

# Saturday 29.10.16 Service

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] that our hearts would be open as well, that we'd hear your voice, that you would shine your face upon us, and that you would draw us closer to you. So we need your help, but we know that you will help us, and we know that you'll be with us. So bless us now as we turn to these words of life. Amen.

Amen. Now, last night we looked at the biblical image of God's hand. Now don't worry if you weren't here last night, it doesn't matter, because we're moving on to a new subject today, but we are staying with the same principle of the fact that when it comes to thinking about God, whilst on the one hand God is near to us, in another way God is completely beyond us. He's beyond what we can describe, he's beyond what we can grasp, and he is just mind-blowingly big. And last night we looked at the image of God's hand, which is a picture of strength, and we saw how God's hand is unbelievably, indescribably strong. But what's amazing is that he uses that strength and uses that hand for you and for me and for our benefit.

And so imagery like God's hand helps to give us a better understanding of God. Of course, as we know, God doesn't have a hand literally, he's what we would call incorporeal, he has a spirit, he's not physical, he doesn't have a body like we do. But a hand, image, speaks to us clearly and helps us to understand what God is like. So last night we looked at God's hand, today we're going to look at another image, and maybe you'll have guessed it because it got mentioned in the psalm that we read. We're going to think about God's face. Psalm 27, verse 8.

You have said, seek my face. My heart says to you, your face, Lord, do I seek. God's face is another image that we have in the Bible. In fact, it's a very, very common image in the Bible, especially in the psalm. So what do we mean by that? Well, the great thing about images like a hand or a face is that they're things that we have. And so that means from the very beginning, there's an element of common understanding there. We can connect with the image that's being used because we have a hand, we have a face. And so perhaps the best place for us to start today is to think about our own faces. What do our own faces express? What comes to mind when you think about your face? Well, I think we can say four things to begin with. First of all, a face is a key factor in identifying who we are. In fact, a face is unique in that way. If I held up a picture of somebody's hand, it would be very hard to identify who that person was. But if I held up the picture of somebody's face in this congregation, you would instantly know who that person was. And we often speak about putting a face to a name. You hear somebody name when you hear something about that person. But if you don't actually know what their face looks like, then your knowledge of them in some way is inadequate. And so a face is a key way of expressing our identity, who we are. But secondly, a face is also a powerful way of expressing how we are. Not just who we are, but how we are. Because your face can express a lot of emotions, can't it? Your joy can be shown through a big smile. Your sorrow flows out with your tears. When we're angry, our face tightens and frowns. When we are afraid of something, our face drains of its vitality and of its colour. And even our love for those who are dear to us can be shown before we ever open our minds. So our faces can express a lot of things. I don't know about you, but I am one of these people who can't hide anything.

And so my wife always knows weeks in advance what her Christmas present is, because when I come in with it, I just can't hide the fact that I've bought something and I've done something and it's hopeless. But anyway, I've just given up on that. She knows what it is and that's that. So I can't hide anything. I don't know about you, but our faces give away so much about ourselves. And that's why when something amazing happens, what is it we say? We say, you should have seen the look on their face. Because that's expressing how they feel. But of course the opposite is true, because when somebody is broken hearted, you only have to look at their face. So a face tells a lot about

how we are. Thirdly, faces are our means of contact with people, aren't they? Because that's what we often talk about. When we're separated from somebody that we love, we can keep in touch in many ways. We can text them, we can phone them, we can email them, we can even FaceTime them now, so you're looking at them through a screen. But none of that compares to being with them face to face. Paul speaks of that in his letters. 1 Thessalonians 2.17 is an example. But since we were torn away from you brothers for a short time, in person, not in heart, we endeavoured the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you. He was able to keep in touch by a letter, but that wasn't enough. He wanted to be there face to face. [ 6 : 00 ] So when you're face to face with somebody, you have close contact with them. There's a closeness. And when you are reunited with somebody you love, say your wife has to be away for days or your children are away at uni. When you come back, when they come and you don't look at their feet or their hands, you look at their face. And there's a joy to be together like that. So, face is who we are, how we are. It gives us contact with other people, but it also is a means of communicating with one another. That's the fourth thing of these four starting points. Our faces are a way of communicating, aren't they?

