

# One Thing

by J. Glyn Owen

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*David's sermon emphasizes the importance of confidence in faith and fellowship with God in overcoming fear and anxiety.*

**Duration:** 46:19

**Topics:** "Trusting God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the theme of having confidence in faith over fear. The main point is that the more we come to know God, the better we are able to conquer our fears. The speaker encourages the audience to find a place in life where they can focus their thoughts and imaginations on God, filling their minds with truths about Him. The sermon also emphasizes the importance of praising and worshiping God, as seen in the reference to singing and making music to the Lord.

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## Transcript

Let us turn together in the book of Psalms and I would like to read the first six verses in Psalm 27. I shall read from the New International Version. Psalm 27, reading verses 1 to 6 as the basis of our meditation this morning.

Psalm 27, reading verses 1 to 6 as the basis of our meditation this morning. 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 evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear.

Though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. 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. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling.

He will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me and his tabernacle, at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy. I will sing and make music to the Lord.

May God bless to us that passage. May he kindle in each of our hearts something of the spirit of the psalmist David as we linger in his courts today. Now, if you look carefully at those six verses, I think you will find two main divisions.

In the first place, we have a picture of the confidence of faith in the conflict with fear. The confidence of faith in the conflict with fear. That is verses one to three.

And then from verses four, from verse four to verse six, the condition for the continuing conquest of faith over fear. Let's look at these together and may the spirit of God enable us to capture something of this remarkably hopeful, optimistic spirit of the man of God as we start a new year together by God's good grace. The confidence of faith in the conflict with fear.

Now, verses one, two, and three divide again into two main sections. In the first place, in verse one, we have the confession of faith that appears in the foreground. David begins, as he often does, with a frank, open acknowledgement of his faith.

It's a good place to begin. And he makes a threefold profession. He declares that the Lord is his personal and perpetual light, salvation, stronghold.

That's the language of the revised standard version. And I think it is the most accurate. The Lord is my light.

The Lord is my salvation. The Lord is my stronghold. And there are the two notions there.

David is speaking personally for himself. And he is referring to all these three concepts as being in the present continuous. God is and remains my light.

God is and remains my salvation. God is and remains my stronghold. Now, a question arises as to whether he is meaning different things by these three different words.

It is feasible that there are just three ways of referring to the same phenomenon. But it is also probable, perhaps more than probable, that he is referring to different shades of salvation. If that is the case, then probably we are to understand the words in this sense.

When he refers to the Lord as his light, he is probably thinking of the kind of thing that happened in the children of Israel's history. You remember how the Lord led the children of Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They knew where to go.

They knew where they were. And they knew that God was with them. Though it be dark, the Lord was there.

The light was there. The Lord is my light. If it is true that we are to distinguish between these three words, then probably the next term, salvation, has reference to some clear-cut deliverance.

He is thinking of the Lord as the one who intervenes to deliver. Now, again, if you look back into the history of David, you will find that there were so many deliverances that came his way. And came his way because of the goodness and the power and the mercy of God.

I think particularly of the way he was delivered from the hands of Saul when Saul was almost mad with envy and jealousy and so forth. Many a time he was delivered. But then, I guess we must go just a little further.

He would think then, in terms of this third word that he uses here, stronghold, he would think in terms of the Lord as being a place of refuge into which his enemies cannot come unless God permits them. If an

enemy comes into the stronghold which is God, he must come in, they must come in, if they're in the plural, by divine permission. God is a stronghold, a fortress.

A mighty fortress is our God, sang Martin Luther, and not without good reason. Well, now, that may very, very, very well be the notion that we have here. David begins then with this personal testimony to his faith in God.

Then he arrives at the only logical conclusion of such a faith and he states it. He puts it in two clear-cut questions. They are, whom shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid? If it is true that the Lord God Almighty, the God of Abram, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of the Israelites, the God who brought them out of Egypt, and the God who called and summoned David, the young stripling from looking after the sheep, and made him a king and enabled him to topple Goliath and to do much else already, if it is true that that God is his God, whom should he fear? It isn't that he's grown in physical stature since he took office.

If he hasn't taken office at this point. It isn't that he is physically strong. It isn't that he is such a genius that he can't, humanly speaking, fail.

But the fact is that if God is his stronghold and God is his deliverer, if God is his salvation, then he need not fear. It's quite illogical for us, on the one hand, to declare that the Lord God of the universe is our God, our light, our salvation, our stronghold, and then immediately to wobble with fear. Now, as a matter of interest, and not only interest, but as a matter of encouragement, and perhaps a challenge, this is precisely the reasoning of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, in the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans.

