

Praising in the Pit

Psalm 34

Rev. Brian Bill

June 21-22, 2025

I met an unforgettable man about 20 years ago when I was pastoring in central Illinois. The first time he came into our church sanctuary, he raised his arms over his head, looked up to the ceiling and said he was waiting for the roof to cave in because of how he had been living. He was rough around the edges and was filled with guilt and shame for some things he had done. He told me he had hit rock bottom and was looking for forgiveness, freedom, purpose, and peace.

As a pastor, I've often made a beeline to the Book of Psalms when face-to-face with someone's suffering or shame. When I don't know what to say, I go with what God has said. A frequent passage I quote is Psalm 34:18: "***The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.***" Psalm 51:10 says, "***Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.***" Psalm 103:12 provides this assurance: "***As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.***"

According to many surveys, the Book of Psalms is the most popular book in the Bible. One commentator writes, "*The psalms teach us to neither ignore pain nor let it determine our lives. This book is all about the lament, praise, faith, and hope of God's people.*"

On the Edgewood Facebook page a couple months ago, I asked people to share their favorite psalms. We received a lot of feedback. One person even suggested we do a 150-week series and preach through every one of them. While we won't spend the next three years in this book, we will take the rest of the summer to go through a number of them. I encourage you to savor the psalms on a regular basis. Our current Bible reading plan is in the Psalms. If you read five a day, you'll go through the entire book in a month.

Here are some introductory thoughts.

1. A psalm is Hebrew poetry, often set to music.
2. It takes about five hours to read through all 150 psalms.
3. There are at least six different human authors, with David being credited with nearly half of them.

4. The psalms are divided into five books (1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150).
5. The various types of psalms include Praise, Thanksgiving, Lament, Royal, Prophetic, Trust, Wisdom, and Imprecatory.
6. About 17% of the psalms include a prophecy about Jesus.
7. The longest is Psalm 119 (176 verses) and the shortest is Psalm 117 (only two verses).

Chuck Swindoll writes: *“Throughout its many pages, Psalms encourages its readers to praise God for who He is and what He has done. The Psalms illuminate the greatness of our God, affirm His faithfulness to us in times of trouble, and remind us of the absolute centrality of His Word.”*

Please turn in your Bible to Psalm 34. Here are a few things to keep in mind before we dive in.

- **Acrostic.** With the exception of a couple verses, this psalm is an acrostic, meaning each verse begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This shows the care and attention to detail from the author and his desire to make it memorable and easy to memorize.
- **Backstory.** This psalm comes with an introduction which helps us understand the setting: *“Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.”*

This incident is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:10-15 when David was fleeing from King Saul. David became so desperate that he sought refuge from the king of Gath. Gath was the hometown of Goliath, the Philistine champion whom David had killed years before. Before arriving, he obtained Goliath’s sword and instead of blending in, he created quite a stir. To help us understand the tension, it would be like Benjamin Netanyahu seeking refuge in Tehran today.

Instead of staying strong, David was afraid and fled to the land of his enemies where he used deceit to get out of a jam. David ran from a real problem and looked for something to make it all okay. Right now, some of you have experienced circumstances through no fault of your own and you find yourself in a hard spot. Others of you have run back to your past and are doing things that you used to do. What refuge do you run to when things get hard?

- Scrolling.
- Spending.

- Pornography.
- Food.
- Gambling.
- Substances.
- Sports.

David felt like the roof was caving in on him when the Philistines were getting ready to arrest and kill him. After pretending to have a mental disorder, he was allowed to leave the country. Once he departed, he fled to a cave, where 400 men who were rough around the edges gathered with him. 1 Samuel 22:2 describes them as *“everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul...”* This makes me think of the “Island of Misfit Toys” from Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer. This psalm is written for the discontent, distressed, depressed, and the down and out. Maybe that’s why I like it so much.

Many believe David wrote this song of praise and provision while in this cave of despair. One pastor used this title for his sermon: *“David’s Broken Hallelujah!”* I’ve entitled the message, “Praising in the Pit.”

