

“Anxious about Nothing”

Who Needs the Past, Pt. 8

We’ve been looking at the book of Psalms during the summer – summer is over but we’ve got a couple of psalms left. And we’ve been trying to bring them to bear on what we’ve been calling “modern problems,” which, of course, if you can bring the Psalms - a 3,000-year-old book to bear on them, they’re not that modern, but we always like to flatter ourselves that our problems are worse than anyone else’s. I mean, every age has always felt that way. So I’m pandering to our arrogance and suggesting we do have modern problems, yet problems which have solutions that are very ancient.

Now with that said, let’s all together read our psalm this morning, **Psalm 27** in its entirety.

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?

2 When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.

3 Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

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.

5 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.

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.

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

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

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.

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

11 Teach me your way, O 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, breathing out violence.

13 I am still 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.

Now this psalm is all about fear, worry, anxiety, and how the Bible tells us to deal with it. Now when we look at the psalm, we're going to see a very refreshing realism, even though it's full of tremendous promises, because the realism is important. I am a big fan of realism. You will see that in the choice of films for our God at the Movies series this year. Some people say, "My, that's dark. I want to watch a movie to forget about the real world." Well, I like that too, but I also like truth, and truth is often dark in a fallen world.

Ernest Becker won the Pulitzer Prize for Non-Fiction in 1974 for his book, *The Denial of Death*. Ironically, he was awarded the prize two months *after* he had died. He had been diagnosed with colon cancer in 1972 and wrote this whole book on death while he was dying – kind of a Black Panther of the 1970's.

But Becker was a realist. Because Becker had seen the horrors of life up close. He served in the infantry during World War II and was on hand to liberate concentration camps. He knew how dark life could be. So that makes me put even more stock in this quote from his book: "I think that taking life seriously means something such as this: that whatever man does on this planet has to be done in the lived truth of the terror of creation, of the grotesque, of **the rumble of panic underneath everything**. Otherwise, it is false."

Now, Becker died way before this pandemic, but he could be writing for our moment. I've been saying for months that there seems to be a low rumble of anxiety running through everything these days. It's like this COVID pandemic is a third rail that – even when things look normal – it's cruising along beneath the surface and all it takes is a minor upset for it to spark into anxiety. Have you noticed that? Every-day life is tense, but add – what we used to would have considered a small – crisis and we feel overwhelmed.

I'm seeing it in marriages, parent-child relationships, finances, employment, what have you. Last Sunday I said goodbye to a faithful member of the congregation who is moving to another state due to his loss of work here. We had lunch a month ago to talk about his options and he said, "I know the Bible says to be anxious about nothing, but that's easier said than done." Well I agree completely! How on earth do we overcome anxiety? We all want to, but *how*?

Whenever I see a book or an article – and I see plenty - saying, "How to Overcome Worry" or "How to Overcome Anxiety," almost always what they essentially say is, "The things you're worried about may never happen. Why waste time worrying about things that may never happen? Instead, visualize a future that is satisfying and focus on that. Visualize that future. Don't sit around and visualize all the things that could go wrong."

But is that “taking life seriously?” Is that the way David does it in this Psalm? No. You know, for example, in **v. 10**, he says, “*Though my father and mother forsake me...*” Now there is no indication David’s mother and father had actually forsaken him. It says, “Though an entire army was encamped against me ...” He doesn’t say, “It *has* encamped against me ...” It says, “Even if it did...” What is David doing? He is doing the *opposite* of what the articles say. He is actually imagining the *worst* things that can happen. He is visualizing the *worst* things that can happen. Why? Because he wants to have a strategy of life, a strategy of dealing with fears and anxieties, that can stand up to anything.

He doesn’t listen to the advice that says, “Maybe none of these things will ever happen, so don’t think about them.” Oh no. As Ernest Becker says, any attitude toward life that minimizes the evil and terror of things is phony. Well, Becker would have been very happy with Psalm 27 – he was Jewish, I’m sure he read it. Embrace reality – don’t deny it.

