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**God is Near
Even when He Seems Far Away**

*Reflections on Psalm 34,
written by C. Young*

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Introduction:

David wrote this Psalm after a time of hiding in the land of the Philistines. He had been hiding from King Saul, who wanted to kill him. Soon someone discovered who David was, and the servants of Achish (Abimelech), king of the Philistines, also wanted to kill him because they were afraid he was there to spy out the land. It was a dark time in David's life. He was in much trouble and could not see any way out. But he knew one thing – God is near. God was with him in the darkness. God knew his fears and heard his cries. David trusted in the LORD and was soon to taste and see that the LORD is good. He knew his heart was right with God and that God would hear his prayer and deliver him out of all his troubles. Eventually, David escaped to the cave of Adullam and all his family came down to be with him. There he wrote to the LORD this Psalm of praise.

We serve the same God today that David served in His day. God loves us and cares for us. Through the darkest times and times of fear and heaviness, God is near. When He seems far away, and we cannot see Him or feel Him, God is near. We only need to trust in Him, for underneath us are the everlasting arms, and we are cradled in the bosom of a loving Saviour.

Bless the LORD at All Times – v. 1

"I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth."

David starts this psalm with praise. Praise would continually be in his mouth. At all times he would praise his God, even when he was in trouble.

How often ought we to bless the LORD? At all times. Think of the times when it is right to bless the Lord.

- In the morning when we wake up to the pleasant sound of bird song
- When we look out and see the beautiful flowers and other things God has made
- When we sit down to a delicious meal
- When it is hot
- When it is cold
- When we are hungry
- When we are satisfied
- When we feel great
- When we are sick
- When things go well
- When we are disappointed
- When we have sweet fellowship with friends
- When we are treated unkindly
- When work seems profitable
- When the day is full of "accidents" or frustrations
- When the weather is fair
- When the storms come
- When the garden grows well
- When the bugs eat the garden
- When we have energy
- When we are weak and tired
- When the computer works
- When the computer has "issues"
- When we see answers to prayer
- When we have prayed a long time, and nothing seems to happen.

These are all good times to bless the LORD. Also this verse says, *"His praise shall continually be in my mouth."* Continually -- at all times, constantly, recurrently, frequently, in all circumstances. When is it good to speak God's praise?

- When the way is smooth and things are working out well
- When it seems we have been left alone and there is no answer to our prayer; we feel that we are stumbling down life's rough pathway with no one to help us
- When we see no end to a situation and no solution to present problems
- When we are tempted to blame others for the things that happen in our lives

There is not a time that it is not good to praise the LORD. *"I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth."*

Boast in the LORD – v.2

"My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad."

My soul, my innermost being, shall make her boast in the Lord. Not everyone will be happy about it, but the humble will. If we spend our time telling what great things God has done for us, we will be happy, and others will be glad also.

Magnify and Exalt the LORD – v.3

"O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together."

Magnify the LORD with me. Help me to cause Him to grow in the eyes of others. Help me to cause others to have a high view of Him. They will see how Great the LORD is and How Big He is. Let us exalt Him! Let us make His name great in the earth so that others see that His name is high above all names. Let us exalt it together. The Lord is great, and His greatness should be made known among all people.

"O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together."

Seek the LORD – v. 4

“I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.”

I sought for the LORD. I looked for Him. God does not get lost, but sometimes we cannot see Him, and we are afraid. So, we must seek Him. If we seek for Him, we will find Him. If we call out to Him, He will hear us; and He will deliver us from all our fears.

“I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.”

Look unto the LORD – v. 5

“They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.”

They looked to Him. They did not look at themselves or at their circumstances. They did not look to their friends for help, or to any other man. They looked to God. They looked unto Him, and were lightened.

When we go through great trials, the way is often very dark. But God is still there. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. (See I John 1:5) We may not be able to see anything around us or even where we are going, but we can look to God.

