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“Can one psalm really change your life? It can if you dig deeply enough. *A Shelter in the Time of Storm* is Paul Tripp at his finest—excavating Psalm 27 with clarity, potency, and straight-to-the-heart relevance. When troubles come knocking, do yourself a favor: let this book teach you how to treasure no less than 52 life-transforming truths from this grace-filled psalm.”

—DAVE HARVEY, church care and church planting,
Sovereign Grace Ministries; author, *When Sinners Say
“I Do.”*

a SHELTER in the time
OF STORM

meditations on God and trouble

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PAUL DAVID TRIPP

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*Malcolm,
You have known me for many years,
yet you have remained my friend.
Thank you.*

A Shelter in the Time of Storm: Meditations on God and Trouble

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Introduction: Hope in God in a World That Is Broken

It was the call no parent ever wants to get. Our daughter had been walking down the street in Philadelphia when a drunk and unlicensed driver careened onto the sidewalk and crushed her against a wall. It was the beginning of many, many months of travail. (By God's grace she is doing very well now.)

There are many mysteries to this moment in our lives that we will never solve. Yet, there are a few things that we know for sure. We really do live in a fallen world. We haven't been given a ticket out of the brokenness of this world simply because we are the children of God. What happened to our daughter was a horrible injustice, followed by day upon day of remarkable pain. The world we live in simply is not operating the way God intended.

There is a second thing we know for sure. There is a God of awesome grace who meets his children in moments of darkness and difficulty. He is worth running to. He is worth waiting for. He brings rest when it seems like there is no rest to be found.

But there is a third thing. You and I were just not hardwired to make our way through this fallen world on our own. We were meant to exist with eyes filled with the beauty of his presence and hearts at rest in the lap of his goodness. This is what I love about the Psalms. They put difficulty and hope together in the tension of hardship and grace that is the life of everyone this side of eternity.

It is not hard to recognize the environment of the Psalms. The Psalms live in your city, on your street, in your family. The Psalms tell your story. It is a story of hope and disappointment, of need and provision, of fear and mystery, of struggle and rest, and of God's boundless love and amazing grace. People in the psalms get angry,

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grow afraid, cry out in confusion, survive opposition, hope for better days, hurt one another, help one another, run from God, trust in God, make foolish choices, ask for forgiveness, and grow wiser and stronger. They are people just like you and me.

Psalm 27 is a psalm of honesty and hope. Like real life, it is written between the tension of a life of trouble and a God of grace. It is a psalm of fear, but in it fear gives way to confidence. It is a psalm of danger, but it speaks with power and practicality of the safety that can be found in the Lord. In many ways it is a sad psalm, yet it is punctuated with songs of joy. It is a psalm of rejection, but it sings the acceptance of the Lord. It is a psalm of action, yet it finds its strength in waiting on the Lord. There are four things that draw me to this psalm.

1) *Its shock value.* David is writing about being under attack. The words are graphic and clear: “When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes. . . . Though an army encamp against me . . . though war arise against me. . . . For false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.”

These would be difficult circumstances for any of us, but think with me: if you were in the middle of them, what is the first thing you would pray for? What is the central thing you would desire? You almost can't help but be shocked by David's response. He doesn't crave vengeance. He doesn't cry out first for protection or justice. No, David's first thoughts run to the temple, where the Lord dwells. The first desire of his heart is to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. At first look, this response seems almost shockingly unnatural, that is, until you let Psalm 27 teach you about faith, safety, and the presence of the Lord.

2) *Its regularity.* For all of its seeming shock value, Psalm 27 gives an accurate and familiar picture of what normal life is like in a fallen world. A moment of high worship is followed by a situation of trouble. A moment of insight is followed by a moment of confusion. Rest is followed by threat. Call to action is followed by the need to wait. Confidence that God is near is followed by a desperate plea that he would hear and answer. These are the variegated colors of a world in need of restoration. These are the regular ups and downs, ins and outs, and highs and lows of living with the Lord in a place

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that is broken. When you read this psalm, you get the impression that David lived where we live.