David goes so far as to imagine the worst. The fierce realism of the Bible is seen right here. The Bible says you can have a way of dealing with anxiety and fear that assumes the worst things may and can happen, that your father and mother forsake you, that an army encamps against you. Think about it! Go ahead. It doesn’t matter, because you can use this on anything.

So what is that strategy? I’ll tell you, whatever it was, we ought to look at it because you know David had literal enemies, and they had real weapons. He did have times where people were *literally* after his life. Most of you, that’s probably not true. And therefore, if he was able to find a strategy that enabled *him* to deal with the fears of his life, don’t you think it ought to work for most of us? So let’s see what he says this great strategy is.

In **v.3** he shows the result, *Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.*” No matter what happens, I have confidence, I can handle it. But he tells us the secret in **v.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.*” Within this verse there are three verbs: to dwell, to gaze, and to seek. Those three are the key. So let’s take a look. How can you have a strategy that will enable you to face any of the anxieties, the stresses of life? I don’t know how you’re doing right now with this, but I know you can improve. Take a look.

First, Dwelling. “*One thing I ask of the Lord ... that I may **dwell** in the house of the Lord ...*” Now what does that mean? What does it mean to dwell in the house of the Lord? David is not thinking so much about a physical spot.

First of all, he couldn't dwell in the house of the Lord literally. You can't live in a temple. He wasn't asking for that. I mean the Levites could live in there – as servants of the Temple – but David wasn't a Levite and besides, *nobody* could live right there in the Holy of Holies - which is like God's master bedroom.

What David is actually asking for is to experience the unbroken presence of God, because the thing he is really after is the *face* of God. The face! "I want to gaze on your beauty. I want to be in your presence." The house of God or the temple of God was the place where God's *paniym* - which is the Hebrew word for "face" – God's presence dwelt. And what David says is, "I want to be always in your presence." What's that mean?

Now people always ask this question at this point: "Hold on, I thought God was present *everywhere!* All the time?" And that's a very valid question that I might better answer through an illustration. Ok, already this morning you have been in the presence of Adrienne (playing the guitar) and Lisa (playing the keyboard). I mean, you've already heard them playing and singing. You're in their presence. Of course. And *yet* nobody can say that you have met them unless after the service you walk up to them - what? - "face to face."

Because, you see, your face is the relational gate into your heart. From far away, you can't have a relationship. You actually have to come up face to face. And when you come up to somebody, you can't look at their kneecap or their shoulder. What are we always teaching our kids? "You've got to look people in the eye when they're talking to you." You have to look in their face if you want to have a personal interaction, because the face is the place where I see and hear you and the face is the place where you see and hear me. So you have to come face to face.

Which is what's killing me about these masks. The sacrifice is not the suffocation – I walk out of stores sometimes for the opposite of a smoke break, I need some oxygen! But the real annoyance is I feel disconnected from people. I feel like it's twice as difficult to communicate. Are you smiling? Are you frowning?

Now what's the point? Two weeks ago we said Psalm 19 says the heavens are telling of the glory of God. Psalm 19 says when you go out and see the stars, are you in God's presence? Sure! But the Bible insists you can't know God *personally* through nature. That's always true. You can tell something *about* the artist from their art, but you can't *know* them. You can be in the presence of Adrienne through her singing and playing – and it's great to be in her presence – but you don't have a *friendship* with her by 15 minutes of worship. You have to come up face to face.

If you want to have a *friendship* with Bill Gates, you don't stick your head in a PC say, "Bill? Are you in there, Bill?" To be in the presence of the handiwork, to be in the *general* presence of someone, is not the same thing as to have a personal relationship. And the Bible says, therefore, what David is after here is, "I don't want to know you distantly. I don't want to obey you in a general way. I don't want to have a kind of general inspirational belief in you. I want to know you personally and intimately. That's what I want."