We can tell, well, people can tell us a lot just by looking at us. Wives are the best at this, but they can just look and make things clear. And parents can do it. A parent can warn a child just with a look. Their misbehaviour just doesn't look. Maybe a guest can be welcomed with a warm look. That's important at church, isn't it? When people walk into church, they want to get a good look, a nice, well-looking look. And even a baby can do it. A baby can't speak, but a baby can tell by their face that they need something. So, a face can do a lot.

Faces are quite amazing in what they can do. And I suppose we can sum all of that up by saying that faces point to two main things. Openness and closeness. And these are going to be kind of our main headings as we think about God's face together. There's that openness, isn't it? It tells us how we are, who we are. And there's that closeness, that idea of contact with one another. That idea of communication with one another. Our faces are all about openness and closeness. Now, these are two things that we are very often scared of. A lot of people are scared of openness. A lot of people are scared of closeness. We don't want people to know everything about us. So we don't want that much closeness. We don't want that much openness.

We don't want to get hurt or vulnerable in relationships. So we're scared of closeness. A lot of people in the world today who are very scared of openness and very scared of closeness. But these are our two main headings as we're going to think about God's face. And I suppose today we're going to ask the question, what does this whole image of God's face teach us about a relationship with God? We are here because we are in a relationship with God or because we want to be and I hope that you do want to be. And that relationship is in many ways it's a face-to-face relationship. But what does that mean? What is their relationship with God like? And what does this image of God's face teach us? Well, our two headings are our guide. Openness and closeness. First of all then, our faces, from our perspective to begin with, are an open indicator of who we are and of how we are. Our faces, your faces are open open before God. And so when we talk about standing before God's face, it means that we are completely open before him. And we're completely exposed before him. Now that raises two really important points. And if you like, one is positive and one is negative. Positively, that tells us that

[ 9 : 49 ] God has the deepest personal interest in you. Your face is representing what is deeply personal to you. And that, that is what God is interested in. God is not wanting you at a distance. God is not wanting some vague acquaintance with you. God is interested in you. God is thinking to yourself, oh yeah, there's some people in Tarbert somewhere in the Western Isles somewhere.

I wonder how they're doing. That's not the way God operates. God knows you. God is interested in you in every detail of you. Every thought, every desire, every dream, every fear. All of that is on God's agenda. All of that matters to God. God is that, has got that deep personal interest in you. And so being face to face with God means that God knows us. God knows us. And our faces to God, if you imagine God looking at your face, he can see everything.

Because our faces show our struggles. God can look into your face and see what gives, what makes you feel tense and stressed. He can see if the worries of work or the pressures of your email inbox or your finances or the expectations that are on you, if that's weighing you down. Or if you're burdened and concerned about your family. God can see that struggle in your face. If you are scared of something, if you are afraid of something, God can see that.

He can see it in your face. He knows if you are scared of something today. He knows that. And God can even see our regrets. Because if we are open before God, he sees everything. He sees what's good and he sees what's not good. He sees our failings. He sees our mistakes. He sees the things that we regret with all our heart. And the things that we don't want anyone else to see. So positively, God has that deep, deep personal interest in you.

Never, ever think that God's not interested. But there's a kind of negative other side to that. Because the effect of this openness before God, and the effect of everything about us being revealed means that we want to hide our face. We want to hide our face.

[ 12 : 38 ] Now sometimes that can be out of a sense of fear or weakness. Don't we often say when something difficult is going to happen, we say, we can't face it. Because it's too hard for us. But more than that, and probably most of all, we want to hide our faces because of our sense of shame.

Isn't that true? You see it everywhere. If you watch Match of the Day tonight, say for example, somebody misses an easy chance. They're about to score a goal and they fluff it up. What will they do?

