

Chapter 1

Seeking God in Our Brokenness

Psalm of the Week: Psalm 34

Day 1

FINDING HEALING IN PSALM 34

Read Psalm 34. Look for verses that reveal God's heart for hurting people.

Seeing God's Heart

My beautiful daughter,

I know you feel broken, shattered beyond repair. The pain seems relentless, the fear overwhelming, the guilt consuming. You can hardly breathe, barely function at times, as if walking aimlessly in a daze, still in shock at this unforeseen turmoil that has completely upended your life. You wonder if you will ever recover. You wonder if you will ever feel normal again.

I know this path is not what you expected or would have chosen, but please have ears to hear. This path will not bring you to ruin. You can survive, endure, even thrive because My grace is sufficient for you. I love you unconditionally, so take one day at a time and draw close to Me.

Cry out to Me. I am always listening.

Take refuge in Me. I will deliver you from your fears.

Look to Me. I will bless you and remove your shame.

Seek Me. I am close to the brokenhearted.

Remember I have restored whole nations to Me. I am willing and able to heal you and make you whole. I have made you, and I will carry you; I will sustain you, and I will rescue you. I love you!

Your loving Father

Talking to God

“Father God, I am so overwhelmed, I don’t even know how to pray. I just know I am broken, and I need help even to function. Please teach me how to depend on your strength, goodness, and love to get through the day.”

Journaling with God

Which part of the letter most resonates with me and why?

Which invitation is the most challenging for me? Which brings the most comfort?

What does Psalm 34 say about God’s help in my brokenness? In what ways is this consistent or inconsistent with my view of God during this time?

Day 2

FINDING HEALING IN PSALM 34

Read Psalm 34. Underline all the verbs that show God's active help in our lives. For example, in verse 4, the verbs are *answered* and *delivered*.

Seeking God First—Broken Vases

[God bestows] on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes.

(Isa. 61:3)

A rock hit my windshield. I didn't repair it right away, and what was once a circular chip smaller than a dime is now an L-shaped crack twelve inches long. Although my passengers might stare at the eye-level flaw in irritation, I ignore it, waiting for my next financial windfall to pay for the repair. It's been over a year. Besides, I think my Toyota will never be quite the same once I break that factory seal.

Often when something breaks, if it's not too expensive, we simply throw it away. If it is repairable, we may make the effort to fix it, expecting it will still be useful but never quite the same. We make do with the repaired item, perhaps hiding its flaws, until we can afford to replace it.

The art of *kintsugi* deals with brokenness differently.

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of mending broken pottery. Resin is mixed with gold dust and then applied to the broken pottery to hold the pieces together. What was once a ruined vase, a pile of broken pieces, is restored with veins of gold and becomes a stunning work of art. The breakage is not ignored or hidden—it is illuminated and accentuated. The restoration and subsequent repair of the pottery becomes part of the history of the piece, which enhances rather than diminishes its usefulness and beauty.

We feel broken, even shattered, after the loss of a marriage. We see ourselves as failures—rejected, lost, and hopeless. Even if our open wounds have healed, we hardly think of scars from the wounds as veins of gold that make us more useful and beautiful than before. But that is exactly

how God sees us and how we can come to see ourselves. God is a patient kintsugi artist, who mends broken pieces into masterpieces and turns our shame into radiance. We become a visual representation of God's restorative power. As we heal, we gain a deeper understanding of who He is, how great His love for us is, and how we can help others experience His love.

Yes, we look different. Being broken was not part of the original plan. But God can heal and restore us to an abundant, joy-filled life as we walk closely with Him. What could be more beautiful?

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (Ps. 139:14)

Talking to God

“Lord, my circumstances devastate me. I feel broken and anything but beautiful, and I wonder if I can ever be whole again. Help me to believe and expect your healing power in my life. Help me to see myself as You see me.”

Journaling with God

In what ways do I feel broken today?

How do I think God sees me? What does Psalm 34 say about how God sees me?

What can I do to help me see myself as useful and beautiful, like God sees me?

Day 3

FINDING HEALING IN PSALM 34

Read Psalm 34, and focus on verses 17 and 18. Copy these verses and place them in an easily visible location, so you can see them throughout the day.

Seeking God First—Demo Day

There is a time for everything . . . a time to tear down and a time to build. (Eccl. 3:1, 3)

The popcorn ceiling visibly sagged, the avocado green carpet smelled of mildew and moth balls, and the kitchen had no appliances but plenty of cockroaches. The clients bought the house anyway. Why? Because they had hired expert renovators Chip and Joanna Gaines from the popular TV show *Fixer Upper*.

At the beginning of the renovation, Chip can hardly contain his enthusiasm for demolition day, affectionately known as Demo Day. Before they can create the dream home, they have to remove every unwanted thing. Chip rips out worn and outdated cabinets, counters, and carpet. He removes old appliances, ugly wallpaper, and ancient light fixtures. He even destroys walls to create sight lines for the highly popular open concept the new homeowners desire.

The challenge with Demo Day is that previously hidden and unaddressed problems—wiring not up to code, water damage, unsupported walls, hornet nests—come to light. Chip and Joanna can't ignore these serious issues; they must address them before they can make structurally sound and safe progress.

