

The Conversation in Your Head

Summer in the Psalms 2016

Psalm 27

Week 4: August 21, 2016

Welcome/intro/vision

This is our last week of a four-week series called summer in the Psalms—next week is the Sunday before public school kicks off and we're doing our big fall launch

New service times at what time?

We'll also pray for the kids and we'll be doing our Connection Celebration to get you connected with small groups and service opportunities

And we'll also be starting a new message series called Courageous. In a world full of anxiety and transitions and threats and fear, how do we live courageous, free, and generous lives?

Looking at the Old Testament book called Joshua to learn about that, excited about this series and looking at these stories, and that's all starting next week, so join us for that series!

Today we're closing out our four weeks in the Psalms

if you're new to the Bible, the Psalms is a collection of poetry and prayers and songs from about 3,000 years that people have used for centuries as a school of prayer and worship

And part of what the Psalms teach us to do so well is that whatever the circumstances they invite us to keep God right in the middle of it

whether it's celebration or crisis, whether it's betrayal or a promotion, whether there's cause for tears or anger or anxiety or it's time to throw a huge party

The Psalms relentlessly and faithfully model we might involve God in the real stuff that makes up our everyday lives in every season and in every situation.

And the passage we're going to look at today is going to be a bit like reading king David's diary or journal.

I keep a journal, just about every day I spend time writing out my prayers, it helps me to slow down and focus a bit more

And when you keep a journal, one of the issues you face is how honest do you want to be because there's always this fear that someone might find it and discover what you're REALLY thinking or what you're REALLY like

But I decided long ago that the only way that a journal is really of any value is if you're really

willing to be about as raw as you possibly can about the voices in your head and the battles in your heart

Today, we're going to get a glimpse of David's journal and we're going to see what he's really thinking and what he's really like

As we get to hear the voices in his head as he's up against a difficult situation

And today, we're going to talk about David's voices in his head and the voices in our own heads, and we're going to see how what David does might help US with the voices in our own heads

See, here's the reality for most of our lives and the battles and the obstacles that we face:

The battle for who we are becoming is won or lost by the conversations in our heads.

[REPEAT]

The battle for what KIND of person we're becoming, our character, our essential nature, is won or lost by the conversations in our heads, especially in the midst of obstacles and challenges

We think that the majority of the battle is external, circumstantial, situational. It's not.

Here's how we know that: there are people in the world who are facing situations that are much worse than our situations are who are much better people than we are.

There are people in the world who have it way, way harder than I have it here in my comfortable house, in my wonderful job here at this wonderful church

Who are much better people than I am: deeper, wiser, more content, more generous, more kind, more full of love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control

So what is it that's making that difference? It's who they are on the inside, how they're processing it, and very, very often, it has to do with the God that they entrust themselves to.

But it's not only that:

because the conversation in your head is what dictates what kinds of actions that you and I take in the midst of our challenges, it is also one of the most important factors in terms of outcomes in our lives

The majority of our battles are pre-decided before we even say a word or before do any action by the ongoing dialogue that we have in our heads

and which voices you're going to listen to and which voices you're going to dismiss.

And if faith is going to make any difference whatsoever in our lives and if we're going to be joyful, peaceful, courageous and loving men and women

Then faith is going to have to shape and ultimately rule all the other voices in our heads

And David today is going to help us to do that. If you've got a Bible turn with me to Psalm 27, if not on screen behind me/if no Bible get a free one on the book table:

Psalm 27

***¹ 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?***

Let's read that together again, shall we?

Our family has been smitten with watching the Olympics over the past couple of weeks, anyone staying up past their bed times catching some Olympics?

Okay, so every athlete has this moment, just before they line up on the track or get ready for the swim or take to the mat or head onto the court--what's happening during that time?

That's all internal dialogue, right? It's all either getting pumped up or walking through the routine or the race in your mind, it's all preparing mentally to perform extraordinarily physically

Because top athletes know what we said earlier: much of the battle is not only physical and external but internal and mental

David is a warrior king who worships God.

