

THE WALK 2

Some practical questions ...

What things in this world give me most enjoyment?
Why do I enjoy them so much?

If my house were on fire and I had time to run back in and get just one last item, what would I choose? Why?

How do I measure what I value most?
What do I want for my children? what does that tell me about what I value most?

Do I prize God more than all my achievements, and even more than life itself?
Why / why not?

What would it feel like if I were 'enjoying God' more?
Would I feel those things all the time?

Is it true that 'your spiritual health is exactly proportional to your love for God'?
(quoted from C.S. Lewis: *The Four Loves* (Harper Collins 1960; 2002))

Psalm 34 quoted in 1 Peter

Psalm 34 seems to be in Peter's mind as he writes his first letter. In particular, he makes clear that it is completely legitimate to apply David's experience in Psalm 34 to us as Christians:

1 Peter 2:3

We have indeed tasted that the Lord is good: what enormous relief and pleasure in the Lord we enjoyed when we came to know him in the gospel.
Application: crave God's word, so that we grow up!

1 Peter 3:10-12

Just as God delivered David from the dangers he faced, so God will deliver Christians during their time living here 'as aliens and strangers'. But make no mistake, the Lord pours out his blessing on the righteous, not on those who do evil. Application: 'do good'.

THE WALK 2

Enjoying God

Psalm 34

The theme of this study

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (written in 1647 as a summary of Puritan theology) begins with the phrase: 'The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.' Psalm 16 ends with the beyond-the-grave certainty that 'In your presence there is fullness of joy, at your right hand are pleasures for evermore'. Fullness of joy is found in knowing God and delighting in the excellence of his character; to be in his presence, to enjoy fellowship with him, is a greater blessing than anything that can be imagined.

Someone might wonder if it is wrong for God to seek glory for himself in creating people: isn't this very self-centred? Certainly it is wrong for human beings to seek glory for themselves (as the dramatic example of Herod Agrippa shows us in Acts 12 ... in accepting the adulation of the crowd ['the voice of a god, and not of a man' v22]) he robbed God of glory that He deserved, but that Herod did not). When God takes glory to himself, he is not robbing anyone of glory, for he is the only One for whom such glory is utterly deserved and completely appropriate. He is worthy of it (cf Rev 4:11). God's passion for his glory is the measure of his commitment to our joy.

This study takes the words of a well-known Psalm to give us vocabulary to glory in God as he deserves. The invitation of Psalm 34 is that we do taste how good the Lord is; in other words, that we do come and enjoy him!

The book of Psalms

Psalms is unique. It is, like every other bit of the Bible, God's revelation of himself to humankind. But, at the same time, these are the songs of God's people addressed to him (and sometimes to other people too). If you like, the psalms are both a downward arrow (from God, to us) and an upward arrow (from us, to God). The interesting thing of course is that the 'upward arrow' is no less 'God-breathed-out' (cf **THE WALK Study 3**) ... so it gives to us God's way of how he would like to be praised. *Psalms* are the church's song book.

As all poetry, the tone and feel of the psalms matter. We must pay attention not only to what is being said, but also to how it is being said ... how our imaginations are being awakened, and how our emotions are being engaged. Poetry not only tells us facts, it has the power to change the way we feel.

We all have experienced how *Psalms* work on us, like that, at a gut level. As we read them, we tend to make connections between the experience of the psalmist and the situations we are in. We read of 'wild beasts' or 'enemies' who are threatening the psalmist, and we 'translate' that to things in our own experience that are we feel are threatening us. We live through it with him.

Group study outline

Introduction

A young Christian tells you that they're already finding that their Christian life feels stale: what would you say?

What do you do when you feel like that? how significant are those 'feelings'?

We're going to read Psalm 34 where David invites us to share in his experience of how wonderful the Lord is. It was written after this story:

READ 1 Samuel 21:10-15

What would drive David to such desperate measures as seeking refuge amongst the nation's enemies, and pretending to be insane?!

What does that tell us about what David felt before he fled to Gath?

And what do you think it felt for him after he went away from there (cf 22:1)?

So now let's read what David himself said it felt like.

READ Psalm 34

How would you summarise David's feelings after his experience in Gath?

Why does he believe he was so lucky?

Make a list of all the ways he describes the pickle he was in.

Make a list of all the ways he describes the deliverance God gave him.

Why does he say it so many times and in so many different ways?

How would you describe 'the tone and feel' * of this psalm?

What is his invitation to the reader of the Psalm?

What does he want us to actually do as our response?

In vv 9 and 11, what are we told to do/what will David teach us? Why is this significant (given that David himself was previously very frightened)?

How does Luke 12:4-5 help us in understanding this 'fear of the Lord'?

What is the command in vv 12-16?

Is the promise in these verses that God's people will continually experience his blessings and not troubles?

Conclusion

How might this Psalm help the young Christian at the start who is finding that their Christian life feels stale?

How could it help you to enjoy God more?

Is our Christian life meant to feel like Psalm 34 all the time?

What is the relationship between knowing these things are true, and feeling it? *(Try not to allow the popular 'head'/'heart' distinction as that's just another way of asking the same question ... it doesn't provide an answer!)*

* Chapter 10 'The Tone and Feel Tool' in Dig Deeper: Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach (IVP 2005) is very good on this subject.

Theme Sentence

Experience (with David) how good God is.

Context of Psalm 34

The heading to this Psalm locates it in one of the most dangerous moments in David's life in **1 Samuel 21:10-15**. On the run from Saul's homicidal rage, David has sought refuge in the one place that Saul's long arm couldn't reach him, the land of the enemy Philistines. David had previously 'slain tens of thousands' of them (including their champion Goliath), and, keen to settle a score, they haul him in front their king. Now David feigns madness, and the king, totally taken in by David's theatricals (!), throws him out, a free man! Our reaction to the story may be 'David was lucky'; David's reaction was 'God is for me'. Psalm 34 is filled with the exuberance of a great weight lifted ...

The feel of the Psalm

John Bunyan said that on the day he was converted, he wanted to tell the crows in the ploughed field all about it; he was so full, he couldn't hold it in! David's like that. Look at v 4 and then v 1 ... I'm going to praise God morning, noon and night because when I sought him, he saved me out of all my troubles. No wonder I'm glowing about it (5)! Come one everybody; let's make it a chorus and not a solo (3). Try him for yourself, if you don't believe what I'm saying (8)!

This Psalm gives us words to voice our delight that God has rescued us! It is not a testimony to the absence of troubles, but a testimony to deliverance from troubles in answer to prayer. The invitation of the psalm is that (whatever our experience) we should experience his goodness, his presence, his strengthening, his pardoning ...

It is written in a fun way, as a fun psalm. It is an acrostic, where each verse begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet (ie 22 verses for the 22 letters).

Two things involved in enjoying the Lord

'The righteous' (15) or his 'saints' (9) will ...

- **fear God** (9, 11)

'Fear' must have been the dominant emotion that David felt. The answer to that fear, is, paradoxically, 'fear of the Lord'. When you are afraid, you need a God on your side who is so 'dreadful' (the literal meaning of the word) that he is more formidable than all those other things. (cf Luke 12:4-5)

- **obey God** (12-16)

Just like the law of gravity, God's moral law underlies his world. If we follow God's way, then human life on this planet would be happy and long; ignore it and life is miserable and short. God will not bless rebels (cf 1 Peter 3:10-12).