They cover their face. And when we make mistakes in life, when we do things wrong, there's like this instinct where you want to just hide your face. You want to hide your face. And so our faces mean that we are open before God. But that openness can instantly make us feel uncomfortable. As we were saying at the start, we are scared of openness. We can expose ourselves towards God, but we are instantly led to a sense of shame. And when we know that we can't hide anything from God, it can make us uncomfortable. And the Bible speaks of that. Ezra chapter 9 verse 6 is a really interesting verse.

Oh my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. That's how we often feel. And maybe that's how you feel today. And that can be for a lot of reasons. Maybe you want to hide from God today. Maybe you want to hide because of a sense of your unworthiness. Maybe because you're afraid of other things, of what other people might say, or of uncertainty about what might happen. Or maybe you're just conscious of the seriousness of your own sin. And you know that you have to do something about it. But yet at the same time, you're crippled by a sense of shame. Now you might feel that as a Christian, you might feel that you're letting God down so much, and we're all like that, every one of us. But if you're maybe not yet a Christian, and if you're seeking the Lord, maybe you feel held back by this massive sense of shame. And this kind of idea that you want to just slightly hide. But if you feel like that, then what we are about to say is the most important thing that you will ever hear. Because remember what we said, God's face is not about just openness, it is also about closing. And this is what brings us to Psalm 27. When you read through Psalm 27, David describes lots of threatening and difficult circumstances. He speaks of evildoers, he speaks of adversities, he speaks of an encroaching army, of war, of false accusations, and even of being abandoned by those closest to him.

[ 16 : 05 ] Verse 12 is a good example. Do not hand me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations. David is speaking about how the fact that in his life he has experienced incredibly difficult situations, dangerous situations, unsettling situations, the kind of situations that would make you want to run and hide. But the amazing emphasis of Psalm 27 is that in all of these situations, God is there for David. And that's why Psalm 27 is this great balance of trouble and triumph. Because although there's all these hard things happening, David says, 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?

And so although David has fears, struggles, difficulties, and although he himself has made many, many mistakes in his life, in all of these situations, he is able to lean on God. And in many ways it's summed up by the words of verse 8.

You've said, seek my face. My heart says to you, your face, Lord, I will seek. In all the chaos of life, in all the struggles of life, God is saying to David, seek my face.

And you can't imagine it in your mind. Imagine David standing there and there's all this chaos going around and all this trauma in his life. Everything seems a mess and yet his face is set towards God's face.

And David's situation is varied. David's context is different. But the principle of this Psalm applies to us just as much.

[ 17 : 54 ] Your particular struggles will be different from David's.

It makes us feel uncomfortable. God can see right into our face and see everything that it reveals. And we can feel an urge to hide our faces from God. We can feel a sense of shame. And we can imagine so easily that God would just want to turn his back on us.

He would look on us and just turn away in disappointment. It's so easy to think that God would feel like that. We can feel that openness will lead to distance from God.

But the amazing message of the Bible is that God is not keeping his distance. He's doing the very opposite. God is showing us who he is.

God is showing us what he wants. God is saying, I want to know you. God is showing us who he wants to know you. And I want you to know me.

[ 19 : 17 ] In other words, God shows us his face. God reveals himself to us. And as he does that, he does two things.

And it's the same headings. He opens himself up to us. And he draws us close to himself. And for the last 15 minutes, I want us just to expand on that a wee bit more.

God, in his face, the image of God's face, tells us that God is opening himself up to us. Now, the kind of technical word for that is revelation.

God is revealing himself. He's not hiding his face. He's not turning away. He's revealing himself to us. And we immediately ask the question, well, how does he do that?

Well, there's a few things we could say. But the ultimate answer to that, and the pinnacle of the answer to that, is that he does so through Jesus Christ.

[ 20 : 22 ] We talk of the Bible as God's revelation, and it is. But the great goal of that revelation is to show us Jesus. God's word is Christ-focused.

And so it is in Jesus that we see what God is like. It's in him that we see God's character, God's priorities, God's goodness, God's gentleness, God's wisdom, God's righteousness.

