

Behold the Face**COMMUNION**

August 2, 2026

Psalm 17:1-7 and 15

¹ Listen to what's right, Lord; pay attention to my cry! Listen closely to my prayer; it's spoken by lips that don't lie! ² My justice comes from you; let your eyes see what is right! ³ You have examined my heart, testing me at night. You've looked me over closely, but haven't found anything wrong. My mouth doesn't sin. ⁴ But these other people's deeds? I have avoided such violent ways by the command from your lips. ⁵ My steps are set firmly on your paths; my feet haven't slipped. ⁶ I cry out to you because you answer me. So tilt your ears toward me now — listen to what I'm saying! ⁷ Manifest your faithful love in amazing ways because you are the one who saves those who take refuge in you, saving them from their attackers by your strong hand... ¹⁵ But me? I will see your face in righteousness; when I awake, I will be filled full by seeing your image.



Today we begin a three-week mini-series in the Psalms called “Praise Break.” The series centers on the idea that the God we worship is with us every step of the way – even in the busyness of summer! Because God is with us always, this series invites us to consider how we might worship God always. This Sunday, in Psalm 17 and in Genesis 32, we hone in on seeing or being present to the face of God. Today’s message is called “Behold the Face.” This title begs a question: What does it mean for us to behold the face of God? We began to wrestle with this question during the Passing of the Peace, when I asked you to share about a time when you’ve seen the face of God in another person. Seeing the actual face of God is another story, isn’t it? Sometimes we think that it might be a terrifying experience to see God’s face. Other times maybe it would be comforting or reassuring, right?



Our first passage, from Psalm 17, is all about seeking God's face. In the Psalm, David very intentionally seeks God's face. As followers of Christ, this is something that we too should do on a regular basis. Whether through prayer or through fasting or through reading and meditating on scripture, we should regularly seek to be in God's holy presence and to offer the Lord our God our worship when we are able to be in God's presence. In our second passage, from Genesis 32, Jacob is fully present to God, who comes and wrestles with him in the form of a "man." Sometimes when we see God's face, we too will wrestle with God. For me this has been especially true when God has challenged me to be present to someone who I find hard to be around or difficult to help. Maybe this is true for you too. As we prepare to dive into these ideas and themes this morning, let us pray...

Lord God, we so want to drink from your presence. We desire to feast on your love. This is the banquet we've been dreaming of. You gather us all because no one is unworthy, no one is the "greatest" or the "least." When we are faithful, you multiply what we offer, so that multitudes may feast. We hunger and thirst for your spirit. We open ourselves to your grace. With open hearts, may the mercy, grace, and love that you offer flow into us. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

Please turn with me to Psalm 17. This psalm of David expresses a cry for justice and trusts in God's faithful presence, affirming that God hears and responds to the needs of the oppressed. In a similar way, last week in Romans 8, we affirmed that the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ intercede for us, bringing our pleas and our case before God with mercy and grace, in alignment with God's will, so that God can respond to our needs. When God responds to our needs, whether through our prayers or through the intercessions of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, we offer our thanksgiving and praise. This should be our natural response.

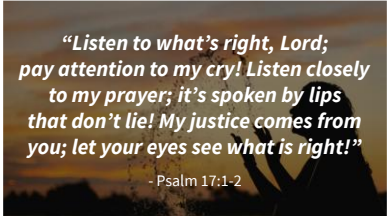
Sometimes we do this spontaneously. For example, when a potentially a really bad situation turns out much better than expected, we might lift up a “Praise Jesus!” Or when we take in the beauty of something in the created world – snow-capped mountains or the rolling waves of the ocean or the vastness of the stars at night – we might proclaim some words of praise and thanksgiving to worship the creator of our world. And maybe, like me you’ve uttered a partly serious “Thank God!” when you finally found a parking place after turning laps in the Walmart parking lot.

All joking aside, my friends, yes, we are capable of offering our praise and worship to the Lord our God outside of the Sunday morning time slot. But it is a process to get to that point. So, we must be willing to make some intentional efforts if we want to see the praise and worship of God becoming a more regular part of our day to day lives. I believe that it is well worth the effort. To regularly offer God our praise and worship is one of the fruits of growing deeper in our love of God and neighbor. Put another way, our regular praise and worship of God is one way that we express this love. Step one is becoming aware of God’s love and grace at work in our lives and in our world. Step two is learning how to offer our praise and thanksgiving for those instances when God’s love and grace is at work. We can cultivate this awareness of God’s presence. And if we are intentional about it, we can learn to allow this to lead to spontaneous praise and worship.

The first question, then, is this: How do we cultivate this awareness? The easy or maybe expected answer is to become more spiritual – tune out the world, focus on the unseen things of God, look beyond the geographical or vocational or relational to seek the face of God. Then we will be able to truly praise and worship God. Yes, there is a time to be still and to seek to know God better. But this is not the advice that we find in Psalm 17.

