

Good morning Church!

My name is Alex, and I'm very excited to bring you God's message today. If I haven't met you yet, here's a quick introduction to myself.

- I'm married to my wife Harmony
- We have 3 boys Isaac, Solomon and Jadon in 5th, 3rd and 1st grade
- We lead a home group in Mountain View
- By trade, like many in the SF bay area, I am a software engineer working in AI

I grew up in Taiwan, an island off the coast of China, where the society is heavily influenced by Buddhism, Taoism and ancestor worship. Christians are the minority, and only a single digit of the population would call themselves Christians. By God's grace, my mom was a believer, though we didn't go to church or talk about God at all really. Then at the end of elementary school, I moved to Vancouver, Canada.

That was where I was exposed to Christianity because my mom needed community - she took me and my brother by herself to a foreign land. So at the Taiwanese Canaan Presbyterian Church, I started going to Sunday school, youth group, all the way through highschool, college and grad school at Berkeley. I didn't fully surrender to Christ until I was in Berkeley.

Looking back, this was a long 10 year journey of denial and flat out rebellion. I was, by normal standards, a good kid and had a successful education. I was proud, and the notion of a God who has a pre-determined plan for me, and equally abundant plan for everyone else, is lazy and insulting. In college, I bought into the existentialist thinking, studied Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre, and took pride in debating with my Christian classmates and small group peers.

But God, quoting Eph 2, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, finally broke me and broke through to me in 2011. I'm standing before you a relatively young christian - after all, my spiritual self is younger than my car and I can't even get a spiritual driver license yet - and it feels very surreal and I'm privileged to be standing here, bringing you the word.

With that, let's dig into our passage today and turn to Psalm 34. Let me read

- I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- ² My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
- ³ Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together!
- ⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.
- ⁵ Those who look to him are radiant,
and their faces shall never be ashamed.
- ⁶ This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
and saved him out of all his troubles.
- ⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
- ⁸ Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
- ⁹ Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!
- ¹⁰ The young lions suffer want and hunger;
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
- ¹¹ Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
- ¹² What man is there who desires life
and loves many days, that he may see good?
- ¹³ Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.
- ¹⁴ Turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.
- ¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry.
- ¹⁶ The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

¹⁷ When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles.

¹⁸ The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.

¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

²⁰ He keeps all his bones;
not one of them is broken.

²¹ Affliction will slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

²² The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

[Prayer]

Let me start with a question: *How do we get “the good life”?*

We have all asked it ourselves, in some shape or form, and are probably still asking it. Any time we are making big (or not so big) decisions.

For those of you still in school, maybe this is picking a major or a class in school, or picking a college to spend the next 4 years of your life.

For the rest of you post graduation, maybe this is

- accepting a job offer,
- deciding who to date or marry,
- choosing a vacation spot,
- planning retirement.

Harmony and I just moved to a new place and you bet this was lurking at the back of our mind. [As someone who is past 40 and in danger of the proverbial mid-life crisis, this question of the good life is a weekly if not daily pondering.]

This is one of the oldest questions in human history, and many have attempted to answer it.

- Thomas Jefferson in the US Declaration of Independence says people should have rights to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness”.
- Dalai lama echoes the sentiment

“We humans who live on this earth face the task of making a happy life for ourselves. Therefore, it is important to discover what will bring about the greatest degree of happiness.”

And since we live in the silicon valley, the mecca/babylon/rome of our time, many of our industry titans and influencers have also made their opinions known on the matter. Here is just a small sample:

- **“Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life.”**
 - That was Steve Jobs. His good life is an authentic one
- “I think life on Earth must be about more than just solving problems... It’s got to be something inspiring, even if it is vicarious.”
 - Elon Musk lives for inspiring goals, for a better tomorrow
- “I want to have minimized the number of regrets I have. When you’re 80 years old, in the end, we are our choices. Build yourself a great story.”
 - Jeff Bezos, who runs his life in a regret minimization framework

- “When you get to my age, you’ll really measure your success in life by how many of the people you want to have love you actually do love you”
 - That was Warren Buffet, in a commencement speech. He values being loved by people.

