

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

June 7-13, 2020

Sermon Series: Momma Said

Week Three: "Say 'Thank You'"

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week's Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday's sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

Almighty God, You have made Yourself known to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Make Yourself known to us in such a way that we may understand Your will and purpose for our lives today. We offer our prayers in the name and spirit of Christ. Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

A Simple Guide to prayer. What are those simple phrases your mother always told you to say to others? Say "I'm sorry." Say "Please." Say "Thank you." These phrases are basic components of our prayer life.

This Week's Sermon Theme:

Giving God thanks and adoration for the blessings we have received is a primary action of our prayers.

Sunday Scripture Reading: Psalm 34:1-10 (A group member should read the passage aloud).

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

What is the context of this psalm? (34:superscript)

When does the psalmist promise to praise God? (34:1)

Who does the psalmist want to hear his song of praise? (34:2)

What does the psalmist call upon his listeners to do along with him? (34:3)

What happened when the psalmist sought God in prayer? (34:4)

How does the psalmist say those who do likewise will feel? (34:5)

How does the psalmist identify himself in verse 6? (34:6)

Who does the psalmist say the LORD's messengers/angels protect? (34:7)

What does the psalmist encourage his listeners to do next? (34:8-9)

How are those who go to God in prayer contrasted with lions? (34:10)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Questions are suggestions, but open discussion is encouraged. These are "I wonder" questions that the group might want to pursue together.

We might first wonder about the story in the superscription if it is not familiar to us.

We probably wonder why the psalmist seems to be specifically writing for those who suffer.

The fact that the psalmist sought God and prayer and experienced deliverance might make us wonder about those times that God seems silent in response to prayer.

We might ask about the language of the "messenger (or angel) of God" delivering people, as opposed to God Himself delivering people. Who is this messenger, and why is that language used?

We probably wonder how the psalmist can say something as extreme as "those who honor God don't lack a thing." Are we to believe that if we honor God, we will have everything?

Or conversely, if someone is in need, does that mean they aren't honoring God?

Finally, we might ask how bringing God our adoration before God, as the psalmist does, is ultimately an expression of thanksgiving to God.

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

See also: 1 Samuel 21:10-15; Ezekiel 3:3; Psalm 119:103; Psalm 32:19

Psalm 34 emphasizes the psalmist's relationship with God – which has resulted in an incredibly trusting confidence that nothing of lasting significance can happen to someone who fully trusts in God. While it is ultimately a prayer of thanksgiving for God's faithfulness and salvation, in the psalm, the writer becomes a teacher, with a desire to lead others to the same kind of trusting relationship with God. Everyone who struggles must remain loyal to God, because the psalmist can attest to the Lord's deliverance!

To begin the study of this psalm, look first at the superscription. Superscriptions in psalms set a context that either the writer, or perhaps the scribe who compiled the psalms, wants us to recognize as we pray the psalm. Here, the superscription reads "Of David, when he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left." It may surprise you to realize that in this superscription, a mistake has actually been made! The story being referenced is in 1 Samuel 21:10-15, but it is Achish, not Abimelech, in whose presence David pretends to be mad while he is escaping from King Saul! In any case, we are to understand that the psalm was prayed by David as a way of thanking God for deliverance

from not only King Saul, but also from King Achish of Gath, whose servants had warned him about David's identity!

Psalm 32 is an acrostic, as are many other psalms. Each of its 22 verses begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in order, from "aleph" to "tav" – like "a to z" in our alphabet. Psalm 32, though, is unusual in that the letter "waw" is skipped, and the final verse of the psalm does not fit the acrostic pattern. Acrostics were common in ancient Hebrew poetry, and were a way to communicate that the poem had fully articulated its theme – covering everything "from a to z"!

Notice that although the psalm is a personal prayer of thanksgiving, the very first thing the writer does, in the first three verses, is to invite his hearers to join in his praise! The writer wants all his hearers to be like him – to sing a never-ending song of praise to God, because the writer is thankful that he has experienced the reality of God's deliverance. He is so ecstatic about his salvation that he even wants to "boast" about God! He knows that his victory is the result of God's work, and he invites the suffering/afflicted to join his praise of thanksgiving, knowing their eventual victory is assured as well.