Here’s our main idea: *When you hit rock bottom, you’ll find that the Rock at the bottom is God Himself.*

If you’ve bailed on God in the past or have failed in some way, this psalm is for you. You may have tripped up, but that doesn’t mean you have to tap out!

We’ll follow this outline.

1. Choose to praise (1-3).
2. Rejoice in the Lord’s provision (4-10).
3. Put truth into practice (11-14).
4. Claim the Lord’s promises (15-22).

The first half of Psalm 34 records David’s testimony. In the second half, he goes into teaching mode.

1. Choose to praise. No matter what we’re going through, or how down we are, it’s always time to praise Him. David turned his dark cave into a cathedral of praise.

- **Praise continually.** Verse 1: *“I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”* The phrase *“at all times”* means, *“in every situation.”* The word *“continually”* has the idea of *“continuity,”* meaning it must never stop. This is reinforced in Psalm 71:8: *“My mouth is filled with your praise, and with your glory all the day.”*
- **Praise contritely.** While the first verse stresses the frequency of David’s praise, verse 2 reveals the focus of that praise: *“My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.”* David was broken and humiliated when he fled to the Philistines. He could have boasted in his own deception, but he knew it was the Lord who rescued him and therefore boasted in Him, which means, *“to shout, shine, and commend.”* Spurgeon writes, *“Who can make God great but those who feel themselves to be little.”* 1 Corinthians 1:31 says, *“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”*
- **Praise in community.** While we must practice personal praise, verse 3 tells us we’ve been designed to do so in fellowship with other believers: *“Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!”* Let’s recapture how mighty and majestic God really is because when our understanding of God’s immensity slips, we allow other things to overshadow Him. Instead of praising Him, we end up living for our own pleasure. If we don’t magnify God, we will minimize Him as we incessantly search for satisfaction apart from Him.

While we can’t make God bigger than He already is, the idea behind *“magnify”* is to *“ascribe greatness”* so we view God as big and mighty in our eyes, and in the eyes of others. We’re to do this *“together,”* united in community with others. That’s why our first “G” is to gather, because corporate praise is essential to our Christian lives.

When you hit rock bottom, you’ll find that the Rock at the bottom is God Himself.

2. Rejoice in the Lord’s provision. Praise in the psalms is based on the attributes and acts of God. While many of us focus on what we don’t have, when we worship together, we’re reminded how God has acted on our behalf.

- **The Lord saves.** Listen to verses 4-6: *“I sought the LORD, and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to Him*

are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.” David experienced this first hand when he was being pursued by King Saul, the most powerful man in the world. 1 Samuel 21:12 tells us David *“was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.”* David was literally between a rock (Saul) and a hard place (Achish). Even though he turned to deceit, he knew that it was only the Lord who could deliver and save him.

David testifies that when He looked to the Lord, his face became *“radiant,”* which means, *“to beam or to glow.”* Job 33:30 says, *“to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be lighted with the light of life.”* Just as Moses reflected God’s glory after being in His presence, 2 Corinthians 3:18 says we will glow when we spend time with God: *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”*

- **The Lord sustains.** David experienced supernatural protection and provision in verse 7: *“The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.”* Many commentators believe this is a reference to the preincarnate Christ. To *“encamp”* means, *“to pitch a tent.”* The word *“around”* means, *“to surround on every side,”* much like Elisha and his servant experienced in 2 Kings 6:15-16: *“...an army with horses and chariots was all around the city...do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”*

The key to receiving God’s sustaining provision is to demonstrate reverence, wonder, and awe for the Almighty. The word *“fear”* means, *“to revere with holy awe.”* One commentator defines it as *“trembling trust.”* God works His ways and His will in such a way that we should respond with holy reverence. To fear God is to know that He is God, and we are not. It’s the idea of revering and living in awe of the Almighty who is awesome in His holiness. He sees all that you do, and it is His hand that sends circumstances into your life. He is the one from whom the angels in glory hide their faces. He brings wrath and judgment and yet is loving, merciful, gracious, and compassionate, inviting us to come before Him as children approach their fathers.