Because that's exactly what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, 6. He says, for God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The knowledge of the glory of God is found in the face of Jesus Christ. So if God is going to reveal himself, and if we're going to ask the question, what does the face of God look like?

The answer is to think of Jesus. And in particular, we can think of the face of Jesus. And let's just try and use our minds to think of Jesus' face.

[ 21 : 33 ] We weren't like the disciples who saw Jesus face to face, but we can imagine. Imagine the look of compassion on Jesus' face as he cleansed lepers and people who were in desperate need.

Imagine the anguish on Jesus' face as he looked over Jerusalem and saw the hardness of its heart. Imagine the sorrow on Jesus' face when he saw the pain being experienced by Mary and Martha because Lazarus had died.

Imagine the sadness of his face as he stood on trial and faced false accusation. Imagine the agony on his face as he hung on the cross.

But also imagine the joy on his face when he appeared to the disciples and said, peace be with you. And imagine the love in his face when he says, whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.

And imagine the commitment on his face when he says, go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, under the Son, under the Holy Spirit.

[ 22 : 51 ] Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. The glory of God, the nature of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

Because by sending his Son, God is opening himself up to us. And this is in a way one of the great developments that takes place from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

Because in the Old Testament, God revealed himself to an extent. And God's glory was present to an extent, but there was always limitations.

And Moses looked on the glory of God, but with a veiled face. And God's presence was in the temple, but it was behind the curtain. So it was there, but it was restricted. There was limitations.

It was there, but it wasn't quite there. In the New Testament, everything comes to a new level.

Because we are able, with unveiled faces, to behold the glory of the Lord.

[ 24 : 02 ] God reveals himself fully and perfectly. Back in Sinai, the people couldn't go near it. And even when Moses came down, his face had to be veiled.

And the tabernacle was restored. But now, in Jesus Christ, the veil is taken away. The curtain is torn in two. And we have open access to God.

And so the Gospel is an amazing message of openness. And that's why Jesus told his people to come to him. That's why he tells us that he is the door. That he is the way.

That he is the light of the world. Because in him, God is opening himself up to us all. That's what we read in John chapter 1. No one has ever seen God.

That's closed. No one's seen him. But the only God who's at the Father's side, he has made him known.

[ 25 : 05 ] Now this is really, really important for us all. Because we must never think that just because God knows what you are like, he's going to push you away.

Never ever think that Christianity is kind of this exclusive club that's for, you know, just people of a certain standard. A lot of people think like that. It's so untrue. The Bible is telling us that God is opening himself up to us.

Jesus himself said, When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to himself. God is opening himself to us. And there's this amazing openness in the Gospel through Jesus Christ. But not only does God open himself up to us by showing us his face, he also shows us his face so that we can be close to him.

Openness and closeness. And if you like the theological word for that would be reconciliation. Being brought back together.

[ 26 : 18 ] Being brought close. Remember what we said at the start. When you see somebody face to face, it's because you want to be really with them. To be as close to them as possible.

And that is what God wants for you. He doesn't want you at a distance. He doesn't want you just as an acquaintance.

He wants you close to him. Now that is why sin and guilt and shame has to be dealt with.

When you read of God turning his face away, it's because of sin. Now God has to do that because God is holy. And sin is everything that he isn't. And everything that he is incompatible with.

And so you often read in the Bible of God turning his face away because of sin. Now God does not want to turn his face away from you. So sin has to be dealt with.

[ 27 : 21 ] And that is exactly what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Jesus died to deal with sin. To remove from us that which keeps us from being close to God.

And having done that, God's desire is to be close to you. God wants to be with you face to face. To be really with you. To be permanently alongside you.

To be constantly upholding you. To be continuously leading you. And that means that God will know everything that you go through. And he will be with you in everything that you go through.

Every struggle. Every stumble. Every mistake. Every difficulty. Every circumstance. Every time you feel like hiding your face. God is saying, I'll be with you.

I will be with you. And what is so amazing of the language of Psalm 27 and one or two other places in the Bible is that God wants us to be so close to him that he becomes our hiding place.