That's the whole secret to a fearless life. Now why? Why? Why does verse 4 answer and explain verse 3? Why would verse 4 be the answer to fear? Here it is. When David says, "The one thing I want is to dwell in your house and gaze on your beauty and seek you in your temple," that's the secret right there. Let me put it this way, and then we'll unpack it. What David is saying is, "My fears are directly proportional to the vulnerability of the things that are my greatest joys. If the thing that is my greatest joy is God, I will live without fear. If my one thing...the thing I *most* want ...is God, I am safe. Because God is indestructible."

You see, when David says, "I'll be safe in your dwelling place ..." You see it in **v. 5**, "*For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle...*" David is not thinking physically. He isn't! He is not so stupid

as to think that these people who are after him with their real knives and their real swords, if he runs into the tabernacle, somehow if they come in after him in an Indiana Jones kind of scene, the ark of the covenant will melt all the bad guys. That's not what he is thinking.

What he is saying is, "I'm only safe, not when I'm physically inside the dwelling of the tabernacle or the temple. I'm only safe when You are the one thing I want most of all. Then I'm safe. Then I'm fearless." Let me show you how that works. While we're talking about ancient solutions to modern problems, let's revisit St. Augustine, the great 4th century African theologian of the church We talked about his epic *City of God* book a few months ago. Because of that, I was given a beautiful, big-old *Encyclopedia of Augustine through the Ages*. So you should plan on hearing his name a lot more!

But Saint Augustine had an amazingly relevant way to understand anxiety. Augustine said, "Here's where anxiety comes from. All of us have *good* things in our lives, and we love them, and we desire them. Good things! Parents and children are good things. A career is a good thing. Romance is a good thing. Sex is a good thing. All sorts of things are good things. We have lots of good things in our lives." But Augustine says, "When something which is finite becomes infinite..."

In other words, when the good things become the “one thing” we think we have to have in order to be happy, when the good things become the “one thing,” we gaze on them. We seek them. We gaze on their beauty. We adore them, and we believe we cannot receive life joyfully unless we have it. So when good things become “ultimate things,” when good desires become inordinate desires, desires that are disproportional-to-their-being, Augustine says that’s when anxiety comes.

Why? Because anxiety is like the smoke, and you can follow the smoke down to the fire. Here is the fire: Anxiety is always the result of the collapse of a false god. “When good things become ‘ultimate things,’ you see, when things that are good to have become things you *have* to have, when they become the central values of your life, that’s where anxiety comes from,” says Augustine, “because anxiety is always a sign of the collapse of a false god.”

Now let me tell you one of the reasons we squirm with this. Some of you may be eaten up with worry and anxiety right now, and you think this is unfair, because you’re worried about a person, or you’re worried about how you’re going to feed your family because of the finances. You’re worried about a lot of things, and they’re good things. There are a lot of valid concerns these days – of course!

But see, this is what’s so hard. The things that turn into little idols in our lives are *always* good things. They were created by God. They’re wonderful. That’s the reason they can slip into the center.

Let me put it this way. A little anxiety is inescapable. If you have any responsibilities, there will be a level of concern. There is a place where Paul says, “I have on me the daily anxiety of all the churches.” So a little anxiety shows you’re a caring person, but debilitating anxiety and devastating anxiety shows good things have become “ultimate things.” Now you’re gazing on their beauty and you’re seeking them above all. You think, “Unless I have that, I cannot be happy.” And that is what creates debilitating anxiety and fear.

So do you see what David is saying is, “God, if you’re my ‘one thing,’ if you’re the one thing I require, the one thing I ask for...to gaze on your beauty, to seek you in the temple...I’m fearless.” Because, see, anything but God and His will is subject to the shifting tides of time and life. Anything but God and His will is vulnerable. Nothing can take God away from you. And therefore you can be fearless. But anything else you set your heart on instead can be taken away. And when there’s a threat to it, you go to pieces.

Now David gives us a great example of this, “Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.” Now is there anything wrong with the love between parents and children? Of course not! God *invented* love between parents and children. God *commands* love between parents and children. And therefore, for you to want, for example, the love of your parents is something good. For you to want it very deeply is something good. Not only is it something very good; it’s something inevitable that you want it.

