heart where it needs to be so that perhaps we can say that we are anxious about nothing.

The superscription simply says "Of David" so we know the connection here. And it says in verse 1 that, "The Lord," and you'll again notice throughout the Psalms here the capital O-R-D, as we see throughout the Old Testament, this is God's proper name. His proper name is Yahweh, so "Yahweh," the Hebrew reads, "is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" There's the rhetorical question. If I'm trusting in Yahweh as my light, my life, my salvation, my deliverer, well then who am I going to be afraid of? Sounds a lot like Paul in Romans Chapter 8. Right? "If God is for us who can be against us?" And again, lots of people as he's about to confess here. There's a lot of evildoers who want to take his life out and yet he declared, very clearly, bottom of verse 1, "Yahweh is the stronghold of my life," he's my rock, he's my fortress, "of whom shall I be afraid?" I shouldn't be, but there are a lot of people who are surrounding me trying to kill me, verse 2, "When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall." Here's his confidence. God is going to deliver me. "Though an army encamps against me." You may feel that way but David literally had armies encamping against him. He says, here's the result, "My heart shall not fear; though war arises against me, yet I will be confident."

And then this transition in verse 4. "One thing," you know these words, "I have asked of Yahweh, that I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of Yahweh and 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 Yahweh."

Verse 7. "Hear, O Yahweh, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, 'Seek my face.' My heart says to you, 'Your face, Yahweh, do I seek.' Hide not your face for 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 mother have forsaken me, but Yahweh will take me in. Teach me your way, O Yahweh, 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 Yahweh in the land of the living! Wait for Yahweh; be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for Yahweh." What a great statement of confidence in the Lord.

Let's take a look at this text and see if we can't learn what would not only make us obedient to the call of Christianity to be fearless, Christians who are worried about nothing, but what a great way to live. Right? I mean, what a good thing for us to reach this place of obedience in our Christian life where we would find the absence of this kind of anxiety and fear that grips so many in our generation.

Take those first three verses and let's just look at this very strong statement of confident assurance that David has about God's care for his life. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; who then should I fear?" Nobody. "The Lord is the stronghold of my life; who am I going to be afraid of? When evildoers assail me," I mean they're here, positioning and strategizing to kill me, "to eat up my flesh, with my adversaries and foes, it is they who will stumble and fall." And certainly that was true in a temporal way for David. I mean, he's seen a lot of victories. But his confidence is that God will get me through this. God will give me victory, "Though an army encamped against me, my heart shall not fear; the war arise against me, yet will I be confident."

What is he confident in? All those statements. "God is his light," that means he gives him life. He is "his salvation," he is deliverer, he's going to give credit to God whenever there's a victory. "God is the stronghold," the protector, "of his life." So he knows this: that God is a God who protects me, he cares for me, he grants me life, he is a God who takes care of his people, and I am the sheep of his flock, the shepherd, the Great Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, Psalm 23, is going to guide me through this. I know God cares for me. In one of the most classic texts that relates to anxiety in the New Testament, First Peter 5, it puts it that simply. It says cast your anxieties on the Lord because he cares for you.

That's a good place to start. And I jotted it down that way, if you're taking notes and I wish that you would this morning, several things we need to note in this passage. Let's start with this: we need to be "Confident In God's Care." If you are a Christian, if you are part of the flock, if you're sheep of his pasture then you have this guarantee in Scripture. God is not just this detached, you know, uncaring God, not that he is to any of his creation, but in your case you are his adopted child and God cares for his people.

Now, I've painted a picture of David's life where it seemed like God didn't care for his people. In this case, it would seem like David, if he was favored, wouldn't be on the run for, depending on how you reckon it, 7 to 12 years running from Saul and certainly you wouldn't think that he would have his son rise up against him and you wouldn't think that he would take 7 years just to establish his kingdom. And yet that's what God does. His plan is not the kind of

immediate solution to all of my problems. That's why it ends with that statement that you are going to need some patience, you are going to have to wait for the Lord.

And yet David knew that whether I'm in green pastures beside still waters or whether I'm walking through the valley of the shadow of death, I understand this: there's a provision and a care that God gives to me. As a matter of fact, to put it in the words of Psalm 23, because "God is with me," the Lord is with me. He doesn't forsake his people. It may not be that every prayer request that I utter to God is answered the way that I want or when I want it, but I know this: that God cares for his people, he has demonstrated his love for us in this, "That while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." There's no greater expression of God's commitment to his people or his care for his people than that. And it's a good place for us to start when we think about our fears and our anxieties.

David had a lot of people who wanted to kill him and I'm not sure what the things are that you stay up thinking about that make you nervous. But oftentimes it is people, people who want to do us harm. Whether it's a lawsuit I'm facing, whether you just read the news headlines and you're fearful of what's going on in our society in terms of violence, as we said earlier in our series, or maybe it's just that you really are up on Christian news and you know that the tide is turning in our country like it's turned in several other countries and if I'm going to live openly in a confessional way about Christianity, I'm going to suffer persecution. This is coming upon our country and we feel this and we sense this and maybe that brings you fear, it makes you afraid, it causes anxiety in your life.

I would remind you what the Bible has to say regarding this. Jesus said it best, I suppose, in Matthew Chapter 10 when he was preaching about anxiety. And he said this: if you really want to get things straight in your mind, he said let's make this comparison. He said, "Don't fear the one who can kill the body and after that there's nothing that they can do." Now that's a big deal because I'm thinking now that is what I'm afraid of. I'm afraid of someone who can kill my body. Well, I realize that that's a scary thing to think through. But there's something even greater that you should fear. And though we don't quote this passage a lot, I find a lot of folks who don't understand the totality of God's sovereignty or power, they don't quote it at all. But the next line says, "Don't fear the people who could kill your body and that's all they can do. Fear the one who," after he kills the body, which implies certainly that he can kill your body, "can cast your soul into hell." That's a huge statement. He says, "yes, I tell you, fear him."

Now, here's the concern. I've got a problem. My problem is sin. I don't qualify to have any fellowship or relationship with God. I deserve to be punished for my sin because God is holy, I know what's right, I've chosen to do what's wrong, just like you have, and I deserve to hear, "Depart from me, I never knew you into outer darkness where there's weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth." There ought to be a punishment for my sin and rebellion and transgression. But the good news is that Jesus who said these very things in Matthew Chapter 10 verse 28 said, "I've come to solve the problem. Matter of fact, my life is going to be given as a payment or a ransom for many people. So there are many people who deserve to be punished but I'm going to be the punishment for them. I've come to bring peace on Earth to those on whom God's favor rests."

