

Psalm 34 "How God Helped a Man Who was Scared Out of His Mind" **

Main Idea: In Psalm 34 we learn that God allows us to face fearful circumstances in order to teach us and give us a platform from which to teach others about Him.

I. David learned about God's worth (1-3).

- A. We should praise God continually.
- B. We should want to see others praise Him with us.

II. David learned about God's help (4-7).

- A. He takes away our fears.
- B. He gives us a new fear.

III. David learned about God's goodness (8-10).

- A. He offers us all we need.
- B. We must look to Him to experience it.

IV. David learned about God's fear (11-14).

- A. We must learn to fear Him.
- B. When we fear Him, it shows up in real life.

V. David learned about God's nearness (15-18).

- A. The righteous cry.
- B. The Lord hears and helps the brokenhearted.

VI. David learned about God's deliverance (19-22).

- A. God doesn't always remove our troubles.
- B. God does promise to sustain us in them.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself these questions...

1. How does my view of God need to change?
2. How does my view of difficult circumstances need to change?
3. What opportunities has God set before me that I am missing?

Are you a fearful person? It's intriguing the number of labels the experts have come up with to detail the host of fears that plague modern man. For instance:

Peladophobia: fear of baldness and bald people.

Aerophobia: fear of drafts.

Porphyrophobia: fear of the color purple.

Chaetophobia: fear of hairy people.

Levophobia: fear of objects on the left side of the body.

Dextrophobia: fear of objects on the right side of the body.

Auroraphobia: fear of the northern lights.

Calyprophobia: fear of obscure meanings.

Thalassophobia: fear of being seated.

Stabisbasiphobia: fear of standing and walking.

Odontophobia: fear of teeth.

Graphophobia: fear of writing in public.

Phobophobia: fear of being afraid.[\[1\]](#)

We might chuckle at the things that cause *other* people to fear, but the fact is, we all struggle with fear. If you think otherwise, then ponder these questions...

Why do we have neighbors that we've talked with about sports, vacations, lawn care, and a host of other subjects, but we've never talked with them about their need for Christ? Is not our failure to witness at the core level attributed to our *fear of man*?

And why, when we've got a problem with someone, do we tend to talk with *other* people about the problem-person rather than go directly to that person with whom we have the problem? Is not our propensity to avoid confrontational situations at its root *fear*, namely *the fear of man*?

And why when we come to church do we merely smile and pass by the person we don't know and go sit next to people we do know, the same people we always sit with in church? Is not our failure to leave our comfort zone for the purpose of encouraging a visitor (or finding out if a person is a visitor) merely another expression of our *fear of man*?

And why do we over-commit ourselves and fail to say 'no' to people when the reason we say 'yes' isn't because we believe God wants us to say 'yes' but because we don't want people to think poorly of us for saying 'no'? Is not people-pleasing just another expression of the *fear of man*?

And why do we get easily embarrassed? Is not our craving for people's approval merely yet another form of *fear*?

And why do we work out and go on diets? Is our motivation the desire to be good caretakers of God's temple, or is it the praise of men we're after? Isn't our tendency to want to impress people just another demonstration of the fear of man that fills our heart?

In case you're still not convinced, consider carefully this observation by Ed Welch, taken from *When People Are Big and God is Small*:

"Don't think that this is simply a problem for the shy, mousy types. Isn't the angry person or the person who tries to intimidate also controlled by others? Any form of one-upmanship qualifies. What about the business executive who is working to be more productive than an associate in order to get ahead? The endless jockeying of egos in the corporate board room is an aggressive version of fear of man. And do you think that the super-confident,

superstar athlete is somehow above seeking the good opinions of fans and sports writers? Aggressively asserting that you don't need anyone is just as much evidence of the fear of man as the more timid examples we have seen. Fear of man comes in these packages and many others.”^[2]

The question isn't, “Do we struggle with fear?” That's a given for sinners. The question is, “How can we learn to respond to our fears in a God-pleasing way?” We find the answer in Psalm 34. Psalm 34 is a song about *fear*, a song that shows that the solution for fear is *fear*. More about that in a moment.