The Bible certainly addresses this question as well. After all, we are all here crammed into a room, listening to God’s word on a Sunday when we could have been outside, and hoping to nourish our souls with reminders of salvation.

Remember the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 who had everything? Having seemingly accomplished everything, had all the wealth, all the power, and youth, and followed every rule, yet feeling unfulfilled, he came to Jesus, and asked a variation of our question

“how can I get eternal life?”

This is the anchor question of our passage today, in verse 12,

What man is there who desires life
and loves many days, that he may see good?

Or more colloquially from the New Living translation:

“Does anyone want to live a life that is long and prosperous?”

Before we let God speak through David, let’s examine the structure of the whole Psalm. It has 2 rough sections:

V 1-10 is David’s testimony of what God has done.

He starts with the lofty, heavenly praise for God. The language of “Magnify the Lord” and “Let us Exalt his name” resembles Mary’s magnificat in Luke 1. Remember? Mary famously burst into song and praise, after she learns she will give birth to Jesus the Christ.

After the call to praise, starting in v4, David recounted what God has done, delivering David from all his fears, hearing his cries, saving him out of all his troubles. The words chosen here - “all his fears”, “all his troubles”, “never be ashamed” - depict a God who provides total, absolute assurance. This is the reason for praise, and the first part of the Psalm is all about David’s testimony of what God has done.

Part 2 (v 13-22) is David’s teaching, of how David wants us to respond, with a reminder of God’s promise. Here we see the clear imperatives, or instructions, on how to live. Starting in v 13-14:

Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.

14

Turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.

David then follows these up with the reasons to live this way. Because God hears and God sees. Because God is near and God delivers. What was true in part 1 of David's testimony, of what God has done in the past (namely, God has seen, God has heard, God has delivered), will continue to be true going forward. Hence David has the authority and the logical backing to teach us, how to live and how to respond, in light of what God has done. And we should listen.

Right in the middle, in v 11-12, between the testimony and the teaching, we see our pivotal question. Between what God has done in the past, and what God has promised to do in the present and future. "Do you want the good life"?

And as a lead in to the meat of the text, I'll borrow from v11
Come, O children, listen to me;

Or imagine this is David calling you, *Come Children*.

Or, as David is a foreshadow to the one and only Jesus, who loves and welcomes children,
Come Children

All right. Part I, David's Testimony.

Psalm 34 is one of the few psalms where we know both the author and the historical timing and setting when the psalm was written. It's useful context for us to know what the author, David, was experiencing at the time.

In your bible, under the heading Psalm 34, you might see this small line of description: "Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away."

The historical backdrop is a reference to 1 Sam 21. As it was told, David fled from Saul to Achish the king of Gath. Then David was recognized and "was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath". As a way to escape, David faked insanity and madness. The description here is dramatic and vivid - scratching on the doors with hands, and letting drool run wild down his beard. And he convincingly succeeded in his act, and in his escape.

A few useful notes for us to consider

1. Gath is a Philistine city. It is where Goliath is from - remember that scary giant that the boy David slayed and beheaded. So they know about David and likely harbors animosity toward the Israelites and particularly David
2. Abimelech in our Psalm's superscript is a common title for a Philistine ruler. Achish is the actual name of the king. So the two are referring to the same person - a title and a name.

As David is writing this psalm, he has just gone through an impossibly frightening and hopeless situation. And David was much afraid and he cried to the LORD Yahweh, as we saw in v6 in Psalm 34.

And lucky for us, Psalm 34 has a sister Psalm 56 which was written just before Psalm 34. Psalm 56 also has a superscript that gives us the historical context, and it reads "When the Philistines seized him in Gath".

Now we have the full picture, pieced together from

- 1 Sam 21, that narrates the historical events
- Psalm 56, which was written before David escapes
- and our passage today Psalm 34, which was written after the escape and deliverance.

Not only was David recognized; he was seized and captured. And Psalm 56 described the ordeal more vividly. No need to flip there now, just take a listen.

Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me;
all day long an attacker oppresses me;

2

my enemies trample on me all day long,
for many attack me proudly.

And David was much afraid and he cried! Repeatedly, as he pleaded with God

8

You have kept count of my tossings;^[c]
put my tears in your bottle.
Are they not in your book?

This is a common pattern for David, as we have seen throughout the Psalms. He is a man who is well acquainted with persecution, and he lifts up his fear and frustration repeatedly and faithfully to God.

... “How long O lord will you forget me” ...

And God delivers the impossible (over and over), with Saul, Absalom, and in our case, Achish the king of Gath. And David bursts out with exaltation in Psalm 34, v8,

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!

It is not just an intellectual knowledge that God is good. It is something David can experience, with the senses. Taste and sight. God’s goodness is real and David can feel it!

Now it is possible to misread this as some sort of prosperity gospel. Hey, David is telling us to physically experience God’s blessing and goodness! That means I should feel it in my body, my bank account, my family, my success. You know, the “health and wealth” gospel.

This verse used to be one of my favorite verses, for the wrong reason. If you recall from my introduction, I grew up with Buddhist values. A core fundamental belief is that suffering comes from attachment to impermanent things. And, bliss and ultimate peace (or the state of *Nirvana* - not the band) comes from detachment of feelings and detachment from enjoying worldly possessions.

When I read “Taste and See that God is Good”, I used to take this as a call to experience God in a sensational way, and as a healthy call against my innate drive to detach from the world. When you couple it with 1 Corinthians 10:31 (“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”), I took this in stride. Praising God while chewing a juicy piece of steak, enjoying the dopamine rush at the end of a run, and the list of blessings go on: a house, a job, a family. Fill in the blank.

Yes, all that is valid. But “God is Good” means much more.

Look at the setting. David was in captivity. David had to fake crazy. David was on the run. In the aftermath of the escape, as we will read in 1 Samuel 22, David was in a cave, where he likely

wrote Psalm 34. Tears on his pillow, saliva in his beard, days out from death's grip. "Taste and see" cannot merely mean a comfortable life, full of blessings without afflictions.

David has tasted something better. God is good, in the sense that God himself is the goodness, not just the gifts he gives or the blessings he offers. David's call to taste and see is to experience God's trait of goodness, that God = good.

God's goodness is not the absence or removal of our problems. It is the presence of God in your problems, as He draws near to us. The immediate context of a joyful man sustained in hardship, gives his witness to God's goodness credibility. And his call to Taste that Goodness, a unique weight.

And David wants to teach God's people (the children) how to taste their King's goodness, even in the midst of our difficulties. How should we properly respond?

Part II, on to David's teaching. I want to draw out two lessons here from David.

Lesson #1: Fear the Lord.. This flows straight out of v11. David himself says it plainly “I will teach you the fear of the Lord.”

Before we get into it, the first thing we noticed is that David mentioned and recognized he has other fears. We see this in v3, how God delivered him from “all his fears”. And we see this abundantly described in Psalm 56 and 1 Sam 21, how David was much afraid of his enemies’ persecutions.

Let’s pause and reflect a bit. We all fear something. Aristotle defines fear in this way:

“Fear is pain arising from the anticipation of evil.” You might have heard the acronym “False Evidence Appearing Real”.

Either way, fear is an anticipation of a future bad. And since the world is a broken sinful place, fear is common place. Everyone is afraid of something.

We might not be under persecution in this country, and we don’t need to watch over our shoulders for an angry mob or government officials to inconvenience us (at least not most of us). But that doesn’t mean we don’t have fears. I mean, we are living in Silicon Valley, where money and career are often the sources of our dread. What if I am part of the next round of layoffs? What if my landlord raises my rent next month, or worse, gives me notice that I need to move out? If you are younger and still in school, am I going to make the cut for the school sports team? Am I going to get that boy or girl to notice me? For those who have kids, we all have fears of how they will grow up? Will their ADHD get better? Will they be able to make friends? And to top it off, we are all growing older, there’s the fear of death and sickness and aging looming in the dead of night.