God cares for his people so much so that he's taken the problem that I have, that is the biggest problem of all, that is not about when my temporal life ends, but what's going to happen after

this temporal life is over, and he solved that problem so that I can say, with Romans Chapter 8 verse 1, that if I trust in him there is therefore now no condemnation, there's no punishment, there's no retribution, there's no payment for sin, there's no residual burning off of my sin in a place called Purgatory. I'm not going to some intermediate space called "Limbo." I'm going directly into the presence of Christ, Second Corinthians 5, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." That is the ultimate problem all human beings face. And Jesus knowing that talking to these folks saying if you really want to worry about someone you ought to worry about your relationship with God, not your relationship with your opponents or your enemies or the people that are encamped against you. You ought to worry about God.

But God has gone from a hostile party to becoming your advocate and your friend. He's no longer your enemy. He's not going to sit on a great white throne and judge you for your sins. If you trust in Christ, all of that has been spent and given and completely paid for on a cross so that he can look at you and say, "Enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." All of your sins problem appended to the cross. You no longer have any issues as it relates to your eternal destiny. That's really good news.

Then he says, "Don't you know that two sparrows are sold for a penny, and yet not one sparrow," even down to the sparrows, "falls to the ground apart from your Father." In other words, apart from the oversight and purview of your Father's sovereignty, not a single bird dies. So I know this: that when I die, whenever that is, very clearly it's not that it's going to be oops, that criminal or that persecutor or that person who murder or killed Mike Fabarez, it's going to be exactly when, according to God's sovereign plan, I am leaving the planet because the days of my life have been fully expended. They were written in the book before there was one of them and God knows when that's going to happen. And I know this, the one who holds the ticket to my last day on this earth has been the one who sent his Son to provide for my eternity, and he says you know that not even a bird dies without God's sovereign oversight, and so it is that you're not going to die without that sovereign oversight. And he said, "Don't you know even to the hairs of your head," every single follicle, "is numbered?" That's how concerned and caring God is for your body and to your life and to your soul. Because of that he says two words, "Fear not." Fear not. You're more valuable than many sparrows, obviously.

You need to understand this: if you make peace with the God who's the God who has all authority, you really have no one else to worry about even though someone could come and kill your body, which wouldn't be outside the purview and sovereignty of God anyway. But you do recognize this: you make peace with God, no one else, really, no one else by comparison should be feared. He says this: "The Lord is my light and my salvation." Then really, if I understand that in the most comprehensive and broadest way, there is no one else to fear. If he is the stronghold of my life there is no one else I should be afraid of. And I know that ultimate deliverance is going to come from God, not just in the temporal, short term lifespan that I'm going to live on this planet, but in eternity. The most important problem I face has been solved by Jesus Christ.

You say, "Well, that really doesn't help my fear about getting there." Right? "I don't have a problem with the fact my name's written Lamb's Book of Life, I'm going to go be with God when I die. I get that Pastor Mike, I put my trust in Christ. I'm just concerned with the transition." Right? "I'm concerned with the pain involved in that." Jot this reference down if you would. I've quoted it a few times lately from this platform, but Second Corinthians

Chapter 12, Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verses 8, 9 and 10. There are three verses that are good for you to look up in your homework this week, where the Apostle Paul, and here's the pattern that's going to start to develop in Scripture, he's looking at something that is painful. It's called a thorn in the flesh. The reason it's called a thorn in the flesh is it caused him great physical pain, much like when you have a thorn in your flesh. That's why he calls it that. And in that pain that he's experiencing he says to God what you and I say when anything's going wrong, we say God fix it. And he pleaded, that's a strong word, three times with the Lord that he take it away.

And you know the passage, Sunday school grads, you know exactly what happened. God said no. But he gave him an answer. He didn't just say "no" cross arms and that was all. He got, you know, his prayer shut out from heaven and he didn't get the answer he wanted. Here's what he got from God, "My grace, my grace is sufficient for you." "My favor, my acceptance of your life, my presence in your life, it is sufficient for you. I'm not going to take the pain away. I've got reasons for the pain," which I would love to know all the reasons for the pain in my life and I'm sure you would too. But they shouldn't scare you because the Bible says, all of that, you need to understand, is offset by this one fundamental truth for Christians: God favors you, God cares for you.

God is a God who does not withdraw from you in the midst of your pain, in the midst of the threats, in the midst of the cancer, in the midst of the lawsuit. God is a God who cares for you. "His grace is sufficient for you." That even when you go through that, and the good news of that passage is that even when you have that pain or you have that problem or you have that liability or you have that threat, that God says his power, because of his presence, is going to be perfected, it's going to be exactly what it ought to be made, in your weakness. The good news is for Christians, and here's the paradigm that's emerging, the things that should make you afraid should be offset by the fundamental truth that God is favoring you, he's with you, he's forgiven you. The God that could condemn you has accepted you.

I'm afraid of a lot of things that happen when I have opponents because in our day they may not be throwing literal spears at me or literal arrows but they're shooting a lot of arrows that make me feel bad. And the Bible doesn't downplay that. We understand there is pain, not just, you know, "sticks and stones may break my bones and words will never hurt me." Words do hurt us and we understand that. We're insulted, we're excluded, we're reviled, we're ridiculed and that's true and that I'm afraid of too. I don't want to be disliked, you don't want to be disliked.

Let me give you the paradigm again from First Peter Chapter 4, First Peter 4:14 if you're taking notes. I'll just quote it, in and out on this passage. Here it comes. He says, "When you are insulted..." Now, again, he's talking about things that you're insulted for that you don't deserve to be insulted for. "Insulted because of your relationship with Christ," and all of us will be if we stand up for Christ. It says this: "You need to know you're blessed." What? You're blessed. Why? Here it comes. "Because the Spirit of glory and of God," here's a great line, "it rests upon you."

Now, that's exactly what we saw in Second Corinthians Chapter 12. We didn't see it because I didn't read it for you specifically, but it says in that passage that the weakness that I have and the pain that I experience, it says, here's the thing, "The power of Christ rests upon you."

