

INTRODUCTION

Cost and value are very different measuring scales. An old picture you took with your now-deceased grandparents may only worth a few dimes. But to you, it brings back a lot of beautiful memories. In our everyday life we go to stores to pay certain amount in exchange for goods. However, in some cases, people buy something that they do not intend to use at all. We call them collectibles. You keep the item in a brand-new condition and store it in a safe place. You hope that many years from now you can make a fortune when you re-sell it. I know a brother who owes a baseball signed by a few star-players of yesteryears. He keeps it in a safe-deposit box, and he plans to sell it to subsidize for his daughter's college fund. Think about this: you have no intention to use the item the way it is made for, because once you open it the value will be gone. But what benefit does it bring you if, for example, you keep your car in a garage or your clothes in a closet and never use it? It is equally true in the spiritual realm. God gives us faith for us to exercise it. The more we use our faith, the stronger it will grow. Therefore, old faith is actually more valuable than new one. Also, our faith in God is more evident when we are in difficult situations. Let us be honest with ourselves, we do not need much faith when we are healthy, when our pantry and fridge are well-stock with food and our bank account has many zeroes. However, when we realize that things are not in our full prediction and control, all of a sudden we know that we need God. Psalm 27 is a testimony of the faith journey of the author. Just like this psalmist our faith in God can fluctuate. God's desire is for us to depend on Him. Therefore, we should not be consumed by fear when we face challenges. It is because God intends to use difficulties in our lives as a springboard for our spiritual growth.

EXPLANATION

1. 信心的宣告 Expression of Trust

The psalmist began his writing with an expression of trust in God. In **verse 1** he boldly declared that he had no fear when he relied on God: 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? He trusted that the Lord watched over him whether he was in peaceful time or when he was surrounded by enemies. He continued in **verse 3**: Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. We do not know if the psalmist was recalling his past experience or he was portraying a hypothetical situation. But if we interpret the title of this passage “Of David” as a psalm written by David, then the battle scene described here is very real. King David was a brave commander. He had wars with many enemies in his life – foreign armies, his former boss King Saul and even his own son and countrymen. David shared that he had victory when he put his trust in the Lord. David testified in **1 Kings 1:29** as he looked back: ...“As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble.” David knew that whether it was attack from wild animals when he was still a shepherd boy, enemies in the battlefield or troubles in the palace God delivered him again and again. You know when men talk they like to get to the bottom-line. Here the psalmist shared with us his bottom-line conviction in **verse 4**: One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: 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 seek him in his temple. The psalmist told us that if there was only one thing he sought after it was to get close to God. His desire was to “dwell in the house of the Lord” and to “seek him in his temple.” The temple symbolizes the presence of God. By dwelling inside the temple the psalmist expressed his desire to draw near to God every moment of his life. Such close connection with God secured his heart even when the psalmist was under the threat of his enemies. The psalmist proclaimed in **verse 6**: Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord. When the enemies were drawing near the psalmist did not have fear. He did not summon his generals to figure out a defensive plan. Rather, he went to God’s tabernacle to sing songs! That reminds me of a scene in 2 Chronicles 20 when a messenger told King Jehoshaphat of Judah that his enemies were inching in. **Verses 3-4** told us the reaction of the king: 3 Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. 4 The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him. It was normal to be afraid because the threat was real. But instead of getting his army ready Jehoshaphat declared a national fast and everyone gathered to seek God for help. Then the king went to the temple and poured out his heart before God. The Lord then foretold through a prophet that the country would be delivered from its enemies. Next, Jehoshaphat led his people to the battlefield. But Jehoshaphat sent his choir to walk before his soldiers! The assembly sang praises to God. If I were a soldier on the other side I might wonder what kind of military strategy that was. The Bible tells us that God then sent His own army to completely get rid of the opponents. Where did the Judah people go on their return from the victory? They went back to the temple to continue their worship! What is your reaction when you encounter difficulty in life? It is normal to be afraid. The doctor’s diagnosis is real. The bill in the mail is real. The flood and the fire that consumed people’s houses are also real. But if you can sing praises to God even in the midst of your problems you admit that God is also real. The psalmist stated that the one thing he desired was to go to the Lord. What is the one thing you rely on when you face difficulties? The one thing for our young people is perhaps their parents. For the adults it can be their own expertise, bank account, life insurance or retirement fund. Don’t get me wrong. I believe that since God is all-powerful He can perform miracles at His will. But more than likely, God resolves our problems through the resources we can get hold of. Therefore, next time you are sick you should pray and go to the doctor too. However, deep down inside we believe that it is God who ministers His grace using the means we know and resource we do not expect to help us. It is God on whom we should put our trust.

2. 信心的考驗 Experience of Trial

The one thing in the psalmist’s mind was to put his trust in God. When we come to verse 7 we notice a change in his tone. Seemingly, he now experienced a time of trial to his faith. He cried out for help in prayer. He plead in **verse 7**: Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful to me and answer me. Then in **verse 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, O God my Savior. Have you ever felt like that? You urgently seek help from God but it seems that your prayer is bounced back from the ceiling. You wonder where God is when you need Him the most. Have I done something wrong that makes God mad about me that He closes His ears to me? The psalmist was genuine about his true feelings. When we pray to God we should not shy away from our