He too has been in that, the first part of that chapter, and indeed in the whole of the epistle, thinking of what God is and God has done for his people, and therefore what God is to the believer. Then he comes at the end of, toward the end, verse 31 of Romans 8, and he says, What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. So then, in the first place, we have the confession of faith that appears in the foreground here in verse one.

Now, next, the occasion for fear that lurks in the background. Listen to verses two and three again. When evil doers assail me, he's thinking of the future, uttering slanders against me.

Or coming to tear my flesh, as some translations put it. My adversaries and foes, it is they who will stumble and fall. Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.

Though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. Though he has confidently concluded that there is no conceivable reason for a person that is rightly related to God to fear, David nevertheless proceeds to indicate the possible or potential sources of harassment in his own life. He doesn't bury his head under the sand and say, I can be afraid of nothing, nothing can come.

He thinks of the possibilities. He remembers the kind of things that have made him afraid in days gone by. He remembers his heart fainting for fear, as he tells us in one or two places.

So here he faces the brutal realities of his life situation in the future, maybe, and in the light of the kind of things he's met in the past. Now he mentions three things. First part of verse two, evil doers assailing him with slanders and threats, or still more cruel, it depends which translation we take.

When evil doers assail me, uttering slanders against me, that is the revised standard version. The new international version, however, suggests the image of an enemy pursuing David like a pack of hungry animals, pursuing their prey to tear him to pieces. That could actually be the correct understanding of the statement here, because you see David had previously, or was even then, sought out and pursued as by the maddened King Saul.

The Old Testament record of such incidents are quite numerous. You remember that incident in 1 Samuel 23. The Zephyrites go to King Saul when Saul is hunting David to try and get rid of him.

And they say to Saul, we know where David is, you come with us and we'll find him, and we'll get rid of him for you, or you can get rid of him. And Saul said to the Zephyrites, may you be blessed of the Lord, for you have had compassion on me. Go, make yet more sure.

Know and see the place where his haunt is. And who has seen him there? For it is told me that he is very cunning. See therefore and take note of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with sure information.

Then I will go with you, just like Herod in the New Testament. Then I will go with you, and if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah. Have you got the picture? Saul says, I'll hunt him out as men hunt foxes.

Says David, I can envisage that kind of thing happening again. Evil doers assailing me with slanders, yes, or coming with their teeth bare to bite and to tear. Doesn't matter which.

Then he goes on, and his imagination gets further. He thinks of enemies attacking his very person. Now this may have been involved in the previous one, the previous statement, if we take the second translation.

But look at the second part of verse two. The NIV puts it like this, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. If this reference is to something distinct from that already mentioned in the first part of verse two, then the emphasis is probably upon the literal attempt of his enemies to attack him in person.

Just as Saul again, often attempted while David was under his roof. You remember how Saul often with his javelin or spear, he tried to pin David to the wall. Evidently, David's imagination here is colored by that kind of experience.

We read, for example, in 1 Samuel 18 verse 11, and again in 1 Samuel 19 verse 10, Saul had his spear in his hand, and Saul cast the spear, for he thought, I will pin David to the wall. The language is very similar in the next chapter. Saul thought to pin David to the wall with a spear, but he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall, and David fled and escaped.

David is envisaging, you see, the kind of thing happening again, but he says, I will not fear. God is my light. God is my deliverer.

God is my stronghold. No spear can strike me unless God permits it. I'm hiding in God.

And then, alas, the climactic thing here that he envisages is an army or a host encompassing him right around. Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war rise against me, yet I will

be confident.

The language may be figurative, but it need not be. David had been in experiences like this before. He'd been at war, and he knew what it was to be surrounded, and he certainly did again in future days, but notice, he postulates such predictable future possibilities, because they're consistent with his past experience, but then he comes and he says, even so, it is they who will stumble and fall who try to trip me.

My heart shall not fear, the beginning of verse three. I will be confident, the second part of verse three. He feels himself to be impregnable.

He feels himself to be absolutely secure because he rests in God. He hides in God. He dwells in God, and until his work is done, God will not allow anything to kill him or to slay him or to harm him.

It must be within the will of God if he's hiding in God. Now, this is not simply a delightful theme. It is, I believe, the most relevant passage at the beginning of the new year.

