His heart faints for fear and all his courage evaporates. He remembers better days when he would visit the “house of the LORD,” and be full of faith and hope.

But now David is in a foxhole, his enemies attacking from all sides; and as we’ve heard, there are no atheists in foxholes. So, it comes as no surprise that David calls for air support from the Lord of the air, whom he calls his “light” and “salvation” (v. 1). This psalm is for anyone who feels they are in a foxhole now, or felt so in the past, or might find themselves in a hole in the future.

Now, there are foxholes and there are *foxholes*. Troubles and sorrows differ from day to day from person to person. When we are seeking shelter, any bunker, bomb shelter, safe harbor, or foxhole will do. But remember that all foxholes are not created equal. Some seek relief in drugs or a bottle, with harmful results. Some seek security through violence or crime, which usually leads to stiff penalties. The only true shelter comes from God who is our light and our salvation. With God, we have nothing to fear. We are as safe as a fox in a hole.

Literal foxholes, where real foxes with bushy tails live, are small. A human could never fit into a real foxhole. Typically, they are only 4 inches or so in diameter. You find them near the base of a tree or along the footings of a wall. The den of a fox ranges from 3- to 8-feet deep and might have multiple entrances. The tunnel could be up to 50 feet long. Foxes rarely sleep in their foxholes. Rather, they store food there, raise their young, or duck into their hole to avoid a bigger predator. For foxes, the hole is a comfort.

But David does not feel comfortable in his foxhole. He feels hemmed in. He is in a tight place, with very little wiggle room. He is uncertain about the future, which sounds a lot like us. Generally, we have a lot of fears. We fear to walk alone at night down dark alleys in big cities. We fear snakes and spiders. We fear the things that go “bump” in the night. We fear lightning storms. We fear mass shootings, climate change, identity theft, cancer, threats to our children, having enough money to retire, and going to the dentist. Lately, we fear the price of gas, eggs, and butter. What we may fear even more is facing all of this without God.

This is precisely David’s mood, although he does not always feel like this. In some of his psalms, David feels ill. In others, David is repentant and longing for forgiveness and a fresh start. In some, David is defiant and asking God to destroy his foes. In still others, David is quietly at peace and relaxed. And lastly, in some, David is cheerful and filled with praise. But not now. His foxhole feels too small for the trouble at hand. His God is big, but God is nowhere to be found right now, and David is feeling exposed and vulnerable.

“The main thing,” as Stephen Covey puts it, “is to keep the main thing the main thing.” David’s foxhole revelation is similar. David says the *one* thing he would “seek after” is “to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple” (v. 4). David knows he will be most happy *in the presence of God*, and most unhappy when away from God’s presence. David experienced both God’s presence and God’s absence during his lifetime. God’s absences often arose from David’s disobedience, those times David turned away from God. David had enough life experience to know that it was in his best interest to be close to God, to have God as his closest advisor and protector.

We know this, too, on an intuitive level; but perhaps contrary to the common wisdom, too often *we are atheists in a foxhole*, not really believing that God can in any real and meaningful way help us in our day of trouble. As one observer noted, “If the faithful truly and fully believe in a protective deity, why would they dive into a foxhole to protect themselves from the bullets whizzing by? [Because] a part of their brain knows darn well that if they do not protect themselves, the bullets will hardly discriminate between those who claim faith and those who reject it.”

So why do the faithful dive into a foxhole when the bullets fly? Because the faithful are not stupid. Even David sought a cave to hide in or a cleft in the mountains for safety. Why? “For [God] will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; [God] will conceal me under the cover of his tent; [God] will set me high on a rock” (v. 5). The main thing is to sense that God is near amid the danger, and to feel at peace again. The danger may take time to dissipate, but while he waits, when he feels God’s presence and peace, David will “sing and make melody,” he will make “shouts of joy” (v. 6). When rescued and safely in the “house of the LORD”, he will “gaze upon the beauty of the LORD” (v. 4).

Think of the house of the LORD as a kind of insurance against the evils of the world. In verse 5, David uses three metaphors to describe the full range of the coverage God offers: shelter “in the day of trouble,” concealment “under the cover of his tent,” and a refuge high atop a mountain. These images suggest safety from a torrential rainstorm, protection from a blistering sandstorm, and dry ground above the raging waters of a flood. David wants to be surrounded by God, protected on all side. As he says in Psalm 139: “You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me” (v.5).

The observant student will notice that this psalm is not about David at all; it is all about God. The Lord is cited 17 times (including pronouns) in 14 verses. The contrast is between the weakness, fear, pleadings and prayers of a faltering human being, and a powerful deity who can extract him from certain destruction. The contrast is between a person who wants more than anything to shed all his troubles and a God who offers him the safety of the divine presence. The contrast is between one person’s dark night of the soul and the One who is his “light and salvation.”

The psalm concludes with something we’ve known all along: God is our only true shelter in life’s storms. When life rains trouble down upon your heard, it does not make a bit of difference what size your foxhole is; it’s the God who is with you that matters. “Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!” (v. 14). God promises to be with you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you are my sufficiency and strength, my light, and my life, my all in all. I pray that when dark clouds of unknowing loom across my heart, that I would immediately call to mind the wonderful truth of Who You really are. May I rest in the wonderful security and eternal salvation I have in Christ, in Whose name I pray, Amen.

**Source:**

* Perry, Susan. “What Americans fear the most.” minnpost.com, October 31, 2014. Retrieved July 15, 2022.
* The story of Major Dabney as told by Sam J. Ervin Jr., Humor of a Country Lawyer (University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 83.

**Foxhole Faith**

Sunday, January 22, 2023 [Psalm 27:1, 4-9](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+27%3a1%2c+4-9&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Robert Lewis Dabney was a Presbyterian minister and a major in the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. He was a friend to General Stonewall Jackson and served as a chaplain to his troops. When he preached, Dabney always talked about predestination. He assured the soldiers that if they were predestined to die, there would be nothing they could do to avoid that Yankee Minié ball, but if they were predestined to live, there was nothing the Yankees could do to kill ’em. Therefore, they should be brave in the heat of battle. His words evidently had an impact, for Jackson’s men were known to hold their ground in the thick of a fight.

One day, when Major Dabney visited the front lines, a skirmish erupted between the boys in gray and blue. Soon, Yankee Minié balls were kicking up dust all around the major as he ran as fast as he could for a big old oak tree. He jumped behind the tree and landed on top of a Confederate private who’d already taken refuge there. The private was quick to remark, “Major Dabney, you don’t practice what you preach…you are always telling us that everything that is going to happen has already been planned and predestined by the Almighty and we can’t escape our predestinated fate, so for this reason we should be calm in battle. But when the bullets started flying, you forgot about that and resorted to free will, trying to save yourself by running and jumping behind this tree.”

Major Dabney then explained the more subtle differences to the young man. “You see, Son, you have overlooked two important facts. The tree was predestined to be here, and I was predestined to run and jump behind it.” Clearly, Major Dabney valued his safety!

The psalmist, David, valued safety, too. He does not like feeling afraid. In verse 1, he mentions his fear twice, which may be why this psalm reads like a foxhole prayer. David speaks of “evildoers,” “adversaries and foes,” armies, enemies, and violence. He longs for security, cover, and “shelter in the day of trouble” (v. 5).