And if you have to say in your journal that you're not afraid, what are you likely doing battle with inside your heart? Voices of fear!

You start with speaking to those voices of fear with a voice of strength.

You're trying to manage and quiet those voices of fear with a larger voice of truth and what you want to believe with all your heart

Now mostly in the Olympics and in our society, the pre-game internal dialogue is reminding ourselves how talented we are, how hard we've worked, how ready we ourselves are for what we're about to face

But who is the focus of David's self-talk? God is! He's not starting with how ready he is for battle, how much experience he has, how many battles he's already won

He starts with God. That's his confidence and his certainty and his hope for success moving forward

In America, we would feed ourselves a lot of pop-psychology self-esteem mumbo-jumbo: you're smart enough, you're strong enough, and doggone it, people like you!

Or maybe we'd start rehearsing all the competitive advantages we have, all the skills we have, all the experiences we have

But David is not interested in that internal dialogue

He's going to match up his situation not against his own skillset but against the Lord, who is supreme ruler, creator and sustainer over all things.

And so David comes out strong in his journal entry, bold and daring and courageous not based on his own skills and abilities, but by placing all his confidence and hopes in the Lord.

The Lord is his light and his salvation, therefore, David shall not fear. He might lose a battle here and there. He might experience setbacks.

But if our destinies are tied to the God who is sovereign king over all things and who promises that he shall one day make all things new, then we cannot lose the war.

You've already had plenty of internal dialogue going on in your head even just today. Some of you are wrestling with a challenging situation, some sort of opposition—and you're either feeling optimistic or pessimistic about the outcome

And if you're a Jesus-follower this morning, the question is, what's your starting point? By what gauge or measure are you evaluating or guessing or hoping?

And are you willing, as we see David start here, to start with the Lord? Are you willing to put your obstacles and challenges ultimately not up against your own skillset but up against the Lord's power and might

And then in that confidence, to start to act and move in NOT our of anxiety or ambition, but in faith, hope, and love.

David starts this journal entry boldly and with conviction and certainty, and he continues to sound confident as he presses deeper in:

***² When the wicked advance against me
to devour^[a] me,
it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.***

***³ Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;***

***though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.***

And then David makes this great turn that I want to invite us to dig into a bit:

***⁴ One thing I ask from the LORD,
this only do I seek:***

And here I want to pause and if you've got a Bible don't let the person next to you cheat and see the next line.

This morning, here in mid to late August, 2016, I want us to pause together and I want to invite you as honestly in your heart as you can bear to be, to fill in this blank.

If this was YOUR journal entry this morning, and you were going to ask God for one thing, for one problem solved, one situation dealt with, one blessing on your life, what is it that you would ask for?

At various points in my life, here's how I would have filled in this blank:

Senior year of high school, the one thing I ask from the Lord: ***get into Carolina!***

First years out of college in my first job, a campus ministry that spent the first 2 years falling apart, the one thing I ask from the Lord: ***save this dying ministry!***

A year later I'm getting ready to ask this beautiful woman to marry me, the one thing that I ask from the Lord: ***let her say yes!***

A few years later, we've got kids, the one thing that I ask from the Lord, this ONLY do I seek: ***SLEEP!***

Several years later, I'm trying to decide if I should apply for this job here at Chatham Community Church, the one thing I'm asking from the Lord: ***show me if this is the job for me!***

And here this morning, what I'm most likely to ask God for now in my prayers, the one thing that I'm asking for: ***bless the Pittsboro campus launch!***

Help us as we fight through obstacles and invite our neighbors and line up all the pieces in place

At each season of my life, there might be different things clamoring for this blank! How about you, today? What are coming in here this morning with? How would you fill it in?

You got it?

Okay, so here's how David fills it in:

***⁴ One thing I ask from the LORD,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.***

Have you ever known someone who was obsessed with something?

An obsession is when your internal dialogue returns to the same thing over and over and over again and you find yourself arranging and organizing your life around that something.