The heading indicates this is a psalm “Of David.” The heading also tells us the situation that prompted David to write this song: “*When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.*”

Do godly men ever struggle with the fear of man? Yes. David did. There was a situation he once faced when he was so afraid he feigned insanity to save his scalp.

When did that happen? The background of Psalm 34 is probably 1 Samuel 21:13. David was on the run. He had already been anointed by God to be Israel 's next king, but Israel 's present king, Saul, wasn't cooperating! Saul tried to kill David on numerous occasions, so David fled. In fact, he fled to the enemy, to the king of Gath for refuge (10).^[3]

Why David went to Gath (the hometown of Goliath) in the first place, we're not told. Apparently, two things were true. One, life was so dangerous in Israel that he had no choice but to flee his homeland. And two, he must have assumed he could go unnoticed in Gath , perhaps dressed in incognito.

The latter assumption proved him wrong. The servants of Achish ratted on David in verse 11: “Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?”

The next verse reveals David's tension level at that moment. Verse 12—“David took these words to heart and was *very much afraid* of Achish king of Gath .” In other words, David felt the fear of man.

What did he do about it? Three things according to verse 13: first, he pretended to be insane, acting like a madman; second, he made marks on the doors of the gates; and third, he let saliva run down his beard.

Frankly, when God's people are controlled by the fear of man, it's not a pretty sight. It's not much of a testimony to the greatness of God, either. King Achish wasn't too impressed with either David or David's God by what he saw. The king responded: “Am I so short of madmen around here that you had to bring this insane nut to me (15)?”

One of the things about the Bible is that it's straightforward about the flaws of God's people. Even godly men like David struggled with the fear of man. But he learned from his struggles, and he resolved to change. That encourages me.

Two psalms grew out of that experience: Psalm 56 (which we looked at last week) and this morning's text, Psalm 34. In the Hebrew, Psalm 34 is an acrostic, with each of the 22 verses beginning with a successive Hebrew letter (except for verse 6 which skips the letter *waw*, and verse 22 which repeats the letter *pey*).^[4] In a sense, Psalm 34 gives us everything ‘from A to Z’ about moving from the fear of man to the fear of God.

David used the word ‘fear’ appears five times in Psalm 34. You might circle them:

Verse 4—He delivered me from all my *fears*.

Verse 7—The angel of the LORD encamps around those who *fear* him.

Verse 9—*Fear* the LORD...for those who *fear* him lack nothing.

Verse 11—Come, my children...I will teach you the *fear* of the LORD.

As far as the structure of the psalm goes, Charles Spurgeon suggests that the psalm is split into two great divisions, in which David expresses his praise to God in verses 1-10 and turns to direct men in verses 11-22. In other words, the first ten verses are a hymn, the last twelve verses a sermon.[\[5\]](#)

Why does God allow us at times to face fearful circumstances? The very structure of Psalm 34 shows us two reasons: one, *to teach us about Him* and two, *to give us a platform from which to teach others about Him.*

So what did David learn about God through his experience in Gath , and what does he desire to teach us about God? David learned and taught others about *six attributes of God* in Psalm 34.

I. David learned about God's worth (1-3).

"I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together."

Note the verbs: *extol...boast...glorify...exalt*. And the object of those verbs...*the LORD...the LORD...the LORD...His name*. This is what the situation in Gath prompted David to do: to extol, boast in, glorify, and exalt the name of the LORD! And not now and then, but *at all times*, and not just by himself but *together* with the rest of God's people.

Are you thankful for *rope*? About a month ago I climbed up a pole at Scioto Hills Camp, up some forty feet, and watched as Aaron connected my harness to a zip line with a piece of rope. Then he told me to jump. I did and whew! What a ride! Flying towards the ground I hung on for dear life to my lifeline, that piece of rope, until I was once again safely on the ground on the other side of the soccer field.

Now answer this. Did I view that piece of rope differently *after* the ride than *before* it? For sure! What made the difference? That piece of rope saved my life, so now I'm singing its praises!

When God delivered David from Gath , David obtained a greater appreciation for God's worth. And how did he respond? The same way we should respond when we're gripped by God's worth. Two responses are in order...