We may feel as though we've been the object of Demo Day when we are stripped of everything we once thought of as normal, secure, purposeful. Then, staggering under the exposure of the brokenness in our marriage

and in ourselves, we become overwhelmed with the task of restoring and rebuilding our lives apart from our spouse and may feel that “the house” should just be razed to the ground. But, carrying the metaphor further, Chip and Joanna will often say the house has good bones and occasionally they find hidden treasures, such as shiplap, wooden floors, or even a message in a bottle left by a previous owner decades before.

Although painful, Demo Day can be good for us. God creates clear, straight sight lines to Him, to our other relationships, and even to ourselves, so we can better understand and recover from our brokenness. We are stripped to bare essentials to enable us to visualize what is important and what we need to do to become stronger and better. We also have the opportunity to expose and demolish old wounds that we have tolerated for many years. Current struggles often bring to light past distresses that we have ignored, either intentionally or unintentionally. Hopefully, we can honestly examine the state of our house and be willing to endure the pain of removing the old for the joy of the new. In her book *Dancing in the Arms of God*, Connie Neal describes this process of recovering from enormous devastation: “As I let myself grieve my losses, deeper losses and leftover pain from the past resurfaced. God could then heal the deep hurts that I hadn’t been able to see.”²

*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are
crushed in spirit. (Ps. 34:18)*

Talking to God

“Lord, I confess that I don’t want to face my brokenness. I want to pretend my house is in order, but I can’t anymore. I invite You to expose my denial, my hidden brokenness. Help me to be willing to do the hard work of tearing away what is broken and to trust You to restore me in ways I cannot even imagine right now.”

Journaling with God

In what ways have I already experienced Demo Day?

What deeper wounds, if any, have surfaced during this time?

What fears do I have about facing these deeper wounds?

How can God help me understand and heal from these deep wounds?

Day 4

FINDING HEALING IN PSALM 34

Read Psalm 34. Underline the verbs that describe the actions of a person seeking God. (For example, the verb in verse 5 is *look* and the verb in verse 6 is *called*.)

Seeking God First—Growing Pains

*My comfort in my suffering is this: your promise preserves my life.
(Ps. 119:50)*

Although my student was a high school athlete, young and strong, her recovery from back surgery was more difficult than expected. She learned some tough life lessons as she battled with the pain. A previously active cheerleader and water polo player, she was eager to return to her activities but knew it would take a while for her body to heal. She figured that she could participate again once the pain went away.

Soon, however, she learned that she couldn't wait until she was completely pain-free to resume her normal activities. Yes, she had to begin slowly to avoid reinjury, but if she didn't move at all, her muscles would tighten up, and she would end up in even worse pain and diminish or even eradicate the benefits of the surgery altogether.

Of course divorce is painful. There are times when we don't want to move because we can't bear more pain. We can't imagine one more step, one more day. I spent many, many hours lying in bed, crying and listening to breakup songs such as "Stop Draggin' My Heart Around," "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together," and "Harden My Heart."

At best, it was okay to face the grief in that way for a season, but then I needed to get out of bed. I needed to move—at least a little bit—even though it was still painful. My first small step was to change my playlist to songs of hope and healing such as "A Little Bit Stronger," "Need You Now," and "Cry Out to Jesus," with positive lyrics for my soul. Instead

of fretting about what's way down the road, I gradually learned to make choices that would help me for that moment, for that day. Should I call somebody? Go for a walk? Spend time with my girls? Make time for myself?

We may feel frozen initially, but we can eventually learn to rely on God's provision of strength and courage to move in the midst of pain.

Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. "Do not be afraid, you who are highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." (Dan. 10:18–19)

Talking to God

"Lord, You know I am sometimes overwhelmed by pain and can't move. I am afraid my pain will just get worse. Please give me the strength to seek healing and the wisdom to know the steps to take to get moving. I trust You to be not only my catalyst but also my ever-present support along the way."

Journaling with God

On a scale from one to ten, what is my level of pain today?

Do I believe God understands and is sensitive to my pain?

What are some healthy and unhealthy ways I deal with my pain?

What step does God want me to take today to reduce my level of pain?

Day 5

Finding Hope in Naomi's Story (Ruth 1)

Sometimes we think the Bible's stories consist of spiritual giants, far superior to us. On the contrary, the Bible is alive with people just like us who struggle, make mistakes, feel despair, and desperately need help in times of hardship. They were broken too. We can learn from their imperfect reactions to their circumstances and take comfort from God's merciful responses.

Because of a famine in Israel, Naomi, with her husband and two sons, left Bethlehem and moved to Moab, a foreign country that provided food for her family. Although the Moabites did not share Naomi's faith in God, Naomi lived peacefully there for ten years. This peace did not last, however, and Naomi returned to Israel a broken woman.

Read what happened to Naomi in Ruth 1:1–13.

My Brokenness

What words or phrases come to mind when you think of the word *brokenness*? What visual image do you see?

Dictionary.com defines broken as “reduced to fragments, ruptured, torn, or not functioning properly.” In what ways does this definition fit you? On a scale from one to ten, how broken do you feel today?

Naomi's Brokenness

What losses did Naomi experience, and in what ways might she have felt broken because of these losses?

How did she feel toward God in these circumstances?

What else do you learn about Naomi's circumstances and her feelings in Ruth 1?

In what ways do you relate to Naomi?

Psalm 34:18 says, “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” In what ways is this verse true for Naomi?

Although these questions cover only the first chapter in Ruth, you can read the rest of the book to see how God redeems Ruth and Naomi, giving them great joy and a new life.

What is most hopeful to you about Naomi’s story?