Verses four through ten consist of the report of the psalmist's deliverance, exhortation to the hearer for their own response, and introspective reflection on how the psalmist's rescue informs his understanding of God. It is interesting that although the superscription gives the specific circumstance of the psalm, the psalm itself only employs very general language concerning this deliverance. In verse 4, the psalmist gives thanks because God "delivered me from all my fears," and in verse 6, because the Lord "saved him out of all his troubles." In all likelihood, because of the strong emphasis on encouraging others to trust God, the general language is meant to help the reader to appropriate the psalm in their own lives.

Verses 5, 8, and 9, then, are exhortations for the hearer to respond. If you look to God, as I did, the psalmist says, you will be radiant – you will never be covered with shame. The way the Hebrew word "radiant" is used throughout the Old Testament means to have a bright and smiling countenance – others need only look at you to see your relationship with God reflected there. In a world where honor and shame defined social strata the way economics do today, to never be covered with shame meant to be held in the highest esteem by everyone. If they are to share in this esteem, the hearers of the psalm are encouraged to "taste and see that the Lord is good." In Ezekiel 3:3 and Psalm 119:103, the metaphor of "eating" God's word is described as producing a wonderful, sweet sensation – better than any food imaginable! Here, the exhortation to "taste" the goodness of God is probably the psalmist's way of saying "just try it, you'll see!" The psalmist has learned from his own experience that others who choose to turn to God as he did will be blessed if they seek God's protection – if they "take refuge in him." Those who "fear/honor the Lord," will "lack nothing." They can know that God is on their side, and nothing is sweeter!

Verse 7 is the first of the psalmist's reflections on God's character in light of his own deliverance. Depending on whether you are reading the Common English Version or the New International Version, the verse may read "The Lord's messenger protects those who honor God" (CEV) or "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him" (NIV). The "angel of the Lord," or "the Lord's messenger" was understood as a member of God's heavenly hosts, who went ahead of God in the world to do God's will. Often, in ancient times, this was understood as a military escort who provided divine protection in times of war, as the NIV translation more vividly portrays. Interestingly, it is verses such as this that gave rise to later Jewish and Christian belief in the presence of guardian angels!

Finally, in verse 10, the psalmist reflects on the seeming inconsistency that whereas even though powerful lions sometimes go hungry, God will ensure the protection of those who are loyal to God. How does the psalmist know this? As always, experience is the best teacher. He has lived it, and wants others to know they can trust God, too.

For the psalmist, then, the best way to say “thank you” to God is to tell others his story of salvation and deliverance. But what are we to make of the psalmist’s insistence that the faithful “lack nothing”? One thing we must NOT do is assume that this implies that those who are needy are somehow not among the faithful. God constantly shows deep compassion for the poor and those afflicted by society, so reading this kind of reverse logic into the psalm is not accurate. Furthermore, while we are only studying verses one through ten of Psalm 34 this week, reading verse 19 will demonstrate for us that even righteous people “have many troubles.” We must always recognize that what the psalmist is confident about is God’s DELIVERANCE from trouble, not avoidance of it! God does not promise to remove our difficulties, but to help us through them. It is telling that the psalmist began by praising God for delivering him “from all my fears.” He learned that he had nothing to fear, in any situation, because his relationship with God made him confident about his deliverance. Ultimately, THAT is why he is thankful!

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

Do you have a story of rescue/deliverance/salvation from God? What is it?

Are you so excited, so ecstatic, about this story of salvation that you want to encourage others to experience it, too?

Do people who look at YOUR countenance see radiance? Is your relationship with God evident when others interact with you?

How do you express thanksgiving to God? In our week on confession, we talked about getting specific about sins. Do you get specific with God when giving thanks for the blessings you have received?

Are you able to have praise of God “always on your lips”? If not, how might you take just a “taste” to see that God is good?

Can you rejoice that God is a God who saves even when you are suffering? Why do you think the psalmist is exhorting YOU to rejoice during your affliction?

What can you do to make God “your refuge,” to know that the angel of the Lord is guarding you?

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Holy and loving God, we give You thanks that You are the God of salvation. Give us hearts to proclaim Your love to the world, so that we might live in a perpetual state of praise and thanksgiving. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Salvation. Amen.