This reminds me of what Oswald Chambers wrote, *“The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.”*

- **The Lord satisfies.** When we fear God and draw near to Him, He will meet our deepest needs according to verses 8-10: ***“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints, for those who fear Him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.”***

We had the joy of having our entire family together this past week. For one of our meals, a daughter and her husband took us to our favorite Thai restaurant. They have heard us talk incessantly about Kra Pao for years and wanted to experience Thai food for themselves. This stir fry is made with ground chicken and Thai chili peppers, green beans, garlic, and seasoned with a sweet and salty sauce, finished with a fried egg and fresh basil. It is very spicy, gently sweet, and richly aromatic. Our son-in-law was initially hesitant to try it, but once he did, he couldn't stop talking about it. Here are some of the things he said for the next half hour: *“Wow, that was incredible. That was very good. I'm going to get this again. I had no idea Thai food tasted that good.”*

Taste and sight are physical senses to help us interact with the physical world. In a similar way, we're to engage our spiritual senses and encounter the Almighty. This is an emphatic invitation to personally experience God's goodness—not just to hear about Him or know about Him intellectually, but to “taste” (experience deeply) and “see” (perceive clearly) for ourselves. Like tasting food, it's something you must experience to truly understand. Derek Kidner writes, *“...the tasting should be more than a casual sampling.”* And once you experience God and perceive Him for yourself, you won't be able to stop talking about how good He is.

The language suggests closeness and intimate trust. You can't taste from far away; you have to come close. The phrase also has the sense of *“try it and you'll find it to be tasty and true.”* The word “taste” implies spiritual satisfaction. Just as food satisfies the body, God satisfies the soul. Psalm 63:5 says, ***“My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food...”*** Psalm 119:103 adds, ***“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey***

to my mouth.” When we taste His character, we’ll learn God is great, He is gracious, and He is good...all the time.

When you hit rock bottom, you’ll find that the Rock at the bottom is God Himself.

3. Put it into practice. We move to the teaching part of the psalm in the first part of verse 11: ***“Come, O children, listen to me...”*** The word ***“come”*** implies movement and serves as an invitation to come close like children do to listen to important instructions from their parents. The word ***“listen”*** means, ***“to obey.”***

Again, we see how imperative it is for parents and grandparents to pass along their faith to the next generation. We just finished our “Mission Ready” sermon series by focusing on the importance of taking the gospel to our neighbors and to the nations. Pastor Daniel did a great job last weekend challenging men to live on mission. After hearing Pastor Chris’ outstanding message on parenting and grandparenting several weeks ago, the staff and deacons decided to make an addition to our mission statement: *“Edgewood is committed to living on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus in our families, among our neighbors, and among the nations.”*

- **Revere the Lord.** The last part of verse 11 reinforces the importance of having the proper respect and reverence for the Lord: ***“I will teach you the fear of the Lord.”*** As we learned in Ecclesiastes, the fear of the Lord must be rooted in action.
- **Refrain from evil speech.** We see this in verses 12-13: ***“What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.”*** It’s interesting that David mentions deceit since he used deception to get out of a jam. I think of the warning about our words that Jesus gave in Matthew 12:36: ***“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.”***
- **Reject evil and do good.** This is stated in the first part of verse 14: ***“Turn away from evil and do good...”*** This is true repentance. Romans 12:9: ***“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.”***
- **Restore peace.** Look at the last part of verse 14: ***“...seek peace and pursue it.”*** David’s men needed to be taught to not only think in terms of war and battles, but in terms of peace and harmony.

When you hit rock bottom, you'll find that the Rock at the bottom is God Himself.

