

Don't neglect your devotional life this summer

Psalm 27:1-14

David C. Dixon

Introduction: Empty spaces always fill up with something, because “Nature abhors a vacuum ...” (George Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950). In our inner being there are many “spaces” – the brain actually is a kind of cartographer, mapping our internal and external worlds, but even on a map there seem to be lots of empty spaces. The “empty spaces” in our soul were all meant for God, so that we can have communion with Him in every dimension of life: *“you desire truth in the inmost being”* (Ps. 51:6). And when truth fills our inner being, our way of thinking and relating, the Lord can then teach us how to have the right kind of communion: **with ourselves** (healthy self-talk, inner dialogue, not fears and worries, but confidence in the Lord); **with others** (not thinking ill, but giving the benefit of doubt; practicing love, peace, right relationships); **with our world** (good stewardship instead of idolatry, not obsessed with things, material or virtual). But what do we *usually* fill those inner spaces with? Entertainment, pleasures, Internet, gaming, fears, obsessions, pastimes, addictions, things. What *should* we fill those inner spaces with? Truth (Ps. 51:6), God's Word (Col. 3:16), prayer (Eph. 6:18), the Lord Himself (1 Pet. 3:15), the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:18); spiritual wisdom, faith, grace, power (Acts 6:3-8). In fact, Scripture warns us about the dangers that are always stalking our prayer life: we don't *know* how to pray as we ought (Rom. 8:26); without the Holy Spirit's help, we babble like pagans, trying to twist God's arm with our arguments about why He should do what we request (Mt. 6:7); we tend to pray selfishly (Jas. 4:2-3); when it's most urgent that we pray, we tend to fall asleep! (Mk. 14:37-38).

So why should summer break be a time of laziness and indiscipline? Do we honestly want a “vacation from the Lord”? I believe the Lord wants us to take full advantage of summer's different pace by digging deeper into His Word and our relationship with Him. What Old Testament book did Jesus quote from the most in the NT? The Psalms! So they even help us to get to know Him better! And who wrote more psalms than anyone else? Scripture attributes some 75 psalms to King David (though scholars suspect 14 more as being by him). Yet he wasn't born a king, but rather the youngest of eight brothers and two sisters (imagine those family dynamics!). Besides being the youngest in such a large family, he was given the task of looking after the family's sheep, probably from a young age (and he took it very seriously!). Remember the occasion of his anointing as king – when Samuel the prophet was ready to anoint one of his older brothers, impressive young men of valor and strength – but God said no! We humans tend to judge things and people by their outward appearance, but God looks on the heart! In fact, it was as David cared for those sheep that he first began to learn to know the God of Israel and put his trust in the One who was caring for Him (young people, lonely hours are not just to throw away on internet!). David was apparently a very poetic soul and probably at an early stage of life began writing his prayer-poems to the Lord, expressing a tremendous variety of emotions and great spiritual sensitivity. But you don't have to be a poetic soul to appreciate his writing (he was inspired by the Holy Spirit). You just need your spiritual hunger, confession of spiritual poverty, and a

prayer to the Holy Spirit that He'll open your eyes and heart to assimilate the deep lessons. We can develop our emotional intelligence through deep reading and studying of the Psalms! My habit for years has been at least one a day.

1) In Psalm 27, David's meditation shows us the depth of his faith and his ardent seeking of the Lord that are truly exemplary for us. In vv. 1-3, we see the basis and extent of his confidence in the Lord, who represented a threefold cord to him: his light, salvation, and stronghold. Notice what a **deep relationship** David had with the Lord, simply based on God's revelation through the history of Israel, the Law, and the prophet Samuel. Yet the revelation we have is so much fuller! Jesus tells us He Himself is the Light of the world, and if we follow Him, we'll never walk in darkness (Jn. 8:12), and that we should believe in the Light while we have it, so that we can become sons and daughters of the light (Jn. 12:36). So Jesus doesn't just *give* us light – He *is* the light itself! – and as we saw last Sunday, **He makes us shine** with *His* light! This means He doesn't just *give* us salvation – He Himself *IS* our salvation! In the Gospel, it's like Jesus is standing at the door of our lives knocking and He says, ***“Anyone who hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and we'll have fellowship!”*** So to have Him living and reigning in my life as Savior and Lord, i.e., for me to live under His rule, *that* is salvation, because He saves me from living under my own rule – which is nothing but disaster! So He becomes my stronghold as well, literally my place of refuge, no matter what's going on around me.