Here's a picture of closeness with a God who says, "it's not just I'm drawing near to the broken-hearted because I feel bad for them," but God says, "listen, here's the thing: the things that make you afraid, weakness, pain, opposition, insults, ridicule, exclusion, that's when I recognize, and you should recognize, that our relationship is unchanging, that my favor and closeness and connection with you is never going away. You need to focus on the fact that I'm with you, that even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death," here's the paradigm again from the Old Testament, I will not fear. Why? "Because you're with me. I'm walking with you."

I'll turn you to this one. To be confident in God's care, it may come down to the economic issues in your life, turn to Hebrews Chapter 13 with me. The paradigm emerges again. When I cast my anxieties on God the only way I can do that and really let go of them is because I know he cares for me. He cares for me even though I'm in pain, even though there's an army encamped against me, even though I'm going through physical ailments and problems. I know this: when it comes to the things that I am afraid of, a lot of them causes me anxiety and fear because of the insecurity of not having enough. I'm afraid I won't have enough resources. I fear that I won't have provision. And that's a real concern. Right? A lot of people in these articles I read about anxiety in our culture, a lot of people are pointing at their paycheck and about their bank account and about what's going to happen in the future, whether they're approaching retirement or whether they're getting out of college and trying to figure out how they're going to pay their student loans and make it in life and I'll never own a house. They fear this. They have anxiety over these things.

Now, I get it. I get the temptation of verse 5. I get the temptation to love money, because if I put three or four zeros after whatever you have in your bank account right now, in your checking account, you'd feel a little better today wouldn't you? "Yeah, I would." You don't want to say amen to that because you're in church but you know you'd feel better about that. You'd say I would go home feeling more secure, I feel more at peace. You throw four zeros after everything that I have in all my accounts, I am absolutely going to feel better. But of course the Bible has made very clear how foolish it is for us to trust in the uncertainty of riches. And even though I know we are tempted to raise our hand and say, "Let me try," every time someone says, "The money that I didn't have and then I had it, it does not provide for me what everyone thinks it's going to provide for me." And again, I'm going to say, "Well, let me try. Put those dollars in my account, we'll see if I can feel better about life." That they say no. Time and time again, Solomon said it, David's son, no matter what I had it didn't provide what people think it's going to provide.

That's why Paul says in First Timothy 6, you got to see the problem of all of this money being the root of all kinds of evil. It is the uncertainty of riches you cannot bank on. Just like we saw last time in the psalms. I don't want to trust in chariots or horses. I've got to trust in God, I want to trust not in my bank account. So we ought to be free from that kind of obsessive focus on money. "Keep your life free," Hebrews 13:5, "from the love of money, be content with what you have," be content with it, "for he has said," now here's the solution, the paradigm emerges again, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." You've got me.

You may not have a pain free life, you may not have a disease-free body, you may not have a frictionless relationship, you may not have a perfect job, you may have financial problems, but here's what you got, you've got me, you've got me. "I will never leave you, never forsake you."

So that we can," and here's the challenge of the Christian life to eschew and assuage the kind of anxiety and worry that so many people are gripped with, "I can confidently say this," even if I don't have money, even if I don't have good health, "the Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what man can do to me?" I won't fear what my body can do to me, I won't fear what the culture can do to me, I don't fear what the government can do to me. I'm just not going to be afraid. And again, here it is again. Why? Because I got God. God is going to walk me through this and at the end the one I'm going to face is not my neighbor, it's not my banker, it's not my employer, I'm going to face the God of the universe, the holy God who created me. And you know what? I'm at peace with that God. That God has promised to never leave me and never forsake me. A lot of people fear opposition, they fear rejection, they fear physical pain, they fear the lack of resources, they ultimately fear death. And as Hebrews Chapter 2 says, they're gripped with it, they're enslaved to that kind of fear.

But as long as we're only a couple of chapters from it, can you turn back to Hebrews Chapter 10? Let me show you that this ought to become the palpable, truthful, sincere anchor of our heart that we know this: I'm right with the living God. I can have peace, I can have fearlessness because the one that I should dread is the one who's become my advocate, my Father. Hebrews Chapter 10 verse 19, let's start there. "Brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places," and you know the imagery here. Right? I'm going to enter into a relationship with God. I'm going to have closeness with God. I'm going to have acceptance with God. And I didn't do that because I pulled myself up by my bootstraps and tried to be good and God now accepts me because I'm getting a B+ instead of a C-. No. I get complete acceptance by the death of Christ, "the blood of Jesus." He died, took on the penalty of my sin, and now I know I have access to God. I have a confident relationship with God. Long distance though it may feel, I have relationship with God.

"And now by this new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh." Now, remember that temple curtain ripped and that temple curtain that ripped was a picture of the destruction of the temple system, of course, of Old Testament worship, the Mosaic law, but it also showed this access that was opened. The Bible says what really is, poetically speaking, was Christ's body being broken, Christ's body being punished and tortured so that I wouldn't have to be. It says this, "And since we have a great high priest..." it's not just that he died for me, it's that right now he's an advocate. If anyone sins we have an advocate with the Father. Jesus Christ the righteous, he is standing before the Father saying Mike Fabarez is acceptable before you, the Holy Father and creator of the universe. The Bible says he is there like a high priest representing me before God because I'm part of "the household of God.

Then I can," verse 22, "draw near with a true heart, a sincere heart," and here's a great phrase, you want to talk about no anxiety, no worry, "with full assurance of faith," confidence. I trust it. I trust him. "With our hearts," now I know this, "sprinkled clean from an evil conscience," God has cleansed me, "and our bodies washed with pure water." That picture of the Old Testament and the old Jewish practice of the ablutions and the washings, all of that was a symbolic picture of the new covenant where my heart would be clean. It would be sprinkled clean. I'm no longer guilty before God.

"Let us then," verse 23, "hold fast," hold tight, grip hard, "to the confession of our hope without any wavering." I'm good with God. My creator and I are at peace because "he who

promised is faithful." And I love the way this goes now, verse 24, just a practical extension of this. Hey, this is true for all of us as Christians. "Let us consider," as Christians, "how to stir one another up to love and good works." We need to grow in this. We need to love God more, we need to love each other more. "Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another," strengthening one another, "and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

That's a great segue to where we go next in our psalm. An absolute, resolute confidence that God is for David, that God is the provider for David, that God is one who cares for David. I can enter into that with even more clarity of thought than David ever could because I know, looking back on Christ, how clearly God has shown and demonstrated his care for me, and ultimately I'm saying that's great.