3) *Its focus on Christ.* Underneath the psalm's accurate depiction of the here-and-there experiences of the world we all live in is a deeper theme. This theme is really the unifying theme of the psalm. It is the thing that gives this psalm of trouble and faith its hope. What is this theme? It is Christ. All of the fingers of this psalm point to Christ. Jesus came to earth, knowing the trouble he would face, but he was not afraid; he knew his Father would be his light and salvation. Jesus knew that his enemies would stumble and fall.

In the cross's most dramatic moment, it was Jesus who cried for his Father not to turn away in anger. It was Jesus who said he would not be alone, even though his father and mother would forsake him. Jesus faced the false witnesses who were intent on violence. Beneath everything else, this is a psalm of sin and redemption, and because of that, again and again it points us to the Redeemer who will come to suffer injustice, violence, and ultimately the rejection of his Father so that we might know forgiveness, acceptance, life, and hope.

4) *Its call to patient hope.* This is not a cynical, survivalist psalm. It does not have an "I've been taken once and it won't happen again" feel to it. For all of the trouble that courses its way through this psalm, it is in the end a psalm of bright and lasting hope. It doesn't call us to live self-protectively. It doesn't give us seven steps for avoiding the difficulties of the fallen world.

No, Psalm 27 tells that even in the middle of difficulties that we do not understand nor seem able to escape, we have reason to take heart and have hope. And the hope of Psalm 27 is not like the hope of a child who has just been promised ice cream in a few hours. The child *does* hope that the ice cream will actually materialize, and she believes it will because she believes that her parents really love her. But she will come back every five minutes to ask you if it's time for ice cream yet! The hope of Psalm 27 is patient, and it grows stronger as it waits, because it is rooted in a daily consideration of the goodness of the Lord.

This really does speak into the familiar realities of your life and mine with challenge and hope, with conviction and encouragement, and with honesty and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Let me say a little bit about the fifty-two meditations that you will be reading. You are not holding an exegetical commentary on Psalm 27. I have approached the psalm like a wood butcher. The wood butcher cuts into a log, looking for boards with a particularly interesting or elegant grain, and cuts them out like a meat butcher would do with a fine steak. Then he places them next to other boards of similar beauty and assembles them into a table, a chair, or a fine wooden box. He assembles the pieces intentionally to help others see their individual and collective beauty in a way they wouldn't without his eyes and his hands.

I have cut into the log of Psalm 27 and pulled out themes of interesting and elegant grain and assembled them into a picture of how to live with hope in God in a world that is fallen. No two of these reflections are exactly alike. Each has a different grain, yet each is meant to catch your attention and help you to see. My hope is that as you examine the variegated grains of truth that are in this psalm, you will not settle for self-protection or survival. My hope is that these reflections will fill your heart with a patient hope that grows stronger as the trouble-spotted days go by.

Psalm 27 and Everyday Life

Psalm 27 really is an amazing psalm. There are moments when it soars with the thoughts of what it means to be a child of the Lord. There are places where it reaches into the harshest realities of life in a very broken world. There are times when this psalm is a scalpel, cutting through the layers and exposing the heart. It is a psalm of worship, commitment, trouble, beauty, and patience. There is a way in which Psalm 27 is like a biblical worldview presented as a podcast. There simply is much more there than you think there is after your first reading.

I had a friend who had quite a large rose garden. He was very dedicated to doing all the daily tasks necessary to keep his roses healthy. But it hit him one day that he'd taken no time to actually enjoy the roses that he was so zealous to tend. So one afternoon he did just that. He sat down in front of one of his rose bushes for three hours. As he sat, he began to see, smell, and hear things that he wouldn't have experienced any other way. Contrary to what you

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may think, the time didn't drag on. He was enthralled by the created glory that he was taking in. And as he sat there, he began to realize why those bushes were worth the commitment and the effort that he'd been investing.

But there's more. After his three-hour gaze of that one bush, he would never—could never—look at roses as he once did. That afternoon he saw, really saw, what a rose was about, and new sight changed him. So, I'm inviting you to sit down with me in front of Psalm 27. I'm inviting you to keep your eyes focused and your ears tuned. I'm inviting you to open your heart to what you may have been too busy to see. I'm inviting you to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. And I would imagine that if you are willing to do that, like my friend, somehow, someday, you'll get up a changed person.