In the valley of the shadow of death, where fear and evil terrorizes, God is there. He cannot be seen by looking at the path. He cannot be seen by looking into the darkness. He cannot be seen by looking at the things that terrify. He can only be seen by looking up.

Perhaps we cannot go on. Perhaps our feet cannot find the way. Perhaps the darkness settles over us like a heavy garment. But this heavy garment can be seen through if we look up, because the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot swallow it up.

If we struggle on in our own way, we will be confused. But, if we look up to God, our faces will be lightened. They will reflect His light, like the moon reflects the light of the sun. Maybe we cannot see anyone else. Maybe no one else can see us. But we can look at the Light, and He can see us. And, if we look to Him, we will not be ashamed.

“They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.”

Cry Unto the LORD – v.6

“This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.”

When David was hiding from King Saul, he took refuge in the land of the Philistines. While he was there, the servants of King Achish, also known as Abimelech, discovered who he was and would have killed him. However, David pretended to be a mad man, and thus, was able to escape and hide in the cave of Adullam. David recalled this fearful time as he wrote this Psalm. He was in trouble, and he could not get himself out of it. He could not buy his way out. He could not reason his way out. He could not fight his way out. No, there was not one thing David could do to get himself out of trouble. His only recourse was to call upon God.

David humbled himself before God. He admitted his helplessness and cried unto the LORD. The LORD heard his cry and saved him out of his trouble, for the LORD saveth such as be of a contrite heart. A broken and a contrite heart He will not despise. He will surely hear when such an one calls unto Him.

Are you in trouble? Are you afraid? Does it seem as if you have no way out? Take a look at your heart. Is it right with God? If so, you can freely cry out to Him. He will save you, for He saves those that are humble. God is your only way out.

“This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.”

Fear the LORD – v. 7

“The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”

The angel of the LORD, Jesus Himself, encamps round about those that fear Him. Do you fear Him? If so, He encamps round about you. If I fear Him, He is encamped round about me. We have Christ’s royal army surrounding us to protect us. His army acts as an impenetrable shield on every side. Nothing can get through unless the Captain permits it. We do not need to fear if we have God. God has His army watching over us to deliver us. Who can fight against Him? Not one. (See Romans 8:26-39) In Christ, we are completely secure.

“The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”

Taste and See the LORD's Goodness – v. 8

“O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”

O taste! Think of all those things that taste good. Which food is your favorite? Imagine that you are eating it and savoring the flavor. It fills your mouth with a good taste and your heart with happiness. Good food results in a good mood.

The LORD is like that. A taste of Him will fill the heart with joy and the mouth with praise. His goodness will bring comfort, just like the taste of a favorite food.

“O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”

Trust the LORD – v. 8

“O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”

In order to taste the LORD, you must trust Him. When you bite into your favorite food, you know that you will like it. You trust it to make you feel good. Your trust causes you to put the food in your mouth and experience the delight it brings.

When you trust in the LORD, you taste of His goodness. His word brings delight to your heart and replaces fear and sorrow with happiness. “Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.” “O taste and see that the LORD is good.”

“O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”

Fear the LORD, Ye his Saints, and You shall not Want – v. 9

“O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.”

Fear the LORD. Come before Him with reverence. Know that He is holy and all powerful. If you do not obey His word, He will chasten you, for He loves you. He loves you so much that He has given you of His holiness and called you a saint. All that believe on Him are saints. God judges the wicked but preserves the righteous. He will not allow His saints to suffer need. There is no want (or lack of any good thing) to them that fear Him.

“O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.”

Seek the LORD, and You shall not Want – v.10

“The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.”

Young lions are strong, and they are skillful hunters, but sometimes they do not catch their prey. Sometimes prey is scarce, and there is nothing for them to eat. The poor lions must go hungry.

However, we, who believe in Jesus, do not go out to seek prey. We seek the LORD. When we look to Him, He will supply all our need. When we look to Him, we will not lack any good thing.

“The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.”

Come, Learn the Fear of the LORD – v. 11

“Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.”