You and I simply do not know what can happen during the year that is ahead of us, on a personal level, on a family level, on a social level, here in the city, here in this country, on this continent, and in the world. We just don't know. Are you afraid? Do you have your fears? Do you have your moments of trepidation? There is a place, says this ancient king of Israel, there is a place where you need not fear, and here it is.

It is hiding in God. Now, we were here last Lord's Day morning, too, not by intent. Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations, Psalm 90.

The generations come and go, but there is a place of refuge. There is a place of hiding that abides to be a stronghold indeed, and nothing can happen in there but such things as God allows and purposes. There is a knowledge of God that can quell your fear, and mine.

Now, that brings me to the second section here, and this is very strategic and very important, very relevant for us. The condition for the continuing conquest of faith over fear. Ah, we make our profession of faith, too.

I don't suppose there are many here this morning. I trust no one who cannot start off, as it were, with some such confession of faith as David. Indeed, it ought to be infinitely greater, with more content to it, in the light of the New Testament revelation and of all that we know about God's redeeming work in Christ his Son.

So that we, too, should be able to overcome the fears of this life, but the question is this. It's all very well to say that in the calm atmosphere of a sanctuary such as this, or in the quietness of your own room when you have your devotions, but it's quite another thing to go out into the world and into the turmoil of things and to have the continuance of that fearlessness, carefreeness, when the storm begins to break, when the enemies are drawing nearer and you can see them baring their teeth and biting and nothing else. Now, the question is this.

How can one maintain this confidence of faith over fear in the face of the foe gathering around, threatening, molesting, harassing? And that's what the rest of these verses tell us, particularly verse 4. So let's look at it as if much depended upon it. There are two main things that we notice here. In terms of principle, David anticipates the maintenance of faith and its conquest of fear, as he himself will persistently and constantly fellowship with God.

David believes that he can go on having victory over all possible fears because he anticipates going into the unseen, into the unfolding ages of time, as a man in fellowship with God. He doesn't make provision, he doesn't plan, he doesn't anticipate doing anything that will break fellowship, but rather doing everything to maintain fellowship. Look at this delightful verse 4. One thing have I asked of the Lord, and that I will seek after.

What is that, David? That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire at his temple. Now, here's the secret of it. Much is wrapped up here.

Let's try to unravel it for our own profit and the good of his people and of his church, as we move into 1981. Now, first of all, notice the symbolic language here. If we don't realize that we have symbolic language here, we can get bogged down and we're in the land of the mist.

That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. This is symbolic language. This is not to be understood literally.

You ask me why. Well, now, if you know the history of David, you know the life of David, you will know that the one thing that did not characterize David was the desire to live the indoor life. He was a man of the open air.

He was a man who wanted to be out. He was the shepherd boy to start off with, and he was a man who was running around always above things. He wasn't a recluse.

So that to think of David here as a monk asking to be allowed to spend the rest of his life in a monastery, in the temple, is just simply out of character, and there is nothing whatsoever in the scriptures to warrant such a notion. David is not asking, you see, that physically he should spend the rest of his days in the sanctuary. Now, if you go further on, you will find that later on in the psalm, David refers to the secret place of his tabernacle, which is a reference to the holy of holies, and he says, God will hide me in the evil day in the secret place of his tabernacle, which means the holy of holies.

Now, you see, this again indicates that it cannot be understood literally. No man ever entered into the holy of holies, only the high priest and that once annually. So David cannot imagine that he somehow or other can be put in the holy of holies to hide from the storms.

He doesn't mean that literally. What does he mean then? What he means is this. He sees how the priests dwelled in the presence of God physically, and how the high priest had access into the presence of God on the day of atonement or the feast of atonement.

And he says, really, he says, this is what I have sought of the Lord, that I may dwell in fellowship with him, close to him, with him, within the reach of his ear and the sound of his voice, that I may dwell in his very place, and he can speak to me, and I can speak to him. His longing is, his yearning is, for fellowship. The symbolic language now mark the sole prerequisite, as he deems it, the sole prerequisite for maintaining a stance in which faith overcomes fear.

How can your faith overcome fear? In this way, that I live in fellowship with God, who is my light, who is my deliverer, who is my stronghold. And if I can always be in there with God spiritually, then I'll be able to control my heart, and my mind, and my imagination, and my will, and my fears, and my passions. I'll be under control, and I will not fear.

The only man who is in control is the man who is controlled by God in fellowship with him. David postulates this kind of intimacy of fellowship with God, then, as the one thing that will protect and promote his faith, and pacify his fears under all conceivable circumstances. This is the one thing I'm asking for, and I'm going to seek after it.