And the next thing that happens in verse number 4, it's printed on your worksheet, go back to Psalm 27. We start to have some things that we just read about in verses 24 and 25 of Hebrews 10. What is that? We have now a picture of corporate worship. Follow this now. Verses 4 through 6, Psalm 27. "One thing I've asked of Yahweh, that I will seek after..." What is that? That I may worship. No. It is about worship, I get that, but that's not what he says, "that I may dwell in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life." Now some people read that say, "Well, I want to be in connection with God." Well, that's true but this is more than that. Specifically, look at between verses 4 and 6 how clearly this is a picture of what goes on in that Araunah, that rock, that Temple Mount, that place where Solomon will build the temple, where the Ark was brought under the tent there, I want to dwell there, I want to be there. Who's there? All the people who have come to worship. "That I may dwell in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of Yahweh."

I mean, which is something that only the high priests could do, he recognized that, but the whole picture of worship, all the symbols of worship, were for David a reminder of God's acceptance of him through the sacrificial symbolic sacrificial system, he realized, I want to go and I want to seek God, I want to "inquire of God in his temple," which again, that may seem anachronistic because Solomon was going to build the temple with stones and columns, but clearly any place where your deity was, any place you came to worship, was called a temple, it was a temple, it was with a tent, I understand that. But he wanted to be there to worship God.

"For he will hide me in his shelter," which is a reference that usually represented that tabernacle, "in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock." Certainly it was on a rock as we saw on Zachariah 14 last week where God is going to exalt that at the end of time, geographically, it will be the one high hill in that millennium kingdom. He says, "And now," verse 6, "my head shall be lifted above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; and I will sing and make melody to the Lord."

Now, I'm not going to minimize that this is a focus on worship. I get that. But David was good at worshipping and he didn't need the temple to do it. He didn't need the tabernacle to do it. He didn't need the Temple Mount to do it. He didn't even need the Ark of the Covenant to do it. Many of these psalms, I'm sure, were birthed out in the Bethlehem fields as he watched over the flocks that he was tending to of his father. I mean, he knew what it was to sit on a rock and encounter God in worship and in song and in prayer. He knew what it was to recite the Torah



and the Law of Moses in his mind and be refreshed by that. This is about something else. This is about the corporate experience of worship that took place. We see this as a paradigm throughout the Bible and that is if we want to eschew, if we want to mitigate, if we want to eradicate the fear and anxiety in our lives, yes, it's about affirming this constant refrain that God cares for me. But then it's saying, you know what, I need to be with God's people. I need this full assurance of faith to be expressed through the fact that I'm not neglecting the assembling of ourselves together.

Now some neglect it, but you shouldn't do it. We ought to be encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching. I put it this way. Number two, you and I as followers of Christ, if you are a follower of Christ, we need to face our fears together. Number two on your outline, "Face Your Fears Together." And I don't mean that just with your neighbors on your cul-de-sac, I'm not talking about Toastmasters or the Rotary Club, I'm talking about a place where Christians gather together to worship, study the Word, pray together, seek the Lord together. That's where the strength comes to be able to live a fearless and bold confidence in Christ in a day where everyone's afraid of everything. We're saying, I know this, a practical step in this is to get together where people worship and seek the Lord and say that is where I'm finding my encouragement and my strength. Does it come from God? Yes. It's mediated though in many ways, that strength, through meeting together with the people of God.

If you're unconvinced let me show you from Psalm 42, we're not far from it. Psalm 42. I just want to show you this equation, this paradigm, this model, this pattern in Scripture. Psalm 42, look at verses 3 and 4. Psalm 42:3. "My tears have been my food day and night." That sounds like you're having a bad week. Yes, he is. "While they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" Now, he's made to wait for God's deliverance as we saw at the end of our psalm. So they're sitting here saying, "Where's your God?" Right? You're losing. This isn't good. You're running around like a fugitive. "These things I remember as I pour out my soul:" So he's praying. Okay? The colon, though, is pointing forward. So what are you remembering? I'm not just remembering my tears, that's easy to remember because I'm feeling that right now, but I'm trying to get out of this quagmire of anxiety and fear and frustration. Right? How do I do it?

Here it comes: "How I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts," there it is again, "glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival." There's no time when the worship center was more crowded than at the pilgrimages, the festivals. I mean, it's like Easter today. It was worse than that. I mean, people would come and camp out and, depending what the festival was, it could be Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. I mean, people were camping around the worship center. Maybe it was the Passover, people coming from all over ancient Israel to come, and so that was the most crowded time, "a multitude keeping festival." And he says, that's what I think about. What I think about when I'm down and my tears are my food day and night, I think about the people of God and gathering with the people of God. That is such a biblical pattern. And Satan is so good at making you think that when you're worried or you're anxious or you're having a hard time, going through a hard trial, Satan would love to move you away from the means by which God brings his greatest encouragement, and that is being with the people of God.

I don't know how many times I'll run into someone and I'll say, "Man, I haven't seen you at church for a long time." And they say, "Yeah, I've been going through a hard time." I'm thinking, "Dah, that's the time you should be drawing nearer to God." I don't say that out loud, but I'm thinking, "You ought to be drawing near to God. You need to be back in your small group. You need to be back in your sub-congregation." We need to be back here in the church. I get heat, criticism, from folks because our church is so active. I get people saying, "Well, too many nights out," and "You got too many things going on," and "I feel guilty I'm not coming to everything," and "You know, we need more family time," and "You know, I don't like my kids going to bed too late," and "There's too much is going on."

Listen, I'm not going to apologize for having a church campus that is active every night of the week. I'm not at all. Right? This is where we need to be. I had a Christian say to me, by the way, going through a tremendously difficult time. If anyone should be anxious and worry and fearful, it was this Christian, who said to me, it was a perfect summation of what I'm trying to say in this second point. He said, "When I step onto this campus it's like I'm flooded," I wrote it down, "with comfort and assurance." Right? I mean, this is my happy place. I mean, that to me is exactly what the body of Christ should be. And if we know the forecast as the day approaches, which is like birth pangs, it gets worse and worse and worse. There'll be wars and rumors of wars, persecution is going to ramp up, that the love of many will grow cold. All of this is going to be the forecast before Christ comes back and the Bible says, "Hey, meet together, don't forsake the assembling together, encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching."