Yet what happens if your mother and father forsake you, which of course happens, does it not? What happens? There are people who I’ve talked to, who you’ve talked to - and maybe some of you are - who say, “My mother and father have forsaken me, and I will not be consoled. I will not! I will never forget what they did. I will never forget what they failed to do. I will *never* be okay. I will always feel worthless. I will always be unhappy!” And you just refuse to be consoled. What is that? A good thing - parental love - has become the “one thing,” and you’re gazing at its beauty, and you’re longing for it, and you’re seeking after it. You’re worshiping it in the temple.

And as a result, you will be anxious and fearful all of your life. Don’t you see? “If my father and mother forsake me, if my spouse forsakes me, if my career forsakes me, if romance forsakes me, if my looks

forsake me, the Lord will receive me. The *Lord* will receive me!” Unless you get that into your blood, unless you understand the reason we get anxious is because good things become “one things,” and they slide into the center...

You know, Augustine said some anxiety is actually a very helpful thing. It tells you a lot about yourself, because you can always follow your worries to those things which enslave you. You can always follow your worries. Anxiety is always the result of the collapse of a false god. So are you anxious today? Pull on that thread and see where those feelings lead. Only then can you deal with the root issue of your anxiety. Do you understand that? Unless you’re able to get this into your blood you’re going to live a fearful life.

So the question then is, How do we make sure God becomes our “one thing?” How do we do that? And I would say the text is actually telling us two ways. We’ve said there are three things in v.4, dwelling, gazing and seeking. Well, my outline is going to break down slightly because I think that *seeking* and *gazing* are actually two ways we *dwell* in the house. I think seeking and gazing is just a kind of breakdown of what it means to dwell in God’s house. So let me show you these two things. These are the two things you have to do in order to make God your “one thing.”

First of all – but second point on the outline - **you have to gaze on God’s beauty.** When David says, “I’ve come to the temple to gaze on your beauty,” do we think it means a literal vision, something he saw with his physical eyes? I doubt it. I’m not saying David, being a prophet and being a great king and so on, could *never* have had a vision, but I doubt very much that’s what he is talking about. There’s no indication it means every time he goes in he gets a vision of God. I don’t think so.

What does it mean to gaze on his beauty? This is what we’ve called intimacy with God. This is the difference between knowing *about* God and *knowing* God. This is the difference between knowing *that* God is holy and loving and *experiencing* God’s holiness and His love. Let me go back to Saint Augustine, he lays out a three fold plan for meditating on God – what he called “the soul’s ascent into God.”

He says there are three parts: *retentio*, *contemplatio*, and *dilectio*. My son is taking Latin in school so I’m quizzing him on all this after church! First, *retentio* means the discovery of the truths of Scripture and holding them centrally in the mind. This means study and concentration on a passage of Scripture to simply understand it. *Retentio* is the word for retain. Here’s a biblical truth and you see it, and you learn it, and you know it.

But Augustine stays, “Ah, but you don’t stop there. Oh no! You mustn’t stop there. Once you get that truth, you see God is holy, you see God is wise, you don’t just close your book. You don’t close your notebook and say, ‘Ah, now I know that! I know another attribute of God. Check!’ Oh no! Now, secondly, you move from *retentio* to *contemplatio*, which means you contemplate or you look at God through the truth. *Contemplatio* means to consider how the truths of scripture apply to your existence.

That means you start to ask yourself questions. “What does this verse tell me about God? What difference should knowing that make in how I live my life? How I treat people; friends, enemies and strangers? What wrong behaviors, harmful emotions and false attitudes emerge when I forget God is like this?” This is about leaning to see God – to gaze on his beauty – as Paul says, not with the eyes of your head, but “the eyes of your heart”.

But then, because the living Holy Spirit is within you, sometimes you will move into the third phase. Third, *dilectio* means delighting and relishing in the God you are looking at. You begin to actually praise and confess and aspire toward God on the basis of the digested and meditated truth. We can’t really control this. It’s like the wind – we can’t make the wind blow, but if we do what we can to get our sails adjusted and the boat in proper shape, then when we *do* catch the wind...Oh boy, what a thrill! What joy! What delight! What does “delectable” mean? “Mouthwatering, appetizing”, that’s *dilectio*.