I was getting lunch with an old friend of mine a couple of years ago and he was saying that his 13-year-old son was obsessed with baseball

he and his wife were hoping he would develop some more social skills or else he'd never get married and they'd be stuck with him in their basement the rest of their lives!

Have you ever met an adult who kind of did the same thing? Whether their obsession was cars or handbags or golf or their work or their grandkids?

In some situations, our obsessions can de-rail us, de-rail our whole lives if they feed into addictive behaviors

But at the same time, I've known people who were captivated with magnificent obsessions that inspired and blessed me and changed the world.

I've known people or we read about people throughout history

who were captivated with an obsession so glorious that their obsession sustained them through difficult times and opposition to see something all the way through that changed world history for the good forever

And as we get a peek into David's internal dialogue, he's kind of obsessed: God is at the center, relentlessly at the center, and everything else is secondary.

Even as he's facing clear and present dangers!

He knows what you and I know, that there's all kinds of other things that might cycle through that blank over the course of our lives

that the thing that I want today and the situation that feels so urgent today will be gone tomorrow and it'll be something different a week from now, I won't even remember about that thing a week or ten days from now

And if I get those things taken care of or if I get those things that I'm asking God to help me with and if I lose God in the process, then I'm turning God's blessings into curses.

If I had prayed to get into Carolina but then got there and walked away from the God who is good and who is Lord over Carolina,

Then I would have managed to turn God's gift to me into a stumbling block to me.

If God grants us a great launch in Pittsboro later this year and I get so caught up in logistics and excitement that I run off and forget about the God who loves Pittsboro and who loves this church

Then I've turned God's blessing into a curse

If YOU got whatever you wanted in that blank this morning and you took it from God and then abandoned God to go build your life around this thing

no matter how good it might be in and of itself, it would be the worst thing that could ever happen to you

Because

to have the GIFTS of God without the PRESENCE of God is all loss, no matter how good the gift is.

But it's easy in the day-to-day to forget this. And so David here in this Psalm, as he's battling to win this internal dialogue

writes down and captures in this poem the thing that he knows he'll be so tempted to forget.

I don't want God's stuff more than I want God. At least, not on my good days, I don't.

When I'm thinking clearly and rightly, then I know that to have God's stuff without having God would be nothing gained

short-term gain that would have a shelf life of about 5 minutes to 5 days

And then there's something else cycling through that blank.

And so he centers himself, puts it in writing, this is what I want to be about, this is who I want to be: God is my obsession, the stuff is secondary

Every night before bed I pray with my kids

and this past week I was praying with one of them I was walking through the day that she'd had and all kinds of great friends and cool blessings like a pool to play in and activities that she gets to do

And I was thanking God for those with her, but then I was compelled to pray that our hearts might not confuse God for God's blessings

And I prayed for her and for me, that even if all that stuff went away: the pool, the gymnastics lessons, the friends, our house, our cars—if that stuff disappeared, all of that is secondary.

The most important thing is that we have God, and he's given us his love.

Everything else we're grateful for but we hold loosely before him and we offer back up to him and he can do whatever he wants to with any of it

I don't know if she agreed with that prayer or not! But it was good for my soul, to declare here with David, there's one thing that actually matters, one thing that's eternal

There's one magnificent obsession worth putting at the center of our lives and letting all else fall as it may

And that is the Lord. And some days I struggle to believe that. Some days those other things that I want to put in that blank, those things feel loud and strong and urgent and important

This is what David is fighting for in his internal dialogue.

Are you willing to say along with David, that you want to cultivate one magnificent obsession that is the organizing principle and at the top of the org chart in your heart?

This morning, can you say to your heart and into your own internal dialogue that those other things might matter but they do not matter more than this:

to be with the Lord, to dwell with and in the Lord, to see the Lord and to know his beauty all the days of your life?

