

*“I will bless the Lord at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” Psalms 34:1*

David was having a bad day when he spoke these words. I mean, it was a REALLY BAD DAY. He had been fighting battles for Israel while Saul was king. Saul, however, had become a madman, and on some days went off in his paranoia to find his best general David and kill him.

Consequently, on those days David was found running for his life from the very king he was serving.

He penned Psalms 34 on one of those days.

On this particular day, he fled from Saul into the town of Achish -- to hide among the Philistines. Unfortunately, somebody recognized David, and told the king of Achish. It was now a REALLY BAD day. David was in danger of death from two directions!

To try to save his skin, he pretended to be insane...publicly. He acted mad, scrawling meaningless scratches on the city gate, and letting his drool drip down his beard.

Have you ever had such a day?

Maybe not in terms of physical danger, but some days can make any of us feel a little crazy. Sometimes the people in our lives, even those close to us, even those we are working for, even those who claim to love us, can make life very, very difficult.

Fear, anger, hopelessness, and self pity can come to the door of our soul.

What do we do on such dark days?

What do you do?

What did David do?

Psalms 34 is the written reaction of his soul on that dark day. (Most Bibles tell you this in the heading over this particular Psalm, stating when it was written.)

On the very day that David was running for his life from Saul, hiding in the enemy's city, and pretending insanity to survive...on that very day, he spoke these words:

“I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth! My soul shall make its boast in You Lord! O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together! I sought the Lord and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears! O, taste and see that the Lord is good! “

When life gets hard, when circumstances grow dark, when difficulty or loss looms large in front of us – it is in this time that we can either let the darkness overwhelm us or let the presence of God protect and fill us. Such times are not meant for turning away from God, but for drawing close to Him. We do this by blessing and praising Him. He is not the source of our trouble. He is the present help in time of trouble.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and staff comfort me. You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over!”

At such times we need to face and repent of attitudes that want to overtake us – perhaps self pity, bitterness, fear or unbelief. As we turn away from these things and bless the Lord, our hearts can quiet down through faith in God's unfailing love. It is possible to experience the healing peace and comfort of God in the middle of very difficult times.

(over)

On another day, David and his men came home from a battle, only to find out that their homes were burned and all their wives and children taken captive. Every soldier wept his eyes out, even the strongest. Even David. They wept until there was no strength in them.

And then it got worse for David. His faithful men, grieving over their loss, turned against their leader and were getting ready to stone him to death.

It was a REALLY BAD day. (1 Samuel 30: 1-6)

“But David encouraged himself in the Lord.”

That’s what it says.

Another translation says *“But David strengthened himself in the Lord.”*

Do you know how to do this? David knew what to do.

You can do it too. You can strengthen yourself in the Lord.

Most of the Psalms are the written record of David doing just that – encouraging himself in the Lord. They are the record of his reactions to life, and the inward process by which he rose above the darkness which could have overwhelmed him.

You can “encourage yourself in the Lord” with these same Psalms.

I learned such a habit from Billy Graham when I was a young man. Mr. Graham told how he read five Psalms a day. Since there are 150 Psalms, that meant he could read them all in a month’s time. I have kept this simple habit (in general, not every day) for more than thirty years.

Psalms 121 – 125 are the Psalms for the 25th day of the month. I can remember some of the most encouraging verses without opening a Bible. Like Psalms 121: *“I will lift up my eyes unto the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He will not allow my foot to be moved; he that keeps me will not slumber....”* Just thinking about that strengthens me. Reading it again brings encouragement. Hearing myself saying it helps more. Singing it adds more strength. Shouting it is sometimes what drives away the darkness! Believing it releases God’s peace and comfort.

Over the years, Jackie and I have underlined all the promises in the Psalms, all the verses that declare who God is and what He has promised for His children. On a really dark day, I begin to read and speak those underlined parts. Usually, before I am half way through the Psalms, the darkness gives way to the light and love of God that comes from the truth that I have put in my eyes, my ears, and my mouth....and my heart.

It is a habit of “encouraging yourself in the Lord”.

The quality of life which we experience is determined by what happens on the inside of us, not the outside. Happiness comes from within, from our responses to life. No one is better than God, and nothing is better than His covenant Word, to help us find comfort, peace and joy in even the darkest of life’s circumstances.

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