The fear of the LORD brings blessings, but how does one fear the LORD? When David was hiding in the cave of Adullam, all his brethren and his father’s household came down to be with him. (See I Samuel 22:1) One can imagine all the children gathered around David as He sings to them. “Come,” he invites, “put all your cares aside and your games and toys. Come sit at my feet and listen. I will teach you the fear of the LORD.”

David is about to open the storehouse of God’s treasure to teach the fear of the LORD. The fear of the LORD is not a complicated thing. God explains it simply so that even a child can understand.

God is holy and righteous. He has given of His holiness and righteousness to those who believe on Him. He has made them saints. Since He has given them the ability to be holy and righteous, He also teaches them how to live a holy and righteous life.

A righteous life, lived in obedience to God’s word, is a life lived in the fear of the LORD.

“Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.”



Keep Your Tongue from Evil and Your Lips from Deceit – vs. 12, 13

“¹²What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? ¹³Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.”

Living in the fear of the LORD brings blessings. It protects from an untimely death. It makes life good.

The first instruction, given by the Psalmist, for walking in the fear of the LORD is, “Keep thy tongue from evil.” All the words that come out of our mouths should be acceptable in God’s sight. Nothing should pass the door of our lips that does not pass the test of God’s word – always with grace, seasoned with salt.

Secondly, the Psalmist teaches, “Keep...thy lips from speaking guile.” Nothing deceitful should pass the door of our lips. Our words should not be formed to manipulate or to get things to turn out the way we want them. There should be no deceit in our tongues. Rather we must speak every man truth with our neighbor. The very first thing David teaches us to do in order to walk in the fear of the LORD is to make sure that nothing wrong proceeds out of our mouth. We must ask God’s help in this and seek the Scriptures to know right words.

“¹²What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? ¹³Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.”

Depart from Evil
Do Good
Seek and Pursue Peace
v. 14

“Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.”

This verse contains David’s final instructions in how to walk in the fear of the LORD.

Depart from evil. Shun it! Get away from it!

And do good.

How can we do good? Seek peace and pursue it. As much as possible, we must live peaceably with others around us. We must strive to be peacemakers. In situations where peace seems impossible, we must pursue it. Does it seem out of reach? Then it is necessary to keep going after it until peace is secured. While we are chasing after peace and doing good, we will be running away from evil. Evil and good are opposites. One cannot stay with evil and do good. So, run after peace and do good, and you will leave evil far behind.

“Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.”

The Eyes of the LORD
The Ears of the LORD
v. 15

“The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.”

Sometimes the way seems dark. To us, there seems not one ray of light. We don't see God; we don't feel God. He seems far away. But God sees us. His eyes look upon those who walk uprightly in the fear of the LORD. When trouble comes, He sees. He does not turn His face away.

Not only does God see when we are in trouble, but He also hears when we cry unto Him. He does not stop His ears; they are open unto our prayer. We may not see the answer right away, or perhaps do not understand it. God may seem far away and out of reach, but we can know He cares, because God's word assures us that He does.

“The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.”

The Face of the LORD – v. 16

“The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.”

The eyes of the LORD look upon the righteous in compassion. His ears hear their cry. He is attentive to their needs and cares for them.

However, the face of the LORD is against them that do evil. He will look on evildoers in anger and will not take heed to their cries. Rather, he will punish them and cut them off from the earth. He will have compassion on the righteous, but the wicked He will destroy.

“The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.”

The Deliverance of the LORD – v. 17

“The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.”

“The face of the LORD is against them that do evil,” but He bends His ear to hear the prayer of those who walk uprightly. Cry unto your LORD! He will hear. If you are in trouble, call on Him to deliver you. He will hear, and He will answer.

“The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.”