Now, my friends, in terms of principle, lest anyone think I'm preaching something strange this morning, in terms of principle may I remind you that as the years went by, a day arrived when Jesus of Nazareth was in Bethany with the two sisters and their brother Lazarus. He was being lavishly entertained, but Martha was doing most of the chores, cooking, and fussing, and you know the kind of thing that went on. And she turned to him, and she grumbled a little, and she said to him, why don't you tell Mary to help me? The Lord Jesus turned to Martha, and he says, Martha, Martha, you are cumbered and fussed about a multitude of things, but one thing is needful, only one.

Mary has chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her. What was it? I'll tell you. Read the passage.

She sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word. Mary has chosen that one thing needful. What was it? She sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word.

David prophetically says, this one thing have I desired of the Lord, and this is the thing I will seek with all my might and man. It is that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. In other words, symbolically what he's saying, that I may fellowship with him and allow nothing to break the sense of his presence and adequacy.

And this will bid my fears cow down. So much in terms of principle. Now, in terms of actual practice, David recognizes a twofold activity proceeding within the experience of such fellowship, both of which are necessary in the maintenance of faith and in the conquest of fear, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

And he got the picture. Please don't lose it. The one thing is to be with God in fellowship.

With God in fellowship, two things must go on. One, the first activity needs to be a prolonged contemplation of his person, to behold the beauty of the Lord. Or the NIV is still better here, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

See, what David had discovered was this, the more you come to know God, the more are you able and the better are you able to conquer your fears. So the thing to do is this, to find a place in life where you can focus the gaze of your soul upon God so that your thoughts and your imaginations are filled, saturated, overflowing with truth about God. Some of us carry all sorts of facts and figures with us into every day.

In many cases, they're necessary for our manner of life. And I'm not saying that is wrong. But my friend, I'll tell you one thing you need to carry with you into 1981.

It's the knowledge of the truth about God. And if you go without this, you will wilt and your faith will wither and it'll come under the biting frost. It will make you look like a believer that was rather than a believer that is.

And gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. Really, the thought behind that word beauty is the thought of worthiness. Worthiness, not so much aesthetic beauty, even though the Bible speaks of the beauty of

holiness.

But the thought is of the worthiness of God in all his attributes, in his omnipotence and omniscience and so forth, in his wisdom, unspeakable. Yes, but also in his moral attributes, his righteousness, his justice, his holiness, and in his love and in his compassion and in his long suffering. My friend, how full is your mind of God? And you expect your faith to linger and live and grow and develop and face the storms of life.

My friend, it just cannot happen unless you fill your mind with the truth about God. One thing have I asked of the Lord and I will seek after it, says David. I've asked him to give it to me and I'm going to do everything I can to get it.

And that's the first active aspect of fellowship. A prolonged and constant contemplation of the person of God in all the glory of his manifold attributes, as revealed in his word written and in the word incarnate, dwell upon God. We can be full of this world's philosophies.

We can be full of these isms and notions that come from here and there and everywhere. And our minds can be empty of the things that really matter, that foster faith. I guess this is one reason why our forefathers were so strong in faith.

They took time to think of God. I think of some of our hymns. I was contemplating, I was dreaming and meditating this week upon some of these great hymns of the past.

Let me just quote one to you, but I think it's symbolic and an illustration of the kind of thing I mean. Think of F. W. Faber's great hymn, My God, how wonderful thou art, thy majesty how bright, how beautiful thy mercy seat in depths of burning light. And then he moves to another thought of God.

How dread are thine eternal years, the eternity of God, O everlasting Lord, thine endless, sorry, thy prostrate spirits day and night incessantly adored. And then he returns again. How wonderful, how beautiful the sight of thee must be, thine endless wisdom, boundless power and awful majesty.

And then let me quote just this last verse. Father of Jesus, love's reward, what rapture will it be? Prostrate before thy throne to lie and gaze and gaze on thee. One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after.

Fellowship with him, fellowship in which we contemplate the being and the person of God, all glorious, all gracious, all mighty, all wise, and so much else. The second activity needed to be a must needs be a progressive comprehension of God's will. To inquire in his temple.

Now whilst involved in the contemplation of God and of the array of his attributes, all of which together diffuse glory, we must learn to ask the vital questions of him, to inquire. You see, the real place to know God is in the attitude of worship. Some of us try to deal with God on an academic basis.