4. Claim the Lord's promises. If you're feeling low today, allow these 10 promises to lift you up.

- **The Lord sees** – *“The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous...”* (15a). God provides His watch care over His people. Psalm 121:3-4 is applicable to the situation in Israel today: *“He will not let your foot be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”*
- **The Lord hears** – *“...and His ears toward their cry”* (15b). Exodus 2:24-25 says, *“And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.”*
- **The Lord will punish evildoers** – *“The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth”* (16). God is a God of justice and He will punish evildoers who do not repent.
- **The Lord will deliver us from trouble** – *“When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles”* (17). The word “cry” means, *“to cry out, to summon.”* The Lord is always ready to hear the earnest cries of His children.
- **The Lord is near to the brokenhearted** – *“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted...”* (18a). The word “near” means, *“to move close; to be close by.”* Psalm 119:151 says, *“But you are near, O Lord.”* To be “brokenhearted” refers to a heart that is *“bursting or shattering,”* much like what our whole church has been experiencing as we grieve the passing of Chris Harrington and Pam Cullor. I prayed this verse for a couple different people this week. Charles Spurgeon writes, *“Broken hearts think God is far away, when He is really most near to them...”*
- **The Lord saves the crushed in spirit** – *“...and saves the crushed in spirit”* (18b). To be “crushed in spirit” means, *“to be beaten out, to be pulverized with pain.”*

- **The Lord allows afflictions** – *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all”* (19). God has not promised a trouble-free life as Jesus said in John 16:33 says: *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* 1 Peter 4:12 adds, *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”* Alexander McClaren writes, *“Many are the afflictions, but more are the deliverances.”*
- **The Lord fulfills prophecies** – *“He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken”* (20). David endured many battles and yet not one of his bones was broken. John 19:36 references Psalm 34:20 to describe the crucifixion of Jesus: *“For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: ‘Not one of His bones will be broken.’”*
- **The wicked will be condemned** – *“Afflictions will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned”* (21). The Bible is clear that the wicked will be condemned forever.
- **The Lord redeems** – *“The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned”* (22). Those who receive Christ will be redeemed. The same word *“condemned”* is used in both verse 21 and verse 22 and means to be *“held guilty.”* When we are *“crushed in spirit”* and take refuge in Him through the new birth, we will not be condemned. Have you found redemption and refuge in Jesus?

This is a song about David’s life and it’s also a psalm about the life of David’s son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfilled multiple Old Testament prophecies by dying on the cross for our sins (we’ll unpack Psalm 22 in late July).

Several months after coming to our church, my friend got saved, and I had the privilege of baptizing him. He liked to joke that the water boiled for 35 minutes after he was dunked!

I hadn’t heard from him for a while until he reached out to me about five years ago because he was scheduled for a triple bypass surgery and was afraid. He asked me if I would do his funeral if he didn’t make it. I asked him if he was ready to die. He said he was 95% sure he would go to heaven. I asked why he wasn’t 100% sure. He told me he’s still in process and he’s no Mother Theresa. I reminded him

even Mother Theresa couldn't get into heaven by her works but only by trusting in the finished work of Christ.

I rehearsed the gospel with him and he confessed he was trusting Christ alone for salvation. He told me the Lord had been bringing Romans 8:1 to his mind. This is the same verse he quoted when he was baptized: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”***

I encouraged my friend to forgive anyone who had wronged him and to ask forgiveness from anyone he had wronged. He was quiet for a few seconds before agreeing to do this. The night before his surgery he told me he had done it. He said: *“I’ve forgiven all those who’ve done me wrong. This was really hard to do, but I’ve let it go. In the end, God is judge.”* He was living out Psalm 34:14: ***“Seek peace and pursue it.”***

As he reflected on his life, he said he didn't have much money but was thankful for his wife, who made him the richest man on earth. Then he told me he regrets all the time he wasted seeking satisfaction in things that didn't bring any lasting meaning or purpose. I asked him what he was going to do about it. He said if he made it through surgery, he would get back to living for Christ and His kingdom.

We can choose to live our lives in one of three ways:

- Spend our lives.
- Waste our lives.
- Invest our lives.

Thinking about my friend reminded me that I'm rough around the edges as well. My guess is you are, too. The good news is we can be redeemed and revitalized when we fully surrender to Christ.

Let's live each day as if it's our last.

Because one day...it will be.

Life is short, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

In spite of David's many failures and flagrant sins, he kept coming back to the Lord. Friend, no matter what you've done, or how long you've been doing it, the

ceiling is not going to fall in on you and you don't have to hide in a cave any longer.

Invitation