The early church started with a bang with thousands of people on the very Temple Mount, on the rock where that tent was erected when David was writing this psalm. Right? They were meeting there in the thousands and it says meeting daily in the temple courts. I mean, I don't apologize for having a busy church calendar. Right? If you can't make it to everything, you can't make it to everything. I get that, I understand that. But we ought to be gathering together all the more as we see the day approaching. If you see fear and anxiety gripping your heart you need the body of Christ more now than ever before, you need to be a part of this.

I talked about Paul in the midst of his pain recognizing that Satan was the one who likes to keep Christians apart. I think of one of Paul's prison epistles when he's writing to the Philippians in Chapter 1. We read some great things about him having confidence, even in the face of death and execution by the Romans. But he says there in Philippians Chapter 1, "I want to be with the people of God." Listen to the words here, verse 7, "It is right for me to feel this way about you," talking to the Philippians, "because I hold you in my heart." Why? "Because you're all partakers with me of grace." We all have this acceptance before the Father as Christians. "Both in my imprisonment," you're partakers there in a sense that you're with me here in spirit, you're praying for me, "and the defense and confirmation of the gospel," which is why I'm in prison, for preaching the gospel. "For God is my witness, how I yearn for all of you," I want to be with you, "with the affection of Christ Jesus." See, Christians who are going through hard times and are tempted to be fearful, that should be the godly response. I want to be with the people of God.

One quick passage on this I should make you look at this one, First Thessalonians Chapter 2, call this passage up real quick. First Thessalonians Chapter 2. Let's start in verse 17. Here is a great picture that reminds us not only is it Satan's strategy to get you away from the people of

God and assembling when it's time for you to have that strength that is derived, that serendipitous kind of strengthening that happens, that synergistic power that comes from meeting together as Christians. But it shows us again how Paul wanted nothing more than to be with people, not through streaming and not through apps and not through texting, but through face-to-face contact.

Look at verse 17 First Thessalonians Chapter 2, "But since we were torn away from you," and if you know your history in the book of Acts, which we plan to study here soon, you'll understand that Paul was torn away from them, in part because Satan was mobilizing critics of Paul and ran him out of town from Thessalonica. And so he loved these people, he was with these people, but now he couldn't be with them. And he says, "Brothers, I was torn away from you for a short time," because he was going to get back to them, "in person," maybe physically apart, "but not in heart." Man, I wanted to be with you. "We endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you," here it is, "face-to-face." I want to get with you. "Because we wanted to come to you -- I, Paul, again, and again," now here's Satan's strategy, "but Satan hindered us." And there was a lot of hindrances to Paul getting back to the Thessalonians.

Why? Why was that such a big thing? Why would Satan want you apart? Why is that you need to be with these folks? "For what is our hope or joy or crown..." It's the crowning part of my ministry is people. Right? "My crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?" Rhetorical answer: Yes, of course it is, "For you are our glory and joy." You want more joy, you want more strength, want more glory in terms of your Christian life to kind of squeeze to the perimeter and maybe eradicate completely the kind of anxiety that grips our non-Christian counterparts? You need more time with the people of God.

I don't want to diminish at all the fact that this is focused on worship in verses 4 through 6. Right? This is not about getting together just for another game night or for playing cards or playing video games. This is not what this is about. It's about us getting together, studying the Word of God, praying together, supporting each other and sharing prayer requests, worshipping together, that's the thing that we need when it comes to the fears of our lives. Maybe we feel like an army is encamped against us, war is rising against us. Let's get together. Fellowship will alleviate, mitigate, the fear and anxiety in our lives. Drawing nearer to God will certainly do much to alleviate your anxiety.

But let me just, if I can, before I leave this section of the psalm, underscore one thing in verse 6. He says, "Now my head will be lifted above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent," here's a word, "sacrifices with shouts of joy." I'd be remiss as a pastor and a counselor if I didn't just at least say this. If you're saying, "Great, check. I need more of this, I need less anxiety, I need to be with the people of God more," and so you pull into the parking lot, you pull into the driveway of your small group and you start saying, "Okay God, minister to me. Let these people be a blessing to me, let them encourage me, let them bolster my faith, let them strengthen me." You can pray those things, there's nothing wrong with that.

But I love the fact that when David goes there he's thinking about what he's going to bring as a sacrifice. I'm just saying this and it's just good counsel. We see it throughout the Scripture. You're dealing with things, you're struggling with things, emotionally you're being tossed around in your life. One of the greatest things you can do, not only draw together to worship God, not only focus on fellowship together as Christians, but to come and pray before you get

out of your car, "God, how can I be a blessing to them? How can I bolster their faith? How can I encourage them? How can I lift them up?".

I mean, sacrifices, even if I want to make the parallel here, you brought sacrifices of grain and food and fruit and animals, which provided for the Levites. They didn't have fields, they didn't own property. I mean, you provided for them. There was a real sense, practically speaking, that your sacrifice that you brought was for the good of other people. Of course it was given to God, dedicated to God, but you're ministering to people, you're meeting needs through your sacrifices. I'm not going to talk about the offering bag but I mean that clearly is something that would be an obvious application. I'm talking about you getting out of your car, heading into these meetings, saying "I need to do this more and more as I see the day approaching, but I want to go into those even when I'm hurting and saying, "God, use me to help and bless and encourage other people.".

Few things will do more than adjusting and calibrating my heart than when I go to do what Jesus came to do and that is to serve and not be served. You'll be served in the process, I assure you. But let's face our fears together. Let's recognize that the answer so often throughout the Scripture is making sure that we are not neglecting our time together.

Versus 7 through 14. Notice the pronoun shifts that take place from this point on. Now, you've had throughout this, look back up, you've had a third-person address about God. In other words, the Lord is this, the Lord is that. You see in verse 5, the pronoun, third person pronouns, "He," I'm talking to you about God, that's third person. Right? First person - "me," second person - "you," third person - "God." I'm talking about the Lord. But now all of a sudden in verse 7 we shift to second person pronouns. Right? Verse 7. "Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud." So I am now talking to you. "Be gracious to me," he's directly addressing God, "answer me." Now get the pronoun second person, verse 8. "You have said, 'Seek my face.'" "My heart says to you, 'Your face, Lord, I do seek.'".

