

A  
**Cry**  
for help



This year was breathtaking. Have you ever experienced a sunset so beautiful you could only describe it as—breathtaking? Yeah, it was nothing like that.

This year pushed me off my bike, knocked the wind out of me, and left me there, on the ground, sucking air. I was desperate for God's presence, but I struggled to have the spiritual fortitude to even come before Him.

Pre-Jesus, I was quite adept at compartmentalizing grief. I am still skilled in the art of fleeing difficult emotions, and if I'm not careful, I revert to the familiar, flip the switch, and turn off my feelings. The problem is that's not how God has asked

us to live. We cannot be self-sufficient and manage our life apart from Him; it steals our joy.

Initially, I had an intentionally obedient response. I fell on my face and cried to the Lord. I called my best friend and we prayed, cried, and prayed some more.

However, as days turned to weeks, my resolve to lean on the Lord waned, and the familiar sneaked in. Instead of continuing to run to the One who could empower me and restore my spirit of joy, I shut down and began avoiding the Lord... and (shocker) I quickly found myself in a season of depression. I-broke-me. Thankfully, God is near to the brokenhearted.

**Read Psalm 34. Write down verse 18, and spend time dwelling on God's promise. As you study, write down all the ways God kept His promise to David.**

Good stuff, right? What life experiences forged the fire that purified David's heart to be able to write Psalm 34? The circumstances surrounding David's psalm are fascinating, and frankly bizarre (the back story can be found in 1 Samuel 17-23). Here's the abridged version: When David killed Goliath of Gath, he gained notoriety with God's people, and King Saul burned with murderous jealousy toward him (1 Samuel 17-18). So, David,

through no fault of his own, had to flee for his life (1 Samuel 20). Chapter 21 opens with David on the run, seeking provisions from Ahimelech the priest.

This was when David enrolled himself in the “school of hard knocks.” Instead of being honest about being an innocent fugitive in need of support, David lied. He may have done this to protect the priest from culpability in the eyes of King Saul, but even this sin with a “good motive” was wrong, and susceptible to unforeseen consequences. David told the priest that Saul sent him on a top-secret mission that required haste. The priest was happy to oblige David and gave him the Bread of the Presence and Goliath’s sword that David had previously used to cut off the giant’s head (1 Samuel 17).

Unfortunately, there would be grave consequences for David’s lie. One of Saul’s servants, Doeg the Edomite, was there when David conned Ahimelech into helping him. The first chance he had, Doeg told Saul what he witnessed. Saul gave the order and murdered a whole village of priests, men, women, and children as punishment for their “treasonous crimes.” He even killed the livestock.

Ironically, Saul carried out this unjust punishment on God’s people when he had previously disobeyed the Lord when God commanded him to exact the identical (righteous) punishment on the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15). David would later recognize his own culpability in the murder of the innocent people in Nob. David would live to grieve his sin. It broke him. Even in that brokenness of his own making, God was near to David.

**Have you experienced brokenness from sin? Have you ever suffered great loss through no fault of your own? What is the difference in David’s story between these two concepts? How about your story?**

Then David did something inexplicable. While it wasn't uncommon for fugitives to seek refuge among their pursuer's enemies, David put himself in harm's way by seeking asylum in Goliath's hometown—carrying the dead warrior's sword! He was immediately recognized and captured. So David did what any sane person would do—he pretended to be “crazy”

and started drooling into his beard so King Achish wouldn't kill him. While I'm sure David would have intellectually attested God didn't *need his help* saving his skin, he still tried to problem solve by lying! Yet as an example of His compounding grace, God showed mercy and spared David's life. Believing him to be insane, King Achish let David go.