A. We should praise God continually. And that's what David resolved to do in verses 1-2, "I will extol the LORD...My soul will boast in the LORD." But personal praise isn't enough. God deserves more than *one voice*.

B. We should want to see others praise Him with us. Like David did in verse 3, "Glorify the LORD *with me*; let *us* exalt his name *together*."

No wonder Charles Wesley wrote, "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise." God deserves more than my lone voice. Give me a thousand voices to sing His praise!

Yes, our worthy God deserves the praises of His people. That's one of the reasons He put the book of Psalms in His Word, to teach His people how to praise Him. And that's one of the primary lessons we're learning from our series in the Psalms, that God is pleased when we use our voices to sing His praises!

Recently I've been reading excerpts from David Brainerd's journal. David Brainerd was a missionary to the American Indians in the eighteenth century who died at the young age of twenty-nine. Although his years were few, his influence in the hands of God was great.

For instance, Brainerd observed the powerful and transforming work of the Holy Spirit during the year between the summer of 1745 and the summer of 1746. According to his records, seventy-seven Indians in New Jersey were baptized within eleven months. Brainerd describes the tangible evidences of the changes he observed as follows:

There has been a wonderful thirst after Christian knowledge prevailing among them in general, and an eager desire of being instructed in Christian doctrines and manners. This has prompted them to ask many pertinent as well as important questions; the answers to which have tended much to enlighten their minds, and promote their knowledge in divine things...

They have likewise queried with me, respecting a proper method, as well as proper matter, of prayer, and expressions suitable to be used in that religious exercise; and have taken pains in order to the performance of this duty with understanding. They have likewise taken pains, and appeared remarkably apt in learning to sing Psalm-tunes, and are now able to sing with a good degree of decency in the worship of God.[\[6\]](#)

It matters not a person's color of skin, or age, or language, or time period in history. When people truly come to know Christ as their Savior, they exhibit the same evidences of God's indwelling presence as Brainerd observed in these Indians: a desire to be instructed in *Christian doctrines and manners* (they want to learn from God's Word how to think and live), they engage in *prayer*, and they *learn to sing Psalm-tunes*, to borrow Brainerd's description, "with a good degree of decency in the worship of God."

Beloved, our God possesses incalculable worth. That's why we sing His praises in church. And quite frankly, that's one of the reasons why seeing empty spaces in our pews grieves me. He's worthy of *more voices* exalting Him with song and life. Do we really want to see others join us in praising Him? If so, then let's reach out this week. Let's pray fervently. Let's invite our neighbors to join us. God is worthy!

II. David learned about God's help (4-7).

"I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them."

In the first movement of the song David shared his resolve for the future: I *will extol* the LORD. In this second movement, he shares his past experience: I *sought* the LORD, and He *answered* me.

David teaches us two things about God's help.

A. He takes away our fears. That's what David says God did for him in verse 4, "He delivered me from all my fears." The word 'fears' is a strong term which carries the idea of "terror." It can refer to events that are dreaded or to the dread itself.[\[7\]](#)

How does God do that? Does he make the fearful situation go away? No, instead...

B. He gives us a new fear. The solution for fear is *fear*. That's not double talk, either. Notice carefully verse 7 again, "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them." Who does the angel of the LORD encamp around and deliver? Those who *fear Him*. To put it simply, the solution for the *fear of man* (verse 4) is to develop *the fear of God* (verse 7).

We must replace the fear of man which tends to paralyze us with another fear, the fear of God, which protects and liberates us. Proverbs 29:25 explains, "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe."

Let this sink in. The primary reason we fear man too much is because we fear God too little. The solution then is to take steps to cultivate a proper view of God which will produce a proper fear of God.

David shares next a third insight about God that he learned from his Gath experience and wanted to teach others:

first, about God's worth, secondly about God's help, and...

III. David learned about God's goodness (8-10).

"Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing."

David affirms the Lord's goodness here. *The LORD is good.* How does God manifest His goodness? Here's one way...

A. He offers us all we need. "Those who fear Him *lack nothing*," David says. Would you agree that fearing the Lord brings with it fantastic benefits? Those who do *lack nothing*. That's not a guarantee that God will give us everything we *want* in life, for there's a difference between *having everything* and *lacking nothing*.