Do you look at God like a fat kid looks at cake? Now don't look at me like, "What is all this?" Come on, we all do this with all kinds of things *except* with God. We all gaze at the beauty of these good things that have become "one things." You know what it means to gaze on the beauty of something. You turn it over in your imagination, the thing you want. It may be a career. It may be a new car. It may be a new house. It may be a particular person, and you think what life will be like if you get it. You gaze on the beauty of it.

See? You fill your mind with it. You taste it. You imagine it as you go to sleep at night – it relaxes you. We do it with everything else *but* God. Now do it with Him! That's the only way to make the true one thing your "one thing." Gaze on God's beauty. Do you know how to do that? Do you take time to do that? David says unless you do that, you'll not be dwelling in God's house and you'll have a fearful life.

But then next, Seek. He doesn't just say, "I want to gaze on your beauty," but, "I want to seek him." **V.8**, "*My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek.*" Now the word "seek" is a very, very specific Hebrew word. It was a military term that meant to consult with an oracle before going into battle. "Here are our battle plans, but before we attack, is God in this?" So what it means is, David wants to obey. He wants to find out God's will, and he wants to submit to it.

Boy, this is extremely important. These are the two parts of what it really means to be a Christian. These are the two parts of true religion: gazing on the beauty and seeking God's will. If you only seek God's will to obey, to find out what He teaches and just obey it day in and day out, if that's all you do without gazing on the beauty, it will be all phariseeism and legalism – you'll be mean. On the other hand, if you just try to gaze on His beauty, just have this great emotional experience, but you don't want to find out God's will and do daily obedience, well, it won't work either – you'll be wicked. And I'll show you why.

Just think of marriage. A good marriage is a wonderful thing because you can fall in each other's arms every so often. You see, you gaze on each other's beauty. You have intimate connection (wink-wink, nudge-nudge, say no more!) but you can't walk around all the time in each other's arms. There's a life to live. You have to go to work and so on.

And let me tell you what 95 percent of marriage is – young people pay attention - finding out how to serve the other person and how to do *for* them. Because if you want to experience the other person's love and yet when they say, "Hey, would you do this and this and this for me?" and you say, "Oh no. That's too inconvenient. I don't like to do that," if you live like a selfish person, if you don't learn what the other person's wishes are, if you don't *serve* that other person in the *little* things day in and day out, it will be the end of intimacy.

Don't you see? You can't just live selfishly. You can't just walk around and do anything you want, not trying to find out how to serve that person, not making sacrifices for that person, not obeying the needs and the wishes of that person and then expect to just jump in bed and have a wonderful, wonderful time of gazing on her beauty or his beauty. If you think that's going to work, it doesn't! It never works!

A human being is not a computer. You don't just enter a password and it springs to life. It takes time to boot it up. In a relationship if you want intimacy, if you want to gaze on the beauty of the other person, if you want to commune with that person in love, you also have to find out that person's will and do it. And they have to be doing the same to you. That's just the way it works!

What does that mean when it comes to God? I'll tell you what this means. A lot of people have wanted desperately to gaze on God's beauty and get these experiences I'm talking about. We're all about the experience of spirituality. A lot of us go to church just seeking that. Some people almost get a high during the worship service. That's good. That's fine, but I'll tell you this. To gaze on God's beauty without seeking God's will can never work. You want to gaze on God's beauty? There's a way to do that.

There is a story that appears in three of the gospels about a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. He knew Jesus was going to come by on a certain road, so he sat down beside it and waited. And when he heard Jesus was coming, he cried out, "Lord, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and healed him – he could see. Do you want to see God? Do you want to gaze on His beauty? Do you want to have the sense of love and joy and peace that comes from a transcendent spiritual experience? Of course you want that. Well, how do you get it? You don't get it by running around trying to get it. You plant your butt on the road that Jesus inevitably will come down, and that road is the road of obedience.

