

The Psalms and our Fears

When it comes to handling emotional brokenness, there are two common approaches. One approach is to avoid and deny emotional pain. Pretending we are outwardly brave when we are inwardly broken is unhealthy. “Suck it up” is a compelling instruction for the track coach as she exhorts her athletes to finish the race. It is not good advice those who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

The other approach is to give in or enthrone our emotions. Our emotions are like a warning light on the dashboards of our lives. The light is not intended to guide or dominate us. Our identity is not rooted in how we feel. We should not resign ourselves to our feelings and assume there is nothing we can do about them.

God’s Word gives His approach to emotional health. The Psalms consist of 150 prayers or songs expressing the heights of human joy and the depths of soul darkness. God, in the Psalms and particularly in the brokenness and frailty of the Psalmist, teaches us to express and pray our pain in God’s presence and seek Him and His soul healing. The Psalmist exemplifies courage by expressing his raw emotions and faith by seeking God through the suffering of life.

One such Psalm is Psalm 34. The context of Psalm 34 is the cave of Adullam outside the Philistine city of Gath. How David found himself in a cave outside of Gath is quite a fascinating story (1 Samuel 21).

Soldiers chased David because a jealous and psychotic King Saul had ordered them to kill David. As he prays Psalm 34, he has just barely escaped death at the hands of Ahimelech, the King of Gath, and is alone and abandoned in a cold, desolate cave in enemy territory. His fears were very real.

Our fears are very real. Have you ever considered the first sounds of an infant? Why does a newborn healthy baby scream? I suggest it is a wail of fear. “What is going on?” “Why is it so cold?” “What happened to my cozy condo?” “Why is some strange dude hitting me on my backside?” Our lives begin with a measure of fear, and fear can follow us most of our days. It is why the Bible repeatedly declares, “Do not be afraid.”

The Psalms teach us how to express and even pray our fears and trust God amidst our fears.