As we dive into the Psalm, notice how physical it is. The lips speak and the feet walk. The heart passes the test of faithfulness in action. There is a kinetic energy in the Psalm. There is movement and action and effort in the search for the face of God. For most of us, when we are intentionally trying to seek the face of God, it is because we are trying to discern God's will or direction for our lives. We are at a crossroads, so to speak. When we find ourselves at this point, we often do not get a clear answer. The psalmist's advice to us? Keep moving. Pick a direction and get moving. If it isn't working, make a change. Try another direction. This has been David's experience at times in his life.

Throughout his life, as his life meandered, as successes and failures came and went for David, whether experiencing blessings or challenges, he always sought God's face. Like a river that meanders until it finds its true path, course corrections helped David as he moved forward, always seeking God's face, always wanting to be in God's presence. The positive forward motion led David to a place in his faith where he could praise God for the blessings just as easily as he could trust God in the challenging times. Turning to verses 1 and 2, we see that David is in a challenging time. Here we read, *"Listen to what's right, Lord; pay attention to my cry! Listen closely to my prayer; it's spoken by lips that don't lie! My justice comes from you; let your eyes see what is right!"*



*"Listen to what's right, Lord;
pay attention to my cry! Listen closely
to my prayer; it's spoken by lips
that don't lie! My justice comes from
you; let your eyes see what is right!"*

- Psalm 17:1-2

With his lips, David is expressing his need for God to hear his prayer, to pay attention to his needs, to respond with justice to the desires of David's honest and truthful heart. I imagine David lifting hands towards heaven as he tried to reach out to God. Can you see that as he speaks these words to the Lord? I can because I have done this. And because David trusts God, the prayers will continue. David will continue to pray these prayers because he believes that God will keep listening and looking and that God will respond.

In the next verse, David backs up these words of prayer with some evidence. God has closely examined his heart, and God has found David's heart to be good and true and right. His mouth does not sin. Moving to verse 4, David reminds God – and maybe himself – of his faithfulness: *“My steps are set firmly on your paths; my feet haven't slipped.”* David is walking closely with his God, walking in the light of God's love, trusting in God's presence as God walks with David. This walk with God did not begin when trouble started brewing. No, this is David's walk day in and day out. This is, again, why David can praise God in the highs and the lows – and in everything in between. There is a confidence and an assurance found in David's faith.

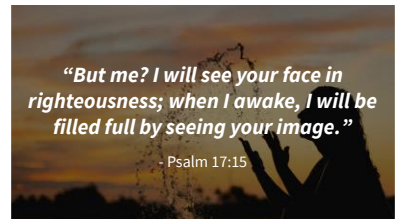
This trust and assurance pour out of verses 6 and 7. David trusts that God will respond because *“you listen to me.”* David knows God as the one who listens. Past experience builds current trust. God has responded again and again to David's prayers in the past, so God will respond now. David feels assured of God's *“faithful love”* because again and again God has saved David, the one who takes refuge in God over and over. David knows that God's love is faithful. Past experience builds current assurance.

This is a key lesson for us. If we want to have lips and hearts that are closely connected to God – offering praise and worship regularly, lifting prayers and walking daily with the Lord – we cannot wait until things are either really good or really bad. The really good and the really bad almost force us to turn to God. When we are so overjoyed or when we are so overwhelmed, turning to God is almost natural. In these extremes, thanking God for strength or comfort or seeking God's peace or rescue is the norm. The challenge for us is to be like David – to seek God and to behold God's face all the time, in all of life.



Like David, we are called to go and to seek, to move forward. We are called to do so when we feel threatened and when we feel secure and when we feel some of both. We are called to go and to seek God's face when we feel satisfied and when we feel unsettled – and everywhere else in between. Praise and worship should come from many different places within us. This is our side of the equation. We are the ones who offer praise and worship to God. The next question then is this: How do we encounter or behold the face of God?

We find our answer in verse 15. But first, how do we get there? In verses 8-14 David reveals why he is praying. He speaks of his enemies, of those who are seeking his downfall. They are wicked and seek to fill their own stomachs. They speak arrogantly and make evil plans. This is what David needs God to hear about, to listen to, and to respond to. In verse 15, David helps us to know how to seek or behold the face of God. Here is David's way: *"But me? I will see your face in righteousness; when I awake, I will be filled full by seeing your image."*



Righteousness is a relational concept. David's understanding here is this: He will behold God's face as he honors his relationships with God and with his fellow human beings. Righteousness is about being faithful and just and true in our relationships, first of all with God, and then with one another and with those around us. We see God as we honor and keep these relationships in good standing. This is also a New Testament concept. Jesus told us that when we serve others, we serve him. When we feed or clothe or comfort or care for or encourage others, we do so to Jesus. When we see others as Jesus saw them – especially the ones that society prefers not to see – then we see Jesus. We behold the face of God when we live in righteous relationships and when we participate in acts of righteousness. And this, my friends, is well worth the effort. We see the outcome or the "why" in the last part of verse 15.