Here's the thing—whatever we put at the top of our hearts and make our top priority is going to bear some kind of fruit and have some kind of consequences in our lives

And part of why this is so important and why we should all follow David in putting God at the top spot in our hearts and in our lives

whether you've been a God person your whole life or you're trying to decide if you want to take this God thing seriously or not

Is because when we put God at the top spot, the consequences, the down-stream impact in our lives are good, good, good, and very good.

And anything that you put in there will fall short of you being the most fully alive man or woman God designed you to be.

Over the years, at points I've put my work at the top spot of my life

do you know what it does to me, my heart, my mind, my worries, my schedule, my marriage, my kids, and my friendships when my work is at the top spot in my life?

It's a train wreck.

Some of you are in the middle of that train wreck and you don't know what else to do. Try this prayer

try saying to God that the one thing that you're asking and seeking is that God would be at the center and replacing your work, and ask for his help to actually do this, to put God in the top spot and see what he does.

At other times I've put people at the top spot of my life.

Do you know what it does to my heart and my mind and my work and my relationships when people-pleasing is the prime directive?

How many people can you keep happy with you all of the time?

It's a different kind of a train wreck. But it's still a train wreck. Some of you are in the middle of that same train wreck.

Try praying this prayer, replacing your old one thing that you've been seeking and swapping it out for this new one thing: God, his beauty, his goodness, his love, his life, his presence

Those are the two things that I'm most tempted to make my one thing, at the top of my heart. You've got your own things that might not be mine, but you've got them

And I'll cycle through those two occasionally, sometimes without even realizing it!

I don't usually realize it until either there is some sort of pain OR someone around me helps me to see the surface symptoms

And then I do what David does here—I remember who I want to be, what I want to be about.

In biblical language I repent, I take out that thing that shouldn't be at the top of my heart and I replace it with the beauty and the goodness of the Lord

And a funny thing happens when I do that—I'm a way healthier human being!

Sometimes the situation is still hard, sometimes the circumstances haven't changed a bit!

But who I am in the midst of those circumstances and how I'm processing and praying and thinking about myself in the midst of my everyday life is way more fruitful.

My friends, what is your one thing you're seeking and asking for and longing for this morning?

Can you see how that thing, if it's not the LORD, is doing some things in your heart and in your relationships and in your spirit that's just not quite who and what you want to be?

And are you willing to replace that, with this prayer of David's, this one magnificent obsession?

Now David continues to do battle to win his internal dialogue by reflecting on God and his goodness

***⁵ For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.***

***⁶ Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the Lord.***

***⁷ Hear my voice when I call, Lord;
be merciful to me and answer me.***

***⁸ My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, Lord, I will seek.***

There's a bit more of his internal dialogue, a heart that says "seek his face!" And David agrees with himself, "Yes! I'll do that!"

Our culture is a follow-your-heart kind of a culture but frankly if we all just followed every whim of our hearts our lives and this world would be a total disaster: don't do it!!!

But if we've woven our hearts and our internal dialogues and commitments around seeking the face of God—ah, now THAT'S a heart that you've trained to the point where you could trust it and follow it.

***⁹ Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.
Do not reject me or forsake me,
God my Savior.***

Again, if you're asking God to not hide his face and not turn away and not reject, what are the voices of fear in your heart worried about? That God WILL do these things.

So David surfaces his heart's fears and then here he speaks back to those fears:

***¹⁰ Though my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will receive me.***

***¹¹ Teach me your way, Lord;
lead me in a straight path
because of my oppressors.***

***12 Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes,
for false witnesses rise up against me,
spouting malicious accusations.***

***13 I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.***

***14 Wait for the Lord;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.***

About six weeks ago I was taking a class down in Charlotte on Biblical leadership.

And the guy who was teaching it was the retired playfully grouchy old white guy named Sid Buzzel who kept us enthralled with his great stories of adventures and struggles and occasional failures as he led various churches throughout his career.