So now all the sudden we've gone from talking about God and declaring my confidence in God and talking about worshipping together with God's people, now I'm talking to God. This is a section, verses 7 through 14, that's all about prayer. There's an interpolation of a couple of third person descriptions of God, but the primary focus on this, save verse 14 and one other statement, these are all second person addresses, these are all prayerful things. This is a lot of material, verses 7 through 14, about how to pray.

And because there's a lot of material here that specifies different ways to pray, I'd like to put it this way as we build a set of sub-points here. Let's put it this way. Number three, you need to "Pray Very Specifically." You want to alleviate, minimize the fear and anxiety in your life? Well, it's a very simple paradigm, I quoted it at the outset, that we are to be anxious about nothing. Right? Be anxious for nothing. Or as the English Standard Version translates it. "Do not be anxious for anything." You know the rest of the verse Sunday school grads? Right? "But with everything, everything with prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." You want to know what the doctor is going to prescribe when it comes to anxiety? The first thing on the prescription is this: you got to pray. You have to pray. The way it's put in Philippians 4 verses 6 and 7 is so powerful. You got to "let your request be known to God." Pray, pray, pray. You've got to pray. Verse 7 is certainly calling us to that at



least by way of example. Here's David: "Hear, O Yahweh, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me."

Now we're going to get a bunch of things here, verses 8 through 14, that we can itemize. We'll pick these out and put these in categories. Let me give you five sub-points here as we close this. Five things we see that we can pray for, should pray for, ought to pray for, that David is praying for here that I think will help a lot, because the answer is prayer. Right? That's the number one thing. I recognize this, I'm going to pray. But what do I find in verse 8? Fundamental really relates to the first point. "You have said," God has said, "Seek my face." That's an overriding, underlying assumption of the Old Testament. "Seek me, follow me, come to know me, get to know me, love me with all your heart, soul, strength and mind." Well, here is my resolve: "Your face, Yahweh, do I seek." I am committed to knowing you. I'm committed to bringing you close. I'm committed to me drawing nearer to you.

If you're building sub-points here's Letter "A." Ready? We need to "Pray to Know God Better." Pray to know God better. When I look at the Scripture and I know that there are problems, I need to know this: God who promises is faithful. I need to understand even what we talked about in the first three verses, if I'm going to understand that the Lord is my light and my salvation, if he is my stronghold, how am I going to learn about all that? How am I going to even know? If I'm going to cast my anxieties on God, First Peter Chapter 5, I need to learn what it means that he cares for me. I need to draw near to God by learning about this God, understanding this God.

Now, again, I've already mentioned three things that are the staples of the Christian life. I know we always want something new-fangled. Right? Give me a quick way to figure this out so I can have this all now. The staples of the Christian life, the kinds of sermons that were preached, if you had Christian grandparents, to your Christian grandparents, you may feel like Mike's stuck in a time warp because he's preaching those same things. They're too simple, we need more complicated answers. I mean, here are the staples of the Christian life. You need more Bible study, you need more prayer, you need more fellowship. And we've already covered those.

But to draw near to God to know God better, that's how it's going to happen. I'm going to study the book that he wrote about himself, all this self-revelation, I need to know that. I need to relate to that and relate to that God by praying, and I need to get with God's people. That's where the knowledge is, that's where the experience and understanding of God is. If I'm going to draw near to God I need those three things. And it's like health, good health. Right? I mean, we read 300-page books on how to get healthy. I could write a pamphlet, a page, a paragraph, a memo, three bullet points. You've got to eat right. You got to sleep well. You've got to exercise. No one wants to buy that bestselling health book because it's too hard. I'll read 300-pages to figure out an easier way around that.

And so it is for the Christian life. We want to grow in obedience, we want to grow in closeness with God. You want to see fear and anxiety eradicated from your Christian life? Right? You need more Bible, and you need more prayer time, you need more fellowship with God's people. I hope that's the first thing some Christian said to you when you got saved. Am I right? I hope they said to you, "OK, now you're a Christian." "What do I do?" "Read the Bible, pray, go to church." I mean, it may be boring to you but it is the answer, as hard as it may be, and I

guarantee you because Satan knows that is the answer, those are the means by which God gives to us what we need in the Christian life, Satan's going to make those seem boring, he is going to make those seem hard, he's going to make those things be things to you that you're going to come up with a million reasons and excuses not to do them. But that's what you need. You need more time in the Word. And you're thinking, "No, it has got to be something more complicated than that. I read three chapters and prayed ten prayers and call me in the morning." Listen. That is the answer. Are there other things in the Christian life? Sure. But that is the staple.

Verse 8, "'Seek my face,' my heart says to you Lord, 'Your face I will seek.'" Drop down of verse 11. I mean that's the other part of it. "Teach me your way, O Lord." How am I going to learn that? I'm going to learn it in the Word. "Lead me on a level path." I'm going to know how that path looks when I get with other Christians. This is about prayer. It's prayer, Bible study, fellowship. These are the fundamentals. How are you doing in those things before you yawn through that? How are you doing? I mean, all of us, I hope, can see that we need more information about God, we need God to teach us his way, we need more time in the Word. How was your time in the Word this week? I mean, hopefully you know that we need more prayer and most of us realize it's so easy to neglect that. Even the Apostles, the inner circle. Right? I mean the top three guys in the apostolic band couldn't even pray with Jesus in his hour of need for an hour. I mean these are things that Satan, as Chrysostom said, Satan presses hard against this when we start praying, really praying well. He knows.

Fellowship. Maybe there's more that you should be involved in. This church. It is not about me trying to have a full campus. I mean, this is about us having what God wants to deliver through the means by which he's established in his Word. I'm going to pray to know God better and I know what that means in terms of Bible study, prayer, fellowship, learning his ways, seeking his face.