Paul David Tripp
March 6, 2008

Psalm 27

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

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

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

One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.

And now my head shall be lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!
You have said, "Seek my face."
My heart says to you,
"Your face, LORD, do I seek."
Hide not your face from me.

a shelter in the time of storm

Turn not your servant away in anger,
 O you who have been my help.
Cast me not off; forsake me not,
 O God of my salvation!
For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
 but the LORD will take me in.

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

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

Meditations

1 | Life as a Student

Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.

PSALM 27:11

Do you think that you've arrived? Do you tend to think that you've learned what you need to learn and now know what you need to know? Do you see yourself as having more answers than questions? Do you carry around a hunger to know? Do you want to understand more deeply and more fully? Do you have a humble, open, and seeking heart? Are you approaching life with the mentality of a student?

Here is a prayer to be taught. Do you pray this? How often? I think there's much pride of knowing and the accompanying mental lethargy in many of us. There was a time, in the early years of our faith, when we couldn't get enough. We had a voracious hunger for truth and a lively fear of falsehood. We lived with the humbling realization that there was so much that we didn't know. We loved walking through the gallery of God's wisdom, taking in the treasures there. We loved listening to fellow students who were further along the path of wisdom than we. We loved to be pointed to nuggets of wisdom that could have come only from the mouth of the Divine. We loved to study the Word of God, to examine each phrase, comparing Scripture with Scripture. We could not get enough, we were not satisfied; we were students.

But something happened along the way. Perhaps we got distracted by the physical pleasures of the created world and began to live more like tourists than students. Perhaps we got discouraged by the troubles of the world and felt our study was not helping us. Maybe we got sidetracked by our own purposes and plans and had

a shelter in the time of storm

little time left to be students. Or perhaps our hunger was blunted by assessments of arrival. Perhaps we came to think that we knew all that we needed to know.

Yet, there are two reasons that remain to pray this prayer: depth and danger. Why would I pray to be taught again and again and again by the Lord? Because his wisdom is just that deep and vast. His wisdom has no boundary. His wisdom has no bottom. His wisdom has no ceiling. If for ten million years I would sit for twenty-four hours a day at his feet and listen, I would scratch only the very surface of the wisdom that is his. If I gave every day of my life to study only the wisdom that is captured on the pages of Scripture, I could study until my very last day and not have mined all the treasures of wisdom that are there. So, once more, I pray to be taught because the wisdom of God is just that deep.

I also pray this prayer because I live in a world of danger. It's a world where the sounds of falsehood echo more loudly and repeatedly than the sounds of wisdom. Living in human culture is like sitting in a twenty-thousand-seat arena just before the concert begins. Everyone is talking at once, a den of voices so loud and pervasive you can barely hear yourself think. Every day a thousand voices speak into my life and the vast majority of those voices have not gotten the flowers of their insight from the wisdom garden of the Lord.

They tell me who I am. They tell me what life is about. They tell me how to invest my time. They tell me how to use my resources. They tell me how to conduct my relationships. They tell me what is true and untrue. They tell me what my goals should be. They tell me what the good life looks like. They tell me what I should be and do and want. They offer me a comprehensive system of wisdom that's well thought through and attractive on many levels, but that competes with the true wisdom that can come only from God. It's so easy to be taken captive. It's so easy to have divine wisdom corrupted by human wisdom. It's so easy to breathe in the polluted air of a culture that no longer actually thinks that God is, let alone that he is wise.

So, with a lively acknowledgment of the vastness of the depth of God's wisdom and a healthy fear of the germs of falsehood that are everywhere around me, I accept the fact that on this side of eternity I live in the middle of a raging wisdom war. So, I pray for the strength,

Life as a Student

protection, direction, and encouragement that can only be found when I am a student of the Lord. Morning after morning I bow my head and humbly pray, “Lord, please teach me your way.”

Take a Moment

1. If you were to live as a student, what changes would you need to make in the way that you approach your daily life?
2. What, in your knowledge of God’s truth, do you need to investigate further and understand more fully?