

## Psalm 34: Blessing God Blesses Us

**Psalm 34** is an *individual song of thanksgiving* written as an imperfect alphabetic acrostic (easier to memorize and learn) to encourage and teach wise living. The *New Bible Commentary* entitles **Psalm 34**, “An ABC for a Crisis.” The psalmist uses his personal experience of God’s rescue as an opportunity not only to give thanks (*todah*=a *thank offering*) to God, but also to offer wisdom for living to his hearers. (Psalm 25 is identical in form to this alphabetic acrostic, skipping the same Hebrew letter *waw* between verses 5 and 6 and repeating the letter *peh* on the last verse. Maybe the same Hebrew poet/psalmist wrote both psalms, maybe David himself or someone collaborating with or influenced by him.)

The superscription on **Psalm 34** associates it with a time when David escaped death by astutely pretending insanity, but in retrospect, according to **Psalm 34**, David understands that God was working to protect him as he was seeking and calling on God. (I Samuel 21:10-15, 22:1)

1. *Songs of Thanksgiving* are the “sacrifices of praise” called for in both the Old and New Testaments. See Psalm 50:14 and 23 and Hebrews 13:15.

Writing about these songs of thanksgiving in the Psalms, Claus Westermann, a famous Old Testament theologian, says that “It is astonishing...that this category, as far as I can see, is developed so richly and fully only in Israel,” and he adds later that Luke 1:46-55, 1:68-75 and 2:29-32 show us “that declarative praise was again awakened when God performed the decisive, final deed of salvation for his people in the sending of his Son. How could it possibly have been otherwise?” (Grogan, *Prayer, Praise, and Prophecy: A Theology of the Psalms*, p. 156)

2. *Songs of Thanksgiving* usually have 3 parts: (1) an introduction, (2) the main section narrating the psalmist’s experience of distress, cry for help, and deliverance from trouble, and (3) a conclusion.

**Psalm 34:1-3** is the *introduction*. Thinking back on a time in your own life when you now realize God “rescued you,” what words, phrases, concepts stand out for you in verses 1-3?

3. **Psalm 34:4-10** is the *main section* of the psalm that describes the psalmist’s experience and the lessons of this experience for him.

What do you notice about this person’s experience, about how he recalls it, and what he wants you to grasp about it?

4. **Psalm 34:11-22** is the longer than usual *conclusion* of this song of thanksgiving. The *conclusion* is a wisdom lesson that the psalmist tells his readers/listeners he is now going to teach. **(34:11)**

What are the first surprising clues he gives for wise living? **(34:13-14)**

Read I Peter 2:3 and I Peter 3:10-12 to see how Peter used his experience with **Psalm 34** to help the early followers of Jesus to understand the kind of authentic behaviors and lifestyle Jesus was calling them to.

Peter quotes **Psalm 34:12-16** from the Greek Septuagint in I Peter 3:10-12. The topic he is exploring with his readers is suffering for “righteousness’ sake,” for doing good, using Jesus as the model.

5. What wisdom does the psalmist offer us for facing troubles in **34:15-18**?

Think about when and how **34:18** has proved true for you and others:

“The LORD is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”

How does **34:18** illuminate **34:17** and **19**?

6. The final verses of **Psalm 34, verses 19-22**, present the relationship that YHWH’s faithful, old covenant people had with Him and hint at what we faithful new covenant people have now and forever in Christ and His Kingdom.

What hard “realities” about earthly life do these verses remind you of?

Actually make a list of the “reassurances” these verses offered to Jesus and that they now offer to you in your union with Him.

7. How might reading **Psalm 34**, reflecting on and praying (speaking and listening to God) about the truths in this psalm, impact your life with God and with others in your current circumstances?

What “sacrifices of praise,” “songs of thanksgiving, of declarative praise” are you offering and receiving?

How do the psalmist’s example and teaching in **Psalm 34** support your answer to the question in **34:12**?

What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? (ESV)

Who out there has a lust for life? Can’t wait each day to come upon beauty? (The Message)

Lastly, remember that Eucharist means “giving thanks.”