But move on to verse 9 now. Here's the second thing. "Hide not your face from me." That's an interesting thing to say. "Turn not your servant away in anger. O you have been my help." You've been kind in the past even when I thought you might be angry with me. "Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!" Well, David seemed to have a little pang of guilt here all the sudden. Do you know why David felt guilty from time to time? Because he was guilty. That's why he felt guilty. And it seems like this is kind of a guilty thing to say. "Like, wow. You sound like you don't deserve any of this." Well that's right, he doesn't. And all I'm saying is you may be hearing part of this sermons and say well, "I seeking God or having him bring peace. I don't feel like I deserve any of that." Well now you got it. You don't deserve any of that.

And sometimes it's your sin that surfaces when you try to seek God and you recognize I don't deserve to have God's favor, I don't deserve to have God's blessing, I don't deserve to have God get me through this next battle when everyone's surrounding me and wanting to "eat up my flesh" as it says in verse 2. Well, I know you don't deserve it. Matter of fact, this prayer, I mean, the assumption of that prayer in verse 9 is that David knows that he's a sinner, that he's coming with a penitent, confessional kind of faith saying, "God, I know that I've blown it." Jesus teaches on prayer and he says, "Forgive us our transgressions as we forgive those who have transgressed against us." I mean, that is a fundamental part of our prayer life. Don't neglect it.

Letter "B." "Pray for the Forgiveness of Sins." Pray confessions about your sin. Pray with a penitence that you know that you don't deserve any of this. You need to be praying that you'll see God better. You know the practical steps and the outworkings of that. You need to pray that you would see your sin clearly. There's some kind of peace even gathered by confessing our sin, isn't there? I mean, we don't even just have to look at the promise that, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness," although that is comforting. There is even a sense when God points out our sin, as Hebrews 12 says, that I start seeing that there is some comfort in knowing that he's my Father and I'm his son and what son is there without discipline. And I realize that even the discipline of him pointing out my sin leads me to that contrition and that confessional prayer and I realize, man, God loves me. God's spirit of grace and glory rests upon me. God's power rests upon me.

I don't want to stretch too far but if you think about the, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I'll fear no evil for you are with me." Do you know the next line? "For your rod and your staff, they comfort me." I preached on this before and I know the big stick, the crook on top of it, you see that staff often used as a defensive weapon if the wolves are coming on the flock, the shepherd would protect the flock with that. But there is also the first word "rod" which again is like a, you know, something you put in your belt if you are a shepherd. It was a smaller stick, a shebet in Hebrew, and the shebet, if you've been around here in any parenting classes, you know the shebet. We talked about the shebet as it speaks in Scripture about that being used as a tool of discipline on our children.

And so it was for the shepherd. If you had a wayward sheep you would take that shebet and you'd rap that sheep on the nose, on the schnoz, and he would recoil in pain and get back on the path. You'd poke and prod with the shebet. There's even something about the comfort that is brought through a God who corrects our errors, points out our sin, surfaces our guilt, even as we pray that we know we're not worthy, that we say to him as David did in Psalm 32 and Psalm 51, "Just don't abandon me in this. I know I don't deserve it. I'm going to confess my sin."

Verse 9 is a good reminder of that. There's comfort in being reminded, even in our praying, that God is a God who is holy and that we're not. It drives us back to the grace of God that we have forgiveness and acceptance in Christ. Pray specifically to know God better, pray specifically the confession of your sins.

Thirdly, verse 10. Note carefully the third thing we can be praying about. "My father and mother have forsaken me, but the Lord 'might' take me in." Underline the word "might." Highlight that actually. Do you see it there? Is that what it says? How about verse 13? "I think that 'maybe' I should look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Do you see the word "maybe" there? Help me now. I said this in another service and someone came up to me and kind of said, "You said, 'maybe the Lord...'" No. Pay attention now. I'm being sarcastic. Okay. I'm trying to get you to correct me and say, "Pastor Mike, that's not what it says." "For my father and mother have forsaken me, but the Lord WILL take me in." Verse 13, "I BELIEVE," that's an affirmation, a confident affirmation, "that I shall look upon the goodness of Yahweh in the land of the living." I know you're good. I know you care. I trust you. That's a good thing to be praying.

Letter "C." "Pray to Affirm Your Confidence in God." What a great way to pray. Pray to affirm your confidence in God. Confidence that he cares, confidence that he's faithful to his promises. I mean how often, and this convicted me when I prepared this sermon this week, I said how often do I pray to God and just dump my problems on him. And that's good. Pour out your heart before the Lord. God says "Ask of me." I get that. Good thing. But what I need to incorporate more into my prayer life, and maybe you do too, are those statements of affirmation. God, I know that you are good. God, I know that you work "together all things, all things together, for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose." I know your good plan, I know your good promise, I know you will not leave me, I know you will not forsake me, saying those things to God, affirming your confidence in God. It's an act of worship.

We're affirming and ascribing to God the things that are true. It's a good incorporation of an element in our prayer life that we desperately need. Guess what happens when I start affirming my confidence in God. I start feeling less anxious. I start to push to the edges of my heart and my life and my mind all these things that make me worry. Pray to know God better. Nothing will eradicate fear more than that. Pray for the forgiveness of sins. What a great thing it is to confess our sins and know that God forgives us, to affirm my confidence that he will take me in and that he will chase me down with goodness and mercy.

And then verse 12, which reiterates what we see in what I tried to label this whole section. He gets very specific, "Give me not up to the will of my adversaries." And he thinks now, you can imagine, he's picturing the guys and their beards and their mouths and their teeth. These "false witnesses have risen against me, they breathe out violence." He's picturing them, he's speaking of them, he's talking about those specific things. I would put it this way, Letter "D." "You Need to Pray Asking Specifically," ask very specifically of God what you want. It's good for your marriage. It's good for your relationship with God. State your desires clearly. Don't be anxious for anything. "But with everything with prayer and petition," very specifically, "your requests with thanksgiving." Right? There's the affirmation of God, of your confidence in God. "Let your request be made known to God."

Nothing better than coming to God in my prayer life, after I confess my sin, after I want to draw near to God, after I state my confidence in God, to say, "God, now here's the problem. I want to be very specific about it." You know what happens to me when I start to get specific in my prayer requests about the problems that I face with the things that make me afraid or worried or anxious? I start to see how they sound, sometimes. I journal a lot of my personal requests and I start to write out these problems and sometimes I sit there and I have to go back and erase what I just wrote, "No, no, that's not it." Sometimes I say, "Well that sounds silly in light of everything I said about how great you are and how good you are and how faithful you are in your promises."