So the lesson here is not to conjure up a new fear, but to first recognize and face our existing fears, and then reprioritize and reorder them to be secondary to Fear of the LORD.

David’s reminder and his own example is to turn toward the Lord. Not ignoring, not downplaying, not numbing. And David’s life is a long list of problems, turning to and seeking the Lord, and God delivering. Along with all

I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.

The subject of our ultimate fear is the LORD. And it’s the all capital Yahweh, God’s own name, creator of the universe, sovereign judge and orchestrator of the world. And we get to ask this creator of the universe, and for him to respond and actually act and address our fears?

Imagine going to your company’s CEO, your governor, president. Knocking on his or her door, and laying out the problems that you are currently facing. And he or she actually paid full attention to you, and listened to all your concerns and addressed all of your fears. Impossible!

But Yahweh is in charge of the universe, and is fully good and fully capable of doing the impossible.

David sought and was heard. So we too have every reason to not only redirect, but also enlarge our fear toward the LORD. After all, fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, the beginning of good living.

The Hebrew word used here is *Yirah*, which is a fear bundled with awe, a deep respect, reverence, with holy trembling. It's a bigger, more powerful fear, full of weight and wonder.

I want to try here to paint a picture of what that feels like, even though it'll be difficult to describe God using things from this world.

Picture a boy on a dinner date with a girl he's liked for months. (Btw, it's going to be clear where this example is adapted from) In the car beforehand, he's a mess, going over what he might say, how he might want to sound and come across. Then dinner starts, and at first he's all nervous, constantly gulping water, wiping his sweaty palms on the cool glass of ice water.

But then the girl starts to talk about her day. She's funny, sharper than he expected, sarcastically witty yet not hurtful. Somewhere in there, he stops thinking about himself and what he should do. He's just leaning in, amazed he gets to sit across from her and laugh with her.

His nerves didn't go away because he fixed himself or perfectly rehearsed his lines. They went away because something bigger, something more majestic captured his gaze and focus. He still cares about not blowing the date, but it feels different now. It's not anxiety and paralysis anymore. It's awe.

That's a faint echo of what happens when the focus of our fear shifts. Once we begin to fear the LORD (to hold him in *yirah*), we start to act differently and pay attention to different parts of our lives. If you have learned to respect the beauty and might of the ocean, you might think twice before you jump headfirst into a strong surf. If you have lost control driving over black ice, you won't ignore the sign that says "chains required". You pull over and respond.

In the same way, when the fear of the LORD takes hold of us, it doesn't erase our other fears. It reorders them, because someone greater has captured our attention.

The presence and nearness of God is both beautiful and fear-inducing. Remember how Moses' face shone and glowed as a remnant of being face to face with God's glory? And Aaron and the people were afraid to draw near. To live out this fear properly, like a loving father, David provides a concrete and vivid picture of what fear of the LORD looks like,

13 Keep your tongue from evil

and your lips from speaking deceit.
14 Turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.

To paraphrase, the fear of the LORD shows up in our words, in the decisions we make and in our relationships. And this is aligned with who God is. The God we fear is a God who speaks life, a God who is good (not evil) and a God of peace who reconciles.

But David doesn't just describe what this fear looks like; he also shows us why it matters. There are deep, sobering reasons to fear the LORD, and he begins to unfold them in v 15 and 16:

15 The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry.
16 The face of the Lord is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

David's logic rests on two basic truths about God.

First, God is holy and just. He really does distinguish between the righteous and those who do evil. He is never confused, never biased, never fooled by appearances.

Second, God sees and hears everything. His eyes are "toward the righteous" and His ears are "toward their cry"—He sees every act of faithfulness, every hidden obedience, every whispered prayer. But He also sets His face against evil; no sin escapes His sight, and no rebellion will finally stand.

So the only sane response is to have a right fear of this God—to turn from evil and do good in His sight.

Peter later quotes this very passage in 1 Peter 3 to a suffering, persecuted church. He uses David's words to press home the same point: because God sees, hears, and will judge, we are free to bless instead of striking back.