The Nearness of the LORD – v. 18

“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”

The LORD is nigh. He is close. He folds you in His bosom when your heart is broken. Perhaps it is broken because of a sin. The LORD knows. Perhaps it is broken because of a sorrow. The LORD knows. Perhaps it is broken because of a difficult situation. The LORD knows. He is nigh. Lean upon Him and rest; underneath are the everlasting arms. (See Deuteronomy 33:27)

Since the LORD is nigh, and you are held close in His everlasting arms, tell Him about your sin, or your sorrow, or your situation. He will listen. He sees that you are broken and humble, and He will save. He will hear when you cry unto Him because you have a humble heart.

“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”

The Deliverance of the LORD – v.19

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.”

The repetition of this theme gives great comfort. The LORD wants us to have the assurance that He will deliver.

The LORD is nigh. When we pass through afflictions, when we go through the storm, He is nigh. He seems far away. This is not strange. As humans, we know life is difficult. Because it is so hard, we focus on the tempest. The sky is dark, the water is choppy, the boat is tossed to and fro in the waves and is filling up with water so that we are afraid it will sink.

But Jesus is with us in the storm. Did we think He sent us out to sea to face the tempest alone, while He stood on the shore? Look! There He is! Walking on the water! “Jesus! Let me come to you!”

“Come,” He says, and stretches out His arms. We step out of the boat to go to Jesus. Be He still seems far away. Look how rough the water is. We will sink! Sink! Sink into the darkness of the deep! “Lord, save me!” And Jesus reaches out His hands and pulls us up. He was never far away. Perhaps we could not see His face, but His arms were not shortened that He could not save. We fear because we cannot judge Jesus’ distance in the storm. But our Lord is there, waiting to save us. The waters of affliction may be deep, but our Lord stands ready to deliver us out of them all.

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.”

The Keeping of the LORD – v. 20

“He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.”

This verse is a prophecy about Jesus. Jesus came and died on the cross. He died for us. He died for you. He died for me. He died for every person in the whole world.

God gave His Son, Jesus, as the perfect sacrifice for sin. His body was broken for us. His head was pierced by a crown of thorns, and blood flowed down. He was bruised and battered by the crowd who buffeted Him and plucked out His beard. His back was torn by the sharp cat-o’-nine tails as He gave His back to the smiters to be scourged for us. His hands and His feet were pierced by long nails as He was crucified for us. His side was pierced by a sword, and blood and water flowed out. He died of a broken heart for us.

Yet, God did not forget His Son. He took care to look after the smallest details. Though Jesus was torn and broken in many ways, not one of His bones was broken. Not one.

In just such a tender way, God cares for you. Every hair on your head is numbered. God created you, and He loves you down the minutest detail. His tender heart pities you as a Father pities His child. Won’t you pillow your head upon His arm and rest in His love today? Your Father will look down and watch you so carefully and lovingly that He will know when even one hair falls from your head. You are never out of His sight. You are in His arms.

“He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.”



Photo by C. Young

The Desolation of the Wicked – v. 21

“Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.”

The wicked live by doing evil. They sow evil, and evil is what they reap. By that in which they delight, by the same shall they be slain. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” (See Galatians 6:7)

The wicked oppress the righteous. They persecute them and make things hard for them. But they cannot take away their LORD or their hope of eternal life.

When the situation is turned around, and the wicked are in trouble, they are desolate. They have no one to turn to, and they have no hope.

“Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.”

The Redemption of the Righteous – v. 22

“The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.”

Evil shall slay the wicked, but the LORD will redeem His servants. The wicked have nothing to look forward to but a violent end. The servants of the LORD have a Redeemer, who will not allow them to be destroyed by the enemy. The wicked have nothing to look forward to but death. The servants of the LORD have the promise of eternal life.

They that hate the righteous shall be desolate. They have lived by violence and hate, and when it comes time for them to die, they will be left alone and without help. When they are in trouble, there will be no one to redeem them. They will be without hope.

None of them who trust in the LORD will be desolate. None. Not one. God will redeem *all* who trust in Him. Those who trust in the LORD have a Saviour to turn to in trouble. They have hope.

This Saviour is our dear Jesus. Let us put our trust in Him, for He cares for us. He is our hope. He is our helper now, and He is our assurance of eternal life.

“The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.”