**Before jumping on the bash-David-bandwagon, examine your own life. Do you sometimes fall into the same self-reliant trap as David, under much less pressure?**

**Consider your life. Has there been a time you disobeyed God and experienced natural consequences? Is there currently anything you're trying to help God “problem solve”?**

David fled to Israel and holed up in the cave of Adullam with a growing number of outcasts who would prove to be loyal to him. To David's credit, he didn't take God's glory for his continued safety. As one commentator said, it was here David “converted the cave into a cathedral” and praised the

Lord. In Psalm 34:1-3, David praised God for all He had done, and encouraged others to do the same. God drew near to David in his brokenness by physically saving his life, but He also drew near using David's own obedience in praise! When David proclaimed God's faithfulness, his acute

awareness of God's enduring presence refreshed him. I loved what one commentator said of praise: "What an effective antidote to the poison of doubt, depression, and despair. How often we fail right here!" Often,

Christians praise their way back to joy! The first lesson David shared with his cave-dwelling counterparts, he taught by example: Praise the Lord at all times, regardless of the immediate circumstance!

**Read 1 Samuel 20-22. Try and get a sense for the scene. These next verses might be easy to gloss over without a greater context.**

In Psalm 34:4-10 David told of how, when he sought the Lord, God delivered him from all his fears. Given the background knowledge we have from 1 Samuel 20-22, this was a huge statement about the protection of God. Think about whom David was speaking to and in what conditions. He was no longer in the palace, but a cave. He no longer had ser-

vants to attend to him as a part of the royal family, but instead was surrounded by his band of outcasts and outlaws. They had no comforts from home, but they did have a commitment from God to provide. David's lifestyle took a serious hit, and yet he had joy, looking expectantly to the Lord for protection and provision—and He came through!

**Spend time thanking God for the simple things that are sometimes taken for granted.**

Then, in verses 11-16, David shared some hard-earned knowledge and a hard truth about how God deals with His enemies. He called the men around to listen to him and then like an older brother, shared his

been-there-done-that wisdom and told them not to do what he had done. He had lied and suffered the consequences, so he told them to be honest and trust God. He had waltzed into Gath carrying the sword of the giant

he had slain, David's counsel—seek peace and pursue it. He encouraged them to do good because the Living God is against those who do evil! (Sound wisdom from the school-of-hard-knocks.) Then in this beautiful contrast between the wrath of God and the deliverance of God, David switched gears and, from a place of vulnerability, shared this promise from God.

***“The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.”***  
*—Psalm 34:17-19*

What a promise! David reassured them that God hears us. He is near to us. He will save us. When we are utterly dependent on Him, He is ever so near and poised to move on our behalf.

When David cried out to the Lord, He wasn't indifferent to his cries. As an infant, our son Bryson fought sleep. He cried for us to rescue him from the intolerable cruelty of bedtime. He needed to learn to “self-soothe.” Eventually, we let that poor baby cry-it-out, but it broke my heart. This is merely a shadow of how God feels when we cry out to Him. When our fears are real, when the brokenness is great and the grief heavy, God will not sit idly by when we are broken and in need! He is all we need in the depths of sorrow!

**Do you find it harder to praise God in difficult circumstances? Do you cry out to God for help? How is God calling you to respond to the truth of His Word?**

## What example do you set before the people who follow your leadership in areas of praise and dependence on God?

I came across a quote from a man for whom we named our youngest son Haddon. Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote, "I can bear witness that whenever I am in deeps of sorrow, nothing will do for me but *Jesus only*. I can rest in some degree in the externals of religion... when I am in health; but I retreat to the innermost citadel of our holy faith, namely, to the very heart of Christ, when my spirit is assailed by temptation or besieged with sorrow and anguish. What is more, my witness is that whenever I have high spiritual enjoyments...they are always connected with Jesus only" (*Strengthen My Spirit*, p 99).

Recently, I have had the honor to test this promise and have found it true. I had heard it. I had counseled people with its truth. I could even quote it. However, this was the first time I had real-life, boots-on-the-ground, Jesus-put-me-back-on-my-bike experience with this promise. It was the first time I had to lean into His promise to sustain me, and the first time I was acutely aware of His keeping it.

I cried out to Him in the midst of my brokenness and He answered me. Here was this promise, spoken millennia ago for David, but also just for me. **IV**

**About the Writer:** Amanda York, along with her husband, Tim, are Free Will Baptist church planters to the Deaf in Buffalo, New York. She is mom to Bryson (6) and Haddon (4). Amanda has served in various church ministries in Ohio, Alabama, Tennessee, and New York. She is a professional American Sign Language Interpreter, focusing on medical and collegiate interpreting.