And at one point he was talking about leadership challenges. And he got very serious as he shared some of his leadership challenges: new church plants, conflicts with various people, financial challenges in his churches

“But,” he said, “those weren’t the biggest leadership challenges I faced in my career. In the midst of all the other things that I faced and that I dealt with and there were definitely people and situations that felt set against me

“But the biggest leadership challenge and problem that I had to deal with my entire life was one person: me. I was my own biggest leadership challenge. My own stubbornness, my own mistakes, my own fears, my own personality quirks—those were my biggest challenges.”

“And,” he said, “your biggest leadership challenge in ministry, no matter what you face, will always be you.”

Sid was right. Our biggest challenges in life aren’t external, they’re internal. David knows that.

And so he writes out this prayer as a way to fight his deepest, most important battle and he closes his journal entry with this beautiful, submitted, hopeful, longing finish:

***13 I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.***

David is confident that he will see God’s goodness in his lifetime, in this world, not just when he dies

And the trick with this kind of confidence and the place where we sometimes get messed up is we have a pretty clear idea of what we kind of goodness we want to see from God, right?

“God, I want you to do X for me in this situation” whatever that might be: fix my husband or my wife or my mother-in-law or my son or daughter

And sometimes we DO see God’s goodness in our lives in answer to those kinds of prayers, but sometimes we narrow our focus so much to only one specific way that we think God could be good to us

And if God doesn’t do that one specific thing, if he’s being good to us in some other way that’s outside of our really narrow frame, then we miss it, we don’t see it, we don’t appreciate it.

And sometimes we get bitter or give up on God, when he’s being good to us, we’re just not positioning ourselves to see it and receive it

And then David closes with a swear word in our culture. It wasn’t as much a swear word in his culture, he didn’t know what 21st century Americans would be like when he wrote this, he had no idea this would be so offensive to so many people when he originally wrote this.

But he says this: “WAIT” I hate waiting. I don’t think I’m alone. How many of you hate to wait?

***14 Wait for the Lord;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.***

But this waiting isn’t a wasting time kind of waiting. This waiting is active, engaged. It works and waits, it’s engaged, not passive, not checked out, not waiting for God to do something while we watch.

It’s a bold, reckless, faithful kind of waiting that trusts and stands on tip-toe eager to see what God will do.

David here closes the journal entry that started out so bold with a quieted, submitted beautiful line, he is fighting to win the conversation in his head

And this morning, as we close, I want to do this for you, to remind you of the good news:

Follower of Jesus, hear the good news and remain confident of this: you will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, in your lifetime. Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart, and wait for the Lord

And if you do not yet know this God, hear this good news: in order to secure for you to see the goodness of the Lord in your life, he sent his son Jesus to die on a cross, to wipe away your sins and bring you home into a relationship with you.

And he invites you to put all of your hope in him, that you might know his goodness, and share in David's holy confidence

Take home question for this morning is simply this:

What needs to change about your internal dialogue today?

Because the most defining variable in your life and my life isn't what's out there but what's in here. It's not our obstacles OR our opportunities

but how we're responding and who we're trusting in the midst of our obstacles AND our opportunities

Do you need to borrow a line from David's journal entry here to help you to reset a bit, to shake things up a bit? Where do you need to re-shape your internal dialogue around stronger and healthier and more life-giving voices?

Maybe you need a strong and bold voice inserted into your internal dialogue: "The Lord is the strength of my life, whom shall I fear?"

Maybe you need the quiet confidence here at the end: I am confident of this, I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart, and wait for the Lord.

I want to invite you this morning to take one line from David's journal entry and make it your own this week.

Whenever you hear yourself slouching into fear or anxiety, when those voices in your head are proud and stubborn or jealous or snippy or angry or aggressive, let David's voice speak into it.

And see if replacing the stuff that's currently going on in there with this new voice might not produce some new strange and wonderful movements in your soul.

Because the battle for who you and I are becoming over the course of our lives is won or lost not by the circumstances we face but by the voices in our heads that we choose to listen to

May the Lord give us ears to hear HIS voice speaking words of truth and grace to us through these Scriptures this week.