Some people *have everything* the world has to offer but are empty inside. Other people have very little but they *lack nothing*. What makes the difference? The *fear of God* does. And to emphasize the point David adds, "Those who seek Him *lack no good thing*."

What an incredible demonstration of the goodness of God! God offers us *all* we need. And how should we respond to this offer? David makes it clear that...

B. We must look to Him to experience it. Don't miss the action verbs: *Taste...see...take refuge...fear...seek.* In other words, God's promise doesn't eliminate human responsibility, but rather makes it possible. David didn't sit back and wait for God to get him out of Gath . He sought God's help and did a whale of an acting job!

My wife makes a tremendous chocolate cake. If you came to our house for dessert, and I said to you, "Taste and see; it's good," how would you respond? "Oh, I believe you, I'll take your word for it. No thanks." If you liked chocolate cake, is that what you'd say?

Hardly. It's hard to learn about chocolate cake by just reading a book. The best way is to *experience* it.

Does it stagger you that the God in heaven, the One who created you and gave His Son to redeem you, wants you to experience His goodness? Yet He does! He invites you to enjoy Him, to know Him, to trust Him, to experience Him.

Can we benefit from fearful circumstances? Yes, God uses them, as He did with David, to teach us about His worth, His help, and His goodness. But there's more!

IV. David learned about God's fear (11-14).

We know we *should* fear God which means we shouldn't cringe from talking to our neighbors about Christ, and we shouldn't let peer pressure keep us from standing up for Jesus at school. We know we should fear God. The question is *how*. How can I become a God-fearer rather than a man-fearer? David answers that question for us in part two of his psalm.

Verse 11—"Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD." David discussed the fear of God earlier in the psalm, but now he picks up the theme again from a different perspective. "I will *teach you* the fear of the LORD," he said. Which indicates, first...

A. We must learn to fear Him. Fearing God isn't a natural thing for sinners to do. Ignoring God is. Marginalizing God is. Thinking small thoughts about God is. But not fearing God. We need to learn how to do that.

And who's qualified to teach another person about the fear of God? Only someone who has first learned to fear God. Like David had. David learned firsthand in Gath the importance of fearing God, and what he learned he now can't contain. He wants to pass it on to others. He wants to teach others about God's fear.

And what do we learn about the fear of God from David? A very vital truth...

B. When we fear Him, it shows up in real life. Watch the flow of the text...

In verse 11 David said, "Listen to me; I'm going to teach you the fear of the Lord." Then in verses 12-14 he shows us what the fear of God looks like, that it shows up in *real life*: "Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."

It's easy to *say* you fear God, but David makes it clear that if you *do* it will *show*. Fearing God shows up in our *speech* (we keep our tongues from evil and our lips from speaking lies). It shows up in our *lifestyle* (we turn from evil and do good). It also shows up in our *relationships* (we seek peace and pursue it).

During World War II, a military governor met with General George Patton in Sicily . When he praised Patton highly for his courage and bravery, the general replied, "Sir, I am not a brave man. . . The truth is, I am an utter craven coward. I have never been within the sound of gunshot or in sight of battle in my whole life that I wasn't so scared that I had sweat in the palms of my hands." Years later, when Patton's autobiography was published, it contained this significant statement by the general: "I learned very early in my life never to take counsel of my fears."[\[8\]](#)

Being fearful is inevitable. It's part of the human experience. The question is, "Then what?" Patton said he *learned never to take counsel of his fears*. In other words, he redirected his focus from his fears to something else (the mission at hand).

David did that too, but unlike Patton, David redirected his focus from the Philistines *to God*. I'll say it again. David learned that the solution for fear (the fear of man) *is fear* (the fear of God).

Here's why. Something very special happens when you learn to fear God. You learn the following about God...

V. David learned about God's nearness (15-18).

"The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

Please notice two things. First...

A. The righteous cry. "His ears are attentive to their *cry*," says David in verse 15. And in verse 17, "The righteous *cry out*."

Life hurts at times, and when it does you feel like *crying*. And at times the righteous do just that. They *cry*.