The **result/application** of this strong faith is that I don't have to fear or be afraid – even if evildoers want to eat me alive! Though an army encamp against me, though war arise against me, my heart will not fear, I will be confident! And there is a **war going on**, isn't there? VBS kids this week have been quite exposed to this reality of the two kingdoms at battle – not against other humans (though sometimes we get tripped up there!). We have to keep in mind **where the real battle comes from!** In NYC last week, at a Gay Pride event, a woman made the mistake of carrying a sign in defense of biological femininity (“trans rights erase women”). She was insulted, threatened, bullied, her sign torn up, physically attacked. This was actually the annual NYC drag march; so what was more frightening was what the multitude was chanting: “We're here, we're queer, we're coming for your children!” (used for years at Pride events). As one commentator noted, we are living through an all-out war on parental authority (Mary Harrington, UK). Bible-believing Christians are labeled as one of the prime enemies of the LGBTQ+ movement, and we certainly do oppose it, but these **human beings are NOT the enemy**, and the church has to work hard to keep from giving that impression (***“We wrestle not against flesh and blood...”***). It's such a difficult balance to manifest clear love for sinners (***“of whom I am the worst,”*** claimed the apostle Paul!), but to maintain God's standard of truth regarding all forms of sin. But we have to recognize the seriousness of this battle: the radical activists in the US have done such a great job of **building an ally culture** that now this “persecuted minority” has on its side the entire US government (including the military-industrial complex and CIA), as well as the majority of the corporate class, the media, academia, law, medicine, and science. Most of the West, including the U.N., is falling in with the party line. Are we in a battle? Will we succumb to fearmongering? Jesus is our Stronghold in the midst of everything!

2) In vv. 4-6, David gives expression to his longing for God's presence; notice how he says it: ***“One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.”*** Do you recall other occasions when someone in the Bible focused on “one thing”? (Jesus in Lk. 10:42, Paul in Php. 3:13-14). David expressed this desire before the temple was built; so his reference to God' “house” might be to the tabernacle, but the Hebrew word *beth* can also mean household or family as well as dwelling place (this word is in parallel with “temple,” which can translate as palace, and also parallel with tabernacle, which basically means tent). So David's “one thing” which he asks of the Lord is essentially His presence, dwelling, and companionship, and this longing is for ***“all the days of my life”*** – a life commitment! It is so important, young people, for you to nail down life commitments at this formative stage of life! The set of the sail during this time of life

determines where you'll end up! Next is David's longing to **gaze upon the beauty** of the Lord; the Heb. *noam* can also be translated pleasantness, delightfulness, kindness. And David regularly uses the sacred name of Yahweh here, which he clearly treasures; he addresses God thirteen times through the psalm with that personal name. How we need to **become enamored** of that name and that beauty, convinced that it's better than life itself (like God's lovingkindness, Ps. 63:3).

The result of this longing brings David to two applications: **a)** In the day of trouble he'll be kept safe in the Lord's shelter (Heb. shelter or booth, like what they built in the feast of tabernacles), and in the hiding place of His tent; he'll be set high on a rock where the enemy can't reach him; **b)** Because of his deep sense of security in the Lord, David is moved to worship: sacrificing with shouts of joy, singing and making music to the Lord.

3) In vv. 7-12, David gives us insights into his vigorous and honest prayer life, opening his heart with both confessions and petitions. He begins the prayer session by pleading for grace and for a response from God. Then his heart recalls the Lord's command to His people: **"My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!'"** [plural]. He follows that up with his personal commitment: **"Your face, O Lord, will I seek."** This confession is his firm intention. But what does it mean **to seek the face of the Lord**? We can't literally see His face, so how do we go about this? We must go to His Word, and we ask His Spirit to give us a clear vision of who He is, to draw us into that deep reality, the mystery of God! It takes humility, recognizing your neediness, confessing your weakness and sin. That's why David continues in v. 9 with **"don't hide your face from me or turn me away – you've been my Helper – don't reject me, O God my Savior!"** He feels vulnerable and expresses his sense of unworthiness; this is a confession of total dependence. In v. 10, his confession turns to his father and mother, who may "forsake" him; the Hebrew word doesn't mean "abandon," but to take their leave, absent themselves. Parents represent a sense of home, family and security. But **"home" is never behind you** in some golden moment when everything seemed almost perfect. Home –that place we all long for– is never back where you came from – it always lies out in front of you! Though parents leave me, David says, the Lord will **"take me in"**; the Hebrew root means "gather, assemble," to put me back together! The Lord Jesus is the One who takes us in! That's what He was doing at the cross as He forgave and redeemed us – gathering us to Himself. In fact, Scripture is now where I feel most at home in the world – because it's what most nourishes the deep sense of hope, life's value, truth and grace, redemption, restoration! So take time to visit "home" this summer – your true home! The result of this prayer of honest confession is the best petition David could make: **"teach me your way, O Lord! Lead me on a level path."** Then he also acknowledges the adversaries that accuse and plague him, but he also hands them over in prayer to the Lord.

4) Finally, in vv. 13-14, he manifests his confident hope and his patience to wait on the Lord. V. 13 – notice how when you wait in patience, prayer and confession, as in this psalm, the Lord *will* strengthen your faith! David's confidence was not shaken by delays, because waiting on the Lord is not passive, but active! The Heb. root *qavah*, translated as wait, hope, look for, expect, actually means to collect, bind together, as multiple strands are bound into a rope. So confident waiting on the Lord is active waiting; it's about binding our hearts to the Lord! And there's no better way to bind your heart to Him than by seeing Him lifted up on that cross as His humanity was being crushed and shattered by our rebellion and brokenness, but His lovingkindness and mercy remained intact. He reigned there, waiting for you and me to wake up and realize our thirst for His love! So spend time this summer binding your heart to Him!!!