This truth is meant to land on us in two ways: as a sober warning—God really is against unrepentant evil—and as a deep encouragement—God really is for the righteous, He sees, He hears, and He will not forget.

Reordered fear means knowing where to look and whom to fear: Yahweh, who sees all and hears all, and will finally set all things right.

Lesson #2: take refuge in Him.

After David's testimony, the word "refuge" serves as bookends for David's teaching.

It starts off in v8: "Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him."

And ends in V22 : "None of those who take refuge in him will be condemned."

Everything in between is held inside that word, refuge.

The theme of refuge first appears in the Bible as part of the law. In Numbers 35, Deut 19, when the land and cities were portioned out to the 12 tribes of Israel, there were 6 cities of refuge set apart so that people who accidentally murder could run there and avoid the avengement from the victims. It is a place of shelter from persecution, and it is given and ordained by God in the law. And they are meant to point us toward the ultimate refuge, God himself. David makes that front and center in Psalm 34.

I want to draw out two observations about God as a refuge here.

Observation #1 - the refuge is full of broken people. Verse 18 says: "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." The Hebrew here is graphic. The word for brokenhearted, is the word used to describe physical demolition, pottery smashed and shattered on the ground. Similarly, the word for crushed means ground down to dust.

In other words, God draws near to people who are broken, in pieces, desperate, hopeless. As David escapes Achish the king of Gath, and heads toward the caves at Abdullum, 1 Samuel 22 describes those who gathered there to be with David as "everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul".

Bitter in soul. These are the brokenhearted and crushed in spirit, and they took refuge in David's presence, who not only is God's anointed but is also a foreshadow of God to come.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, it is also the broken, the lowly, those despised in society that drew near, reclined at table with Jesus, rested at his feet. These are the tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, the sick, the demon-oppressed.

And these people are not only circumstantially broken, downcast in a particular scenario. They need to know they are broken, end of story, in light of God's power and holiness. In other words, they need to fear and respect Him, who sees and knows all, and as a result know that they are sinful. Jesus did say, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Our refuge is full of broken people, as God draws near to the brokenhearted and we who realized ourselves to be despicable draw near to God in response.

Observation #2 - the refuge does not remove afflictions. David says it plainly in v19: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." At this point, David had escaped from Gath, but was hiding in the caves of Adullam, still on the run from Saul. And with hindsight, we know many more trials and waves of persecution were still coming his way.

The Christian life is not a life of comfort nor an escape from life's hardships. Jesus would later say, "in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33) And Paul, writing from the Roman prison, makes it just as plain, "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death". (Philippians 3:10).

Cancer happens to Christians. Layoffs happen to Christians. Marriages break in Christian homes. Kids stray from Christian parents. There is no place for the prosperity gospel, or for "tasting and seeing" only good things in life.

Instead, look at the promise from the rest of v19 - the LORD saves and delivers the righteous out of all his afflictions. Again, the emphasis is on All. Absolute coverage. And the promise here is not the absence of afflictions, but deliverance out of them. It's not skipping trials, but being rescued from them. It's going through the valley of shadow of death following our shepherd's staff, not taking a detour around it.

And this includes going through hardship. v20 is a gem. He [the righteous] will keep all his bones, not one will be broken. The promise is: we might be hurt, but don't worry, it'll only be surface wounds and we will still be intact.

Paul sums it up well in 2 Cor 4:

⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed

My 3 boys are always getting into trouble, and one of them got himself into a particularly scary predicament. (I will let you guess which one) One afternoon on a weekday, I was working from home and we got a call from the school. "There had been an accident, and your kid is in the front office with the school doctor." We rushed there and we were greeted with our boy holding his bloody chin covered by gauze. It turns out he has gone head first down the slide on the playground, and the friction against the plastic had burned off a significant part of his skin.

Long story short, we hurried to urgent care, and were greeted by a physician assistant, who warned us repeatedly that this is not a straightforward case and transferred us pessimistically over to the plastic surgery department. By God's grace, the specialist doctor has a slot for us. Soon, our boy was lying on the surgery chair. His face and upper torso was mostly covered up, except for his chin. At this point, my wife was visibly disturbed by the sight of the gore and the various components God had installed under our skin.