There are disciplines to seeking his will. You read the Bible. You pray. You meditate. You participate in the ordinances of the church. Those are the inner disciplines. Then you have the outer disciplines. Be simple in your lifestyle instead of materialistic. Be chaste in your lifestyle instead of impure. Be forgiving in your lifestyle instead of bitter. Have a servant heart instead of an ambitious and selfish heart. These are disciplines. These are the places where Jesus has been known to show up for centuries. Obey him, seek him, and you'll gaze on his beauty. Otherwise, no.

Okay, you want to dwell in God's house? There's the discipline of gazing on his beauty, and there's the discipline of seeking his will. But for some of you, this still seems pretty esoteric. You're still saying, "I need something more tangible. I have to seek God in His temple, I get it, but what do I *do*? I can't fly to Israel right now anyway." I know, and it wouldn't matter, because the temple's been torn down since AD 70. I've seen the rubble.

Ok, so what is His temple? We talked about this at length in the message about Wisdom from Psalm 14. But it says in John 2, Jesus Christ looked at the temple, and he said to the religious leaders, "Tear this temple down, and I will build it up again in three days." They all looked at him and said, "You're crazy! It took 40 years to build this temple. You're going to build it up in three days?" And the text tells us he was referring to himself. Jesus is the temple. Now let me explain what I mean.

David gazed at the beauty of God. Now remember we said Augustine says the way you gaze on God is you take certain truths and you look at God *through* the truths. You look at God *through* them. So when we're told David gazed on the beauty of God at the temple, what did that mean? We said he probably didn't have a vision. It means he went and he watched the temple ritual, and he saw the beauty of God through it. How did that happen?

Well, like this. You know what happened in the temple ritual? Animals were constantly getting slaughtered on the block and sacrificed up to God. And David saw the beauty of the Lord, he gazed on the beauty of the Lord, through the sacrifices. How could that happen? Well, when he saw the animals being slain, he saw the beauty of God's justice and holiness. He said, "Here is a God who requires sin be *paid* for. Here is a God who is so good and so holy, He cannot discount humanity's sin. Here's a God who can't overlook it. Here's a God who must deal with evil. What a good God. What a just God. What a holy God."

But on the other hand, when he looked at the sacrifices, he also saw a merciful God. "Here's a God who wants to deal with our sins so we can still approach Him. Here's a God who wants to forgive us our sins. Here's a God who wants to find us a way to Himself." Now here's the point. If David was able to gaze at the beauty of God through the tabernacle and the temple worship, how much more of the beauty of God will we see if we gaze at God through the face of Jesus?

You see, when we look at God today, we don't have to look at Him through a bull being slaughtered on the altar. We see the face of a human being, the most loving human being ever, dying for us, suffocating on the cross, the blood and the sweat flowing down on his face, looking at us and saying, "You don't know what you're doing. I've been forsaken for you."

Now let me tell you something. If David saw so much of the beauty of God in the *temple*, so much of the beauty of God that it turned him into a great heart so that he could handle an army, how much more of the beauty of God do you think you and I can see in light of the gospel? When I was a younger, dumber Christian, I used to buy into this vein of anti-Catholicism that said, you shouldn't have a crucifix, because "*Our Jesus is no longer dead! Our cross is empty!*"

Well, that's not only stupid, it's terribly unbiblical. Paul himself says, (**1 Corinthians 2:2**), "*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*" I have a painting of the crucifixion hanging in my office. I love to gaze at it. I do it all the time. I find it beautiful. I find it the *definition* of beauty.

That's what we look at. Gaze on Jesus. Look at him. Look at what he is doing. Look at him dying for you. Gaze on the beauty of God. If the beauty *David* saw could turn him into someone who could handle an army, what do you think it's going to turn *you* into? How much *more* of the beauty of God can we see? How much *more* are we going to be able to look at God and say, "You're my 'one thing.' I see your beauty. It fills me up so I'm afraid of nothing anymore. I have the only thing I need?"

