

Life: God's promise of provision

September 3, 2015

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Sept. 20 focuses on Psalm 34:4-14.*

As a child, I remember always having enough food to eat. Perhaps we didn't have the amount of cookies and ice cream I wanted, but we seemed always to have a never-ending supply of squash and spinach. My parents provided what I needed. Their provision for my needs illustrates the way God provides all of the necessities for a full life.

God responds when we call (Psalm 34:4-7)

What's the natural reaction to a problem in life? Call on God. The psalmist testifies that in a time of extreme need, he called to God, and God answered. He delivered the imperiled psalmist from his frightening circumstances. What the psalmist feared and dreaded was averted. God listened, spoke and acted.

Upon the experience of God's deliverance, one radiates joy in tangible ways (v. 5). The experience of victory eradicates any hint of defeat or shame that was going to come about without God's intervention. God delivers joy while rescuing the imperiled.

In the midst of distress (v. 6), the psalmist feels the privation of life coming from the inability to extricate himself from his dire circumstance. Here is the recognition that to come before God seeking help means to acknowledge dependence upon God. Truly, no one in life is independent, for everyone depends on God and comes before him in total poverty.

Verse 7 provides a tremendous encouragement for anyone facing extreme difficulty in life. The angel of the Lord encamps those who fear God. In this context, the presence of the angel implies a defensive or even a military

posture. The word “encamps” indicates the angel leads a substantial number of defenders. Thus, to speak of one guardian angel shortchanges God’s protection through a host of angels. Not everyone experiences such protection. It is for those who have made the Lord the basis of their lives. Those who call on God only in times of need will not experience this divine protection.

Satisfaction and goodness ultimately are found in God alone (Psalm 34:8-10)

In verse 8, the psalmist encourages everyone to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” Seek an experience with God especially in a time of trouble and experience God’s blessedness and goodness. The good fortune here means a person’s life works out well for God gives good gifts (James 1:17). It sounds a bit crass, but the image evoked is to try God like food and experience he is good just like tasting a new dish.

Misunderstandings may come into play with verses 9-10. The idea of lacking nothing or no good thing does not equate to a life of wealth and luxury. At the same time, spiritual goodness and blessing is not what solely is meant. Tangible help is needed at times. When the electric bill comes due, the power company does not accept faith and spiritual blessing as payment. The bill may only be paid with money. Still, God provides what is needed, not necessarily what is wanted.

The “fear of the Lord” is important in this context. Those who fear God will not be the ones sending up requests for goods like a weekly shopping list for to be divinely filled. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom in life. The word “fear” contains the range of meaning from simple “respect” and “awe” all the way to “utter terror.” The idea teaches one must acknowledge dependence upon God who alone is the source of wisdom and knowledge for life.

In stark contrast to those who fear the Lord is the lion. The lion illustrates those who neither fear God nor seek him. It relies on its own strength for food, but that strength does not guarantee a regular meal. The strength of the lion does fail.

Those who respond with holiness and reverence experience God's provision (Psalm 34:11-14)

The call to "come" and "listen" in verse 11 involves discipline. To live in the fear of the Lord does not come naturally. One must put forth effort. Of course, this life is worth the effort. The person wanting the best life possible will experience that life in relationship to God. Often, God is thought to take away the fun and joy in life with all of the rules, regulations and laws about how to live. He comes across as a real "killjoy," but in reality, God gives life! Following his ways results in the best possible life any one may experience.

Still, discipline means avoiding certain behaviors such as those listed in verses 13-14. These bad behaviors result in bad experiences. God wants no one to have such negative experiences in life. Many become accustomed to a life of bad behavior and sin to the extent they actually embrace it. These verses call everyone to avoid such a lifestyle. Instead, the good and peaceful life should be pursued for a lifetime of fulfillment.

The psalmist teaches anyone who calls to God will receive an answer. Today, ringing telephones continue to do just that, ring. People do not answer phones since they expect a telemarketer or a robocall. There is no urgency to answer the ringing phone.

Caller id means people may choose when to answer the phone and choose whose call to answer. God always answers. Usually, the call may ring for a while, and that's OK. God is saying to wait for his timing. When he does answer, how he acts may not be what was requested or even expected. God

provides all of the necessities for a full life for those who fear him, and he provides them in his own way.