[ 28 : 31 ] And that's what David says in Psalm 27. He will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of his tent.

Now remember how he said, when we muck up, when things go wrong, when we make mistakes, we want to hide. And God is saying, you can hide in my arms.

You can hide with me. And so if your instincts tell you to hide from God, please remember that the Bible is telling you the opposite.

Because hiding from God is really just the ultimate act of hypocrisy because it's impossible. You can't hide from him anyway. He can see everything. And all he wants is for us to come and for him to be our hiding place, to seek his face, to hide in his arms.

And that's something that's important for us to remember when we think of a whole concept of self-examination.

[ 29 : 46 ] Because we want to examine ourselves. And especially at the time of communion, self-examination is a biblical command. And it's so good to look at ourselves and to think about ourselves. But if anything, when I look at myself, when I examine myself, the more I dig around, the more I find to frustrate me and to discourage me and to disappoint me.

And I'm sure you feel like that yourself. But with the Lord's Supper, the command is examine yourself and come. Not examine yourself and then, if you're alright, come.

It's examine yourself and come. Because God's desire is always that we will be close. And yes, if we find things that need to be put right by his grace, we put it right. But if we are feeling weak, if we are feeling ashamed, the answer is never keep away.

It's never, ever keep away. It's come close. When God says, seek my face, he is saying to you that he wants the closest relationship possible.

So if you feel exposed, if you feel weak, if you feel ashamed, if you feel threatened, if you feel scared, God is just saying, seek my face, come close to me, come into my arms.

[ 31 : 03 ] And that's where we find peace. That's where we find protection. That's where it's just so comforting and so encouraging. That's why Psalm 34, verse 5 says, those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

So if you want your shame to go away, if you want your disappointment to go away, if you want your frustration to go away, go to God. Because those who look to him are radiant.

And so God is saying to us all today, seek my face. And that involves openness, and it involves closeness.

But we don't need to be afraid. Don't be afraid to be open with God. Because he wants you to come as you are.

And don't be afraid to be close to God. Because he'll never, ever, let you down. May our prayer be David's prayer.

[ 32 : 20 ] Your face, Lord, I will see. Amen. Let us pray. Lord of God, we are so thankful for your grace and love towards us.

And when we stand before you, Lord, we know that you are the God of all glory, all strength, all power. And we are just so tiny.

And yet you call us to you. And you call us to seek your face. To know you more closely than we could ever have imagined.

And how we thank you, Lord, that you know us. And that through your word and by your spirit, we know you.

And we pray, Lord, that even though we make mistakes and even though we have struggles and even though we often feel like hiding, we pray, Lord, that we would only ever have one hiding place.

[ 33 : 30 ] That it would be you. And that we would always, always, always run to you. So please have mercy on us and draw us ever closer to you.

Your face, O Lord, we will seek. Amen. We'll close singing to God's praise in this psalm that we've been looking at, Psalm 27.

Psalm 27, and we'll sing from verse 6. And now, even at this present time, mine head shall lift it be above all those that are my foes and round encompass me.

Now, although we are not in a physical battle like David was at that time, we face opposition, we face aggression from Satan and from sin and from pressures of the world. And so, these words are our own in that context.

And so, even though these things are happening, we pray and sing to God. Therefore, unto his tabernacle I'll sacrifice his bring of joyfulness. I'll sing. Yea, I to God will praise his sing.

[ 34 : 52 ] O Lord, give ear unto my voice when I decry to thee. Upon me also mercy have and do thou answer me. When thou didst say, seek my face, then unto thee reply, thus did my heart.

Above all things, thy face, Lord, seek will I. Let's sing these verses to God's praise. Six to eight. Six to eight. Six to eight. And now, in that is present time, my nature lived in here, will dev mourn. trong buon. In Christ he bring of joyfulness and sing yea I to God will praise this sing O Lord give the air to my voice when I do cry to thee a glory of so let be up and do the want and me when the days change in my face then hear thee reply that in my heart the love things thy pains Lord sleep with life amen the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all amen to hear them the they love come with them they have them