Listen, this is what it means to seek God. You have to seek the Father - you have to gaze at His beauty - through Jesus. It says in **John 1:12**, "*Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*" So if you want God, if you want all the things we're talking about, it's not an abstract thing. It's not a technique. You have to go to God through Jesus. That's how you gaze on his beauty.

Now, last thing. There are a number of you who are saying, "Okay, this is very interesting. In fact, this is very moving. This is very powerful, but I'm scared right now about something that's going to happen on Thursday. That's four days away. What do I do till then? I've got a job interview. I've got a court hearing. This payment is due. What's gazing got to do with that?"

Listen, it's true the Bible gives you this tremendous solution to anxiety. It says learn to gaze on God's beauty and seek Him in His temple. And eventually you develop a habit of the heart. You develop a whole orientation toward God. And of course that's not something that happens really quickly. So the fact of the matter is I *can't* give you something that really quickly will overcome all of your anxiety between now and Thursday. The books in the bookstores do. The magazines in the grocery store do.

They give you those little behavior modification grids, and they give you these little rational motive techniques on thought control. They teach you how to turn away from the negative thoughts and put on the positive thoughts. Let me tell you something. The Bible is giving you an antidote to anxiety too, but it's not a patch. It's not a Band-Aid. It's regeneration. It's a new heart, a new way of life, a new way of doing everything.

So I admit this is something that takes a long time to develop. This is *not* a quick fix, but you can start right now. You know, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," right? You know that cliché? Okay, let's use it. Do you know what the first step is? Today you can say, "One thing. Finally, Lord God, I'm going to make you the 'one thing.' The ultimate thing. I'm going to make you my highest priority. I today determine that gazing on your beauty and seeking you is center to my being. And it may not look like it yet to the outside observer. It certainly won't look like it to You who know my heart better than I do myself. I may not even believe it empirically yet, but I *confess* it. I confess with my mouth that Jesus is the Lord of my life – the ruler, the boss, the supreme being and my all in all."

Gazing on the beauty of the Lord starts with confession before it can ever become a discipline. And you might even start by praying, "Lord make me

want to want that." That's ok, too. But start today. Because you need this. And whatever has got you anxious about Thursday...it won't be the last. And it won't even be the worst. This is the only thing that can assure your foundation, no matter what.

Quick story and we'll finish: Have you ever heard of Jim Elliott? In 1952, he and six other missionaries decided they were going to go into the jungles of Ecuador and make contact with a very primitive tribe with the goal of securing an invitation to live with them so they could learn their language, create a written version of their language, introduce them to literacy, with the ultimate hope of producing a copy of the Bible in their own tribal language. It's all told in a book by his wife Elizabeth Elliott called *Through the Gates of Splendor*.

But step one was they had to make contact with what was a very isolated tribe that was known for hostility to outsiders. They knew it was dangerous, so the night before they were to contact these natives – the Huaorani - they sat around a table, and they sang this hymn together.

We rest on Thee, Our shield and our defender!
We go not forth alone against the foe;
Strong in Thy strength, Safe in Thy keeping tender
We rest on Thee, And in Thy name we go.

The next day they were all speared to death by the Huaorani. The night before they sang, “Strong in Thy strength and safe in Thy keeping.” The next day they were murdered. So does it not work? Of course it works. Because in that same hymn they also sang...

Jesus our righteousness, Our sure foundation,
Our Prince of glory, And our King of love.

You see, if the one thing that’s non-negotiable in your life, if the one thing you really want, if the one thing you really need, if your “sure foundation” is to gaze on the beauty of God, you’re absolutely safe, because the worst thing that could happen to you is a spear gets thrown through your heart - which is exactly what happened - in which case you gaze on the beauty of the Lord in a way you never have before.

I don’t know what’s coming up on Thursday. There’s so much about the future we don’t know right now – which is an insane statement *anyway* if you think about it! I don’t know what you’re anxious about. But I know the answer. I know where you can find hope. Don’t you see it’s your only hope? Come and get it. Dwell. Gaze. Seek.

Let’s pray...