emotions either. God knows our hearts. Whether you are afraid, feeling hopeless or being abandoned, just tell it to the Lord. But the psalmist did not stop there. He went on to ask God in **verse 11**: Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. He made his request specific. He wanted to know which way to go to get out of his problems. But in the midst of his distress the psalmist remembered God's promises. He said in **verse 8**: My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek. God was talking to the psalmist's heart. It was as if God were reminding the psalmist: "Didn't you say that your one desire is to seek after me in my temple?" Then the psalmist echoed: "Yes, Lord, if I have determined to seek You in my normal days I should seek You all the more when I am in trouble!" He also remembered another promise from God in **verse 10**: Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me. His faith rekindled when truth overtook His feelings. He reminded himself that God was more trustworthy than even his own parents. We may think that trouble-free life is the best for us. We buy the best insurance policy available, install security system at our home and make sure that every need of our kids are provided for. God may not think that way. It is easy to sing praise to God when everything works great. We do not need much faith to do that. But when we experience trials; that is the time to verify if our faith is real. The car you sit in has to pass a series of strict crash tests before it can be put in the dealership for sale. The car-lovers among us may find it heartbreaking to see brand new cars being crushed from the front, back and sides. But there is simply no other way to prove that a car can sustain an impact in real life and protect its passengers. If the test results are not ideal then the manufacturer will find ways to make improvement. Similarly, the only way to prove our faith is to put us to a test. Difficulty in life humbles us and helps us realize that we are not invincible. It helps us understand that we need God. Nowadays, people perform drills to prepare for fire, earthquake or even terrorists. The goal is that when an accident actually happens people will know how to respond. As Christians we also need to practice our drills during normal times. We read God's Word to saturate our minds with His promises. When a crisis comes we will not be panic. We just go back to God's promises. Claim His promises in our prayer. Tell him that: "God, I need your help now. You encourage me to seek Your face. Here I am to bring my needs to Your throne." Trials should draw us toward God rather than push us away from Him.

3. 信心的跨勝 Exaltation of Triumph

The psalmist expressed his trust in God. He went through an experience of trial. He passed the test and came out with exaltation of triumph. He testified in **verse 13**: I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. In the Hebrew text this verse begins with a word that can be translated as "if not" or "except." But here, it carries the sense of "regardless." The psalmist was saying that no matter what the reality was he still believed that he would see the goodness of God. The phrase "in the land of the living" refers to this lifetime. In closing the psalmist once again reminded himself to look to the Lord. He said in **verse 14**: Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. We live in a fast-pace world. Waiting is considered as a waste of time. We hate red traffic light, we think our internet is never fast enough and we hope every food can be cooked in a microwave oven. But God is not in a hurry. He wants us to learn to wait on Him. **Isaiah 40:31** said: But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Here the word "hope" is the same Hebrew word translated as "wait" in Psalm 27. The idea is that when we wait on the Lord we have a sure hope that He will

answer us. We use eyes of faith to look beyond the current problem, knowing that God has His perfect plan for us down the road. A pastor once said that life is a matter of perspective. We can do a little experiment to understand this principle. Which is bigger: your thumb or a mountain? We all know it is a mountain. However, if you put your thumb right in front of your eyes as you look at a mountain in a distance it seems that your thumb is bigger than the mountain. My point is that if all we focus on is the trouble right in front of us we will magnify the issue and lose sight of the fact that God is much bigger than the problem we face. Different perspectives will also affect our prayer. If your focus is only on the crisis you will ask God to resolve the issue. You pray: "God, please give me a job, or God, please approve my immigration status." However, if your focus is on the Lord who is behind the scene your prayer will be very different. You may ask: "Lord, I want to experience Your faithfulness in the midst of my trouble. I want people to see that you do exist." A few years back there were some ongoing challenges in the church I served before. Some members were in a hostile relationship with the leadership. Once they lobbied to approve an outrageous proposal. They tried every human means possible to gain support from people. They initiated a signature campaign to ask members to join their camp. They encouraged even people who did not come to worship regularly to register as members to boost the voting. The whole atmosphere was very tense. Everyone on both sides prayed for the result they hoped to get. It is like the gangsters pray to their idol so that their bank heist will be a success. But on the other side the police is praying to the same idol so that they can catch the bad guys. This may not be the best analogy but I think you get my point. By divine coincidence, my family took a trip to Taiwan because I was asked to officiate the wedding ceremony for my wife's niece. Therefore, I could not attend the congregational meeting. What was the voting result? I called up a brother from Taiwan. He told me that the motion was defeated. The people who attempted to stir up a mess failed. How could that be? God intervened their wicked plan. I witnessed the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. No matter what difficulties you are facing don't just pray for a solution. Pray that regardless of the means God uses to deliver you and however long it may take for you to get out of the situation, that God will prove that He is real and He is still actively at work in your life even today. Even when we are still waiting on the Lord we can exalt Him with praises of triumph.

CONCLUSION

God does not want us to go through our problems in vain. He intends to use difficulties in our lives as a springboard for our spiritual growth. Challenges can be stumbling blocks to our faith, if we conclude that everything written in the Bible are like collectibles on a display shelf. They look nice, but no one will open them and actually put them to use. Challenges can also become stepping stones to increase our faith. We say to God that by faith we believe whatever He says in the Bible is true. We trust God as we hold onto His promises. When my boys were still little we liked to play a game. They stood on the bed while I stayed a few feet away. They ran toward me and leaped into the air. My task was to catch them. In their minds they trusted that daddy had the strength to grab them. Also, they never had doubt that their father would step away at the last second and allow them to drop to the floor. Their faith was built on an intimate relationship with me. Do we have the same childlike faith before the Lord? Or do we have a million of what-ifs in our mind: what if God does not answer my prayer, what if God does not provide any help by the deadline? As the psalmist encouraged us there should only be one thing in our hearts - we seek after our Lord because we want to stay close to Him all the days of our life.