So I stood beside our son, held his hand. His breathing and heartbeat was loud and rapid. He was scared; I was scared. I prayed for deliverance and that I would trust the Lord to deliver. With one hand I squeezed my son's trembling hand and with the other hand, I tapped on his chest so he could know I'm still with him, through the pain and confusion. Almost immediately, his breathing began to steady and I could no longer feel his hand trembling. Within a few minutes, he was calm and I heard snoring.

Right in the middle of a bloody surgery, he was resting. I chuckled at the juxtaposition, of the peacefulness in the chaos, stillness inside the storm. It's a vignette of Jesus sleeping in the boat tossed by the wind, Paul and Silas' song in the Phillipi prison, Jesus the silent lamb led to the slaughter.

My son rested knowing his dad was fully present and near, just as I rested safe inside the refuge of our Father. Covered by the fullness of his presence.

So, take a page out of David's book. Name your afflictions and your hurt. Don't numb it with distractions, don't ignore it, don't hide it. Then run for cover under Jesus' outstretched arms.

Life is and will be full of tribulations, and the good life is a life lived from refuge that holds fast, even when you begin to break. All because God has drawn near to us. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

The Gospel

We could stop here and say great testimony and great teaching David. Fear God and seek refuge in Him. But God's not done. 1000 years after David testified and taught from that cave, God himself would come down and draw near. Jesus became man, and went to the cross. He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. He was hung on the cursed tree.

Then he died.

You might ask, "didn't God promise to deliver him out of all afflictions"? Surely Jesus was sinless and righteous. Was God faithful in keeping his promise?

But look at what John tells us in chapter 19:33:

³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."

Whenever we study the old testament, we are taught to look for Jesus, as the ultimate fulfillment of the old. John made it easy for us here and connected the dots for us. Even in death, Psalm 34 held true. The promise didn't fail at the cross. It was being fulfilled there.

Hebrews 5:7 puts it this way: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence."

Jesus feared the Father, cried out to him, and was heard. Psalm 34 played out in the life of the Son. He feared, he cried. The Father heard his Son's cry. The answer wasn't rescue from death. The answer was resurrection through death. The grave is empty. Jesus was delivered through the ultimate affliction, so that we can be delivered in ours.

What David wanted to teach us, the secret to a good life, is not a checklist of how to fear God better. It's a person. The secret is to follow Jesus and put your trust in him.

Remember the rich young ruler, who asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life? "Sell all that you have, and come, follow me." Follow him. The bread of life to the hungry crowd, the living water to the woman at the well, the light of the world to the blind, the source of rest to all who labor and are heavy laden. They are all the same person.

And once you have made Jesus your place of refuge, your place of abiding, he will deliver you out of all your afflictions, by carrying you through them. The last verse of our psalm: "None of those who take refuge in him will be condemned." Paul says the same thing in Romans 8: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." In Christ, blessing overflows. He prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies.

David sat in a cave, hunted, in hiding; yet he praised and sang. "I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall [forever] be in my mouth." What should have been a place of fear and dread became a place of praise.

Jesus too, was laid in a cave, sealed behind a heavy stone. What should have been a place of hopelessness and death, it is now empty, and a place of worship and life.

Last call

Let's go back to David's question: "Do you want the good life?"

Now we can answer him. It starts with being honest that we are the broken, facing afflictions. Some of you are in the middle of something hard right now - don't hide it. Let Jesus have it. Some of you might be carrying pain buried so long that you've stopped noticing it because it's too much - let Jesus see those too.

Bring it all to Jesus. Take refuge in Him. He has already walked through death and come out the other side, and he will carry you through whatever you're facing, and whatever's still coming.

That's how we taste and see the Lord is good. Not by avoiding the valley of death, but by realizing the good shepherd is already there leading us through.

And let's join the singing and David's call, "Oh magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together".