I mean, it starts to adjust my heart and my life and my ideas. Sometimes that's exactly what I state and I realize, God, this is what you need to do. This is my request and I want to make it known. But a lot of times it adjusts my will, it adjusts my praying. Get very, very, very, very specific in the requests that you bring to God and watch if that doesn't shape your will. And isn't that what prayer's about. You believe in the sovereignty of God. Right? You believe that God is a God who is not sitting there going, "Oops, I didn't know that. Let me quick get down

there and fix that problem for you now that you've prayed." God is trying to align our will with his. I mean, God is trying to get us in prayer, and very specific prayer requests sometimes help me kind of adjust and hone and sharpen what I'm asking for. And often God changes my heart even in what I'm seeking. Just like Paul, it may be that I pray for something, I say I want this to go away, God says no, and I get very clear thoughts about, "OK, I get this now. Your grace, your favor, your acceptance, your presence, is sufficient for me. I get why you're doing this." Get specific with your requests.

And lastly, the summation of the whole psalm, verse 14. Right? Because we've covered verse 13. Here's verse 14, "Wait for Yahweh; be strong, let your heart take courage; wait for Yahweh." None of this comes right away. Not a bad thing to pray for. I put it this way, Letter "E" is that "E?" One, two, three, four, five. Pray for patience and endurance. Pray for endurance, pray for perseverance, pray that God will make you a more patient Christian. I mean the picture throughout the Bible is if you want to relate to God know this: God is not a God who works on your timetable. It is time for you to recognize faith, expressions of confidence, specific requests, you have to wait.

I tried to paint the picture of David's life. It took decades for God to respond the way that David thought God should. It's that God is working out a plan even in the trials that we face in not taking away the pains in this life. God is accomplishing his purpose. And think about that, in James Chapter 1, the testing of my faith, it brings perseverance. Sometimes the whole point of the unanswered prayer, at least in my book, is that God is trying to build in me the kind of endurance that he wants me to have to face some kind of service or some kind of evangelism or some kind of benefit to the people around me by building that steadfastness in my spirit.

I pray that God would make you a patient and enduring kind of Christian. James ends that way, it starts that way, with the testing of my faith. It ends talking about Job's endurance and his patience. That's what we need, a lot more of that. Pray specifically. Be confident in God's care and let's do this all together. Christianity is a corporate experience for us as Christians even though we personally all relate to God one-on-one.

I didn't allow my boys to play many video games. I mean, I let them have a console but I policed very carefully the kinds of games that they were able to play, which oftentimes reduced them down for all the weird stuff that's out there to a lot of these sporting games. They had the Madden football and the FIFA soccer and all that kind of stuff. They got real good at it, as these kids do, really fast. I limited the time that they played and all the rest, but occasionally they had someone over to the house and there would be an odd number and so some kid is sitting there on a couch and the console is up and, you know, I am sure it was a reluctant request but occasionally my kids would say, "Dad, we need a fourth. Come on. Can you join us?" Which is like, "OK, I feel bad for whoever you pair me up with. But if you need two-on-two give me the controller," we'd sit down there and start on the game.

Now here's the thing, I've taught my kids from the beginning, you take your job seriously, whatever it is you're doing do it hardily with all your might. So, of course, whether it's a little league or soccer or even this video game, do a good job, work at it, be focused, be a diligent participant. I mean, fight to win, do the stuff that you ought to do. And so I sit down trying to practice what I preach, even though I was very lame at these games, trying to be a good, you know, whatever the game was.



Now, I was a little embarrassed, of course, as my kids were embarrassed for me with their friends, but I did my best. And I worked hard. And while I was a little bit concerned about how this all turned out, I realize this: it's just a game. I realized that. Especially if the friends were over with the kids I know there were other things that were going to happen. This console is about to be turned off, the screen is going to go dark, and we're going to go cook hamburgers or we're going to watch a movie, we're going to something fun. That's real life. The video game is just a virtual life.

I'm not in any way minimizing whatever it is that we face that causes us fear and trepidation and anxiety. But I do need to let you know 100 years from now the monitor is not going to be on for any of us here. This life is temporal, it's passing. The things you see, they are ephemeral. They're not going to be here. But the things you do not see, the kingdom of God, it is eternal. What God is getting us ready for is eternity, to have us march through the gates of the kingdom saying, "Come, you blessed of my father, into a kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And he wants to reward us based on how we played this game, how we did these things. And while there are lots of things on that screen that can make us afraid, we've got to keep this all-in perspective. God cares for us. The reality goes way beyond this life. "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Now, when you're walking through the valley of the shadow of death, it's very important you keep that in mind. Keep this all-in perspective.

As verse 13 says, "Know that we shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!" And that goes beyond winning our next battle. There are bigger things involved than just whether or not God checks off the list, all the temporal things on your prayer list. The Lord is the light and salvation, I hope, of everyone in this room who names the name of Christ. He is your stronghold. Who are you going to fear, who are going to be afraid of? I hope we can be fearless Christians. We will certainly be distinctive in our world if we are.

Let's pray. God, help us bolster our strength and our confidence in you. Let us realize the kind of trepidation, anxiety and fear that the world expresses. I mean, that's just part and parcel of what it is to be separated from you. "The wicked flee when no one pursues them." They're very jumpy. "But the righteous are as bold as a lion." Let that be true of us. Let every one who hears this prayer right now, God instill in them a confidence that is not based on their own performance, not based on how much they saved in their bank account, not based on how smart they think they are. It's based on the fact that while some trust in horses and chariots, some trust in bank accounts, some trust in insurance policies or physicians. We trust in the name of the Lord. We know that you've got a bigger plan than all of the things we struggle with in this life. Let us take every one of those battles seriously. Let us trust you for a win. Right now on this virtual screen that we call life, but God let us know there's something much bigger waiting for us.

Let us know we want to please you and hear "Well done, good and faithful servant." That'll be great when this temporal life is over. We're going to make sure there's nothing that causes us the kind of fear, the kind of anxiety, that grips so many, because we have you. Let us be free from all of those things knowing that you are our helper, you'll never leave us, you'll never forsake us. We claim that promise and we state our confidence afresh in you today.



In Jesus name, Amen.