We're told that *real men don't cry*. That's not true. David is a man's man—he's killed a lion and a bear with his hands, and gone toe to toe with Goliath and a host of other Philistines in battle. David is no wimp, yet he *cried*. More accurately, he cried out to God. When his tears dropped they went *up*. David gave them to God just like he did everything else in his life—his songs for God's praises, his hands for God's battles, and now his tears as an expression of his desperate need for God's help.

And how does God respond when His people cry out to Him? David says...

B. The Lord hears and helps the brokenhearted. Peter actually quotes these verses in his first epistle, a letter he wrote to comfort crying Christians. They were crying because of the persecution they were facing as followers of Christ. In 1 Peter 3:8-9 Peter pens this exhortation, “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”

Notice, *to this you were called*. It’s our calling to live in harmony with each other, to love each other, to be humble, to refuse to retaliate when wronged by another but instead to return a blessing. Is that hard to do? Absolutely! In fact, it’s impossible without Christ in your life.

And to make that point Peter quotes from Psalm 34, “For, ‘Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil’ (1 Pet. 3:10-12).”

Who does the Lord see and hear and help? Peter, quoting David, says, “His eyes are on *the righteous*.” Then we’ve got a problem, don’t we? If God hears and helps *the righteous*, then we are in trouble because by birth and by choice we are *sinners*, not righteous people. We can’t even deal with our fears, let alone live a righteous life that pleases God.

So that raises the question of all questions, “How does a sinner become righteous?” The answer is *by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone*. If you know Christ as your Savior, you are *righteous* for God has given you the righteousness of His Son. If you do not know Christ, you are not righteous, cut off from God, and facing eternal separation from God in the lake of fire.

If you know Christ God has declared you to be righteous, and here’s why. Jesus Christ, God’s Son, lived a perfect, righteous life and in so doing fulfilled the requirements of God’s Law in your behalf (Matt. 5:17). Then on the cross Christ took the curse of the Law, dying a Lawbreaker’s death in your place (Gal. 3:13). And then, having risen from the dead, He wrote His Law on your heart (Heb. 10:16), and gave us His Spirit to produce the fruit of the Law in your life (Gal. 5:23). Now, you can live a righteous life, not merely because you have to, but because you *want to*, because God is *near you*.

VI. David learned about God’s deliverance (19-22).

“A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken. Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.” I learn two very important facts from this.

A. God doesn’t always remove our troubles. Indeed, a righteous man may have *many* troubles. David certainly knew that. And this...

B. God does promise to sustain us in them.

I don’t know what you’re facing in life, but I do know this. God is up to something for His glory and your good. He uses fearful circumstances *to teach us about Him* and *to give us a platform from which to teach others about Him*.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself these questions...

1. *How does my view of God need to change?* To trust Him, you must *know* Him. To trust Him for salvation you must know that He is a saving God. To trust Him in fearful circumstances, you must know of His worth, help, goodness, fear, nearness, and deliverance.

2. *How does my view of difficult circumstances need to change?* If you're a fearful person, I urge you to replace fear with fear. Take steps to replace the fear of man with the fear of God. As a practical suggestion, I encourage you to read Ed Welch's book, *When People are Big and God is Small*.

3. *What opportunities has God set before me that I am missing?* God used David's experience in Gath to teach him and to give him a platform from which to teach others. Now think of a difficult situation in your life. Do you see it as a nuisance to be eliminated or as a divinely placed opportunity? May God give us eyes to see!

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] Fraser Kent, *Nothing to Fear*, , Doubleday & Company, 1977.

[2] Ed Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small*, p. 17.

[3] 1 Sam. 21:10 gives the king's name, Achish. The heading of Psalm 34 calls him "Abimelech." Why the difference? Abimelech lit. means "my father is king," and was an official title for Philistine kings, just like Pharaoh was a title for Egyptian kings (Craigie, 278).

[4] David apparently invested a lot of mental energy in writing this psalm, using the acrostic to aid his memorization of the words and to make it easier to teach it to others.

[5] Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Vol. 1, part 1, p. 122.

[6] Richard Hassler, *Journey with David Brainerd*, p. 91.

[7] Kidner, p. 139.

[8] Unknown