“When I awake, I will be filled full by seeing your image.” Where? Everywhere? David is saying, because I live in right relationship with God and with my fellow human beings, each day I will be filled with God’s presence, filled with God’s love and grace. Each day we too can be filled with God’s presence as we behold the face of God. This is possible everywhere. We can see God in the created world and in the ways that God’s grace and love touch our lives and our world. When we are living in a right and just and good relationship with God, then God seems to be everywhere. We can see the face of God as we look in the mirror, getting ready for the day ahead. We can see God’s face in our loved ones and in the stranger that we meet. Yes, when we are living in a right and just and good relationship with one another, we see God everywhere and in everyone.

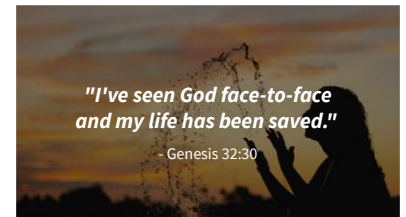


This is the call, this is the goal, this is God’s good plan and purpose for our lives – to see God, to behold God’s face in all things and in all ways. This is not always an easy place to get to, though. Here is the good news, my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Even when we are not seeking God, even when we are not striving to behold the face of God in our lives or in our world, God is seeking us, God is working to be seen and known. For just a brief illustration of this, please turn with me to Genesis 32. We do so with a little background and context first.

You might recall that Jacob and Esau had a falling out. Jacob stole Esau’s birth rite and fled in terror. Isaac sent Jacob back to the ancestral homelands, where he would be safe. Years pass. Jacob marries Leah and then Rachel. He has children with these two women and with both of their servant girls – twelve children in all, fourteen years later. Jacob’s flocks and herds grow, as does the number of his servants. Soon he is overcrowding the place he now calls home. It is about then that God invites Jacob to move back home, back to Canaan. As Jacob and his entire household begin to draw near, his worry and anxiety begin to escalate.

As Jacob draws even closer, he receives a report: Esau and 400 soldiers are approaching. The wheeler and dealer, the schemer and trick player, comes up with a plan. That night he helps everything and everyone across the river and then he retreats back to the other side. He recrosses the Jabbok - alone. In his time alone, God comes to Jacob. In his present situation, at this time of trial, Jacob was probably praying, seeking, searching. We would've been if we were in his place. That's our default. Things get bad: pray! So, perhaps God's coming was a response to Jacob's prayers, seeking, and searching. The wheeler and dealer and schemer can't solve his present situation. Esau is approaching with a small army.

God - the "*man*" in the passage - and Jacob wrestle long into the night. Again and again, Jacob refuses to give in, refuses to let go of this "man." Like David, there is a sense that God will be there. Jacob has experienced enough of God's guidance and direction to hold some belief that maybe this is God that is wrestling with him. Well, in the end, Jacob is willing to let go - on one condition. God must bless him. Jacob is renamed "Israel" - the one who struggles with God. After this blessing, Jacob says to himself, "*I've seen God face-to-face and my life has been saved.*" Like we have experienced when we have seen or beheld God's face, Jacob was reassured and was able to move forward in faith and in trust.



Later, as the story unfolds in chapter 33, Jacob meets Esau. Jacob says to his brother, "*Seeing your face is like seeing God's face, since you've accepted me so warmly.*" Jacob and Esau saw God's face in each other's face. They sought to live in right relationship with one another, offering grace and forgiveness and kindness and love to one another. This is possible for you and for me. As it began with Jacob, so too can it be for you and for me. God desires to work in our lives as well, to transform and redeem us, to lead us to live as we are created to live. When we open ourselves up to God's power, God will wrestle with parts of who we are.

Like Jacob, God will transform you and me, working off those rough edges as God wrestles with the human part of us – the pride, the selfishness, the greed, the need to be in control. And as we increasingly are conformed to God’s likeness, we will see others more and more through the eyes of God. That coworker with whom we struggle, the neighbor with whom we clash, that person in need who is knocking on our door again, that adversary who wants to oppress or take advantage of us – in each we begin to see or behold the face of God.



As we seek the face of God and as we begin to behold the face of God in those we meet as we set about the work to which we are called as disciples of Jesus Christ, our faith grows and deepens. With stronger and stronger faith, we come to see or behold the face of God everywhere and in everyone. And soon, my friends, we come to expect to encounter God all the time and in all people. God is there. As we see God everywhere and in everyone, we will become people who offer our praise and thanksgiving all of the time, in the high and in the lows and everywhere in between – because God is there in all of these times and places. May it be so for you and for me this week. Alleluia and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. We can see God’s face in the mirror, in our coworkers or classmates, in our adversaries seeking to harm us. How can striving to see God in all of these faces (and more) lead to growth in your faith and in how you live out your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. Righteousness is being faithful in our relationships – to God and to one another. In which of your relationships do you need the Spirit’s guidance? Pray!
- 3) *Study*. Read Psalm 17:8-12. Who comes to mind in your life as you read these words? Then read 17:9-14. How can these words become your prayer this week?