If I may give expression to something that makes me shudder, I will do it. I have a fear of this purely academic attitude to God that you may have in a Bible college or in a theological college, with all the good intentions, where God is virtually analyzed and scrutinized as if he were under a microscope. I say to you, if you are to know God and really have fellowship with him, and surely every student involved in training for Christian work needs something of this, you've got to get beyond the purely academic into this attitude of worship.

And when you're in the attitude of worship, you can ask things that the academician will never ask, or rarely so. The man who asks great things of God, the man who seeks to know God's will and comes to know it, is the man who lies prostrate at his feet, and the man who worships. So you see, you can have theologians who are full of knowledge, ostensibly, about God.

They don't know very much of what it means to ask things of God. There have stood in this pulpit since I am here, men of the highest academic distinction in the evangelical world, and they've not been able to lead us in prayer. And they've wanted time to prepare, and they needed warning that they were going to be asked to pray.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there's something wrong here. And it would be as wrong in you, believers, as in him, or in me. When you feast your soul upon the person of God, here you can inquire.

Inquire what? Whatever is necessary to know to do his will. That's where he talks. That's where he communicates.

That's where he floods your soul with faith, and hope, and joy, and love. That's where he shows you your will, and gives you his commission, and sends you forth. You may go in and out and find pasture.

In that attitude, the contemplation of his Lord's person, is seeking to know what he has to say. You know, this is exactly what we have in the New Testament, too. I am reminded, for example, just one illustration.

I've no time to enlarge upon this. Paul in Philippians 3. He's been spending an awful lot of time in assessing, meditating upon the virtues and the deserts of his Lord Jesus Christ, and he comes to the conclusion, he says, I count all things but loss, but refuse, but dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. See, he's been assessing things.

Ah, yes. And then you remember where he comes to. He comes to a point where, moving out of that fellowship, he says, this one thing I do.

Paul, you're going to be a bit of a bigot now. What are you going to leave behind? Everything, he says, but this. What is the one thing you're going to do? This.

I can't profess already, he says, to have fully grasped that for which Christ laid hold of me. But, he says, this one thing I do. Forgetting the things that are behind and pressing forth to the things that are before, I press toward the prize for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

This one thing I do. One thing is necessary, said Jesus. This one thing have I desired, said the Psalmist.

This one thing I do, says Paul. Men and women, it's good to see you in Knox in this cold morning. Let me ask you, are you men and women of one thing? No, the only alternative is to be men and women of no thing.

I conclude with this. Alexander McLaren, in his commentary on that passage from Philippians, to which I refer, Philippians 3, says this. The difference between the amateur and the artist is that the one pursues an art at intervals by spurts, and that the other makes it his wife's business.

There are a great many amateur Christians among us. Who pursue their Christian life by spurts and starts. If you want to be a Christian after God's heart, and unless you are, you are scarcely a Christian at all, you have to make it your business.

To give the same attention, the same concentration, the same unwavering energy to it which you do to your trade. The man of one book, the man of one idea, the man of one name is the formidable and the successful man according to the scriptures. People will call you a fanatic, never mind.

Better be a fanatic and get what you aim at, which is the highest thing imaginable, than be so broad that like a stream spreading itself over miles and miles of mud, there is no scour in it anywhere, no current, and therefore stagnation and death remain unmoved. Gather yourselves together, and amidst all the side issues and mirror aims, keep this in view as the aim to which all are to be subservient. That whether I eat or drink, or whether I, whatever I do, I may do all to the glory of God.

Let sorrow and joy, and trade and profession, and study and business, and house and wife and children, and all home joys, be the means by which you may become like the master who has died for this end, that we may become partakers of his holiness. One thing is necessary, said Jesus. One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, said David.

This one thing I do, says Paul. Join the fellowship of those in pursuit of this one thing, which comprehends within it everything that God has willed for you, and nothing else. Let us seal our vows, and meet the grace of God in Christ, through his word and at his table, with a responding chord of adoration and dedication.

That echoes the music of these testimonies of his saints. One thing I have sought. One thing I do.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for your word. We have our fears.

In the quietness of the sanctuary, we are oftentimes buoyed to challenge them and to laugh at them. But we want your grace to come with us into the outside world, and to face whatever comes our way, sickness, sorrow, loneliness, poverty. Demotion, many other things, to face them with yourself.

Oh, grant us such abiding fellowship, in which we may contemplate your person, and in so doing, learn to ask of you what is necessary to ask, and to be silent before the things that demand speechlessness. In Jesus' name, amen. As we come to the table of our Lord this morning, we're going to sing the hymn that is printed on the calendar.

It is one of the lovely...

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