

When Life Leaves You Broken

BIBLE STUDY HANDOUT | October 21, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 34:15–22 (NKJV)

Central Claim: Faith does not require us to understand every painful circumstance. We can continue trusting God even when suffering challenges our expectations, our prayers seem unanswered, and we struggle to understand what He has allowed.

Key Truth: Being broken does not mean being abandoned.

INTRODUCTION: Understanding Life's Painful Seasons

There was a saying many of us heard from the older saints: “Just keep living.” Those words reflected the wisdom of people who understood that life brings both joy and sorrow, victories and disappointments. No matter how carefully we plan or how faithfully we live, none of us is exempt from life's uncertainties.

Some of life's deepest wounds are invisible. People may continue working, attending church, caring for their families, and encouraging others while privately struggling with grief, disappointment, unanswered prayers, or painful circumstances.

For believers, suffering can introduce an additional challenge. We believe God is loving, faithful, powerful, and attentive to our prayers. Yet sometimes our experiences seem inconsistent with what we believe about Him.

We may find ourselves asking:

- If God sees what I am experiencing, why hasn't He intervened?
- If God hears my prayers, why haven't my circumstances changed?
- If God loves me, why has He allowed something so painful?
- How do I continue trusting God when I cannot understand what He is doing?

These questions do not automatically indicate a lack of faith. Scripture records the experiences of faithful people who wrestled with suffering, confusion, and disappointment.

Biblical Background

Psalm 34 is attributed to David. Its heading connects the psalm with an occasion when David escaped danger after pretending to be insane before a Philistine ruler (see 1 Samuel 21:10–15).

David knew what it meant to experience fear, vulnerability, and uncertainty. Yet he testified to God's goodness without suggesting that righteous people would never encounter trouble.

Psalm 34:19 declares:

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.”

This verse acknowledges two important realities: God's people experience suffering, and God remains faithful to them.

The central question of our study is:

How do we continue trusting God when the experiences of life challenge what we thought we understood about Him?

POINT I: When Life Challenges What We Believe About God (vv. 15–16)

Key Scripture

Psalms 34:15 teaches that God's eyes are upon the righteous and His ears are attentive to their cries.

Understanding the Passage

David begins by assuring believers that God sees and hears His people. His attention is not limited to moments when life is going well.

However, we must distinguish between what God has promised and what we sometimes assume He ought to do.

We believe that God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and loving. But we may unconsciously attach expectations to those beliefs. We assume that because God knows our circumstances, He will prevent certain difficulties.

Because He loves us, He will protect us from certain disappointments. Because He hears our prayers, He will answer according to our desires.

When those expectations are not fulfilled, our understanding of God may be challenged.

The promise of God's attention is not a guarantee of a life without suffering.

Notice that Psalm 34:15 refers to the cries of the righteous. The very presence of those cries indicates that faithful people sometimes experience distress.

David does not promise that God's people will never hurt. He assures them that their suffering does not escape God's attention.

Biblical Illustration: Job

Job 1:1 describes Job as blameless and upright, a man who feared God and shunned evil.

Nevertheless, Job experienced devastating losses involving his possessions, his children, and his health.

His suffering was not presented as punishment for secret wickedness. Furthermore, Job did not possess the explanation that readers receive in the opening chapters of the book.

Job's experience reminds us that righteous living does not guarantee a life free from suffering.

Sometimes faithful people experience circumstances they cannot explain.

Understanding Verse 16

Psalm 34:16 contrasts God's favorable attention toward the righteous with His opposition to those who practice evil.

However, we must not conclude that everyone experiencing suffering is under divine judgment.

In John 9:1–3, Jesus' disciples encountered a man born blind and asked whether his condition resulted from his sin or his parents' sin. Jesus rejected that explanation in this particular case.

We should therefore exercise caution when interpreting another person's suffering.

Not every illness is punishment. Not every disappointment results from disobedience. Not every unanswered prayer reveals insufficient faith.

Practical Applications

1. Examine whether your expectations are based on God's promises or personal assumptions.
2. Avoid judging the spiritual condition of others by the difficulties they experience.
3. Remember that God's awareness of your suffering does not guarantee immediate relief.
4. Allow difficult circumstances to deepen your understanding of Scripture rather than relying only on what you have previously assumed.

Supporting Scriptures

Job 1:1–22: A righteous man experiences suffering without understanding its cause.

John 9:1–3: Jesus challenges the assumption that suffering necessarily results from personal sin.

Isaiah 55:8–9: God's thoughts and ways exceed our own understanding.

Key Lesson

God's character must not be measured solely by whether our circumstances match our expectations.

Personal Reflection

1. Have you ever expected God to act in a particular way and struggled when He did not?
2. How can we distinguish between God's promises and assumptions we have developed about Him?
3. Why is it dangerous to assume that someone's suffering is evidence of weak faith?

POINT II: When Our Disappointment Becomes Disappointment With God (vv. 17–18)

Key Scripture

Psalm 34:17–18 assures us that the Lord hears the cries of the righteous and draws near to those whose hearts are broken.

Understanding the Passage

There is something particularly difficult about suffering when we believe God could have prevented it.

We know that God possesses the power to change circumstances. Yet sometimes those circumstances remain unchanged.

When this happens, disappointment can become deeply personal. We may struggle not simply with what happened but with why God allowed it to happen.

Verse 17 describes righteous people crying out to the Lord. Their cries are expressions of genuine distress.

The Hebrew language conveys calling for help in a time of trouble. These are not necessarily carefully prepared prayers. They may arise through tears, confusion, fear, or emotional exhaustion.

God's attentiveness does not depend upon our ability to express our suffering perfectly.

But we must understand an important distinction:

God's hearing our prayers does not mean He has promised to grant every request according to our preferred outcome or timetable.

We may pray for healing, yet illness continues. We may pray for reconciliation, yet relationships remain broken. We may pray for opportunities, yet doors remain closed.

These experiences can raise difficult questions about God's involvement in our lives.

Biblical Illustration: Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

In 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, Paul describes a thorn in the flesh that caused him considerable distress.

Paul pleaded with the Lord three times for it to be removed.

Rather than removing the thorn, the Lord assured Paul that His grace was sufficient and that His strength was made perfect in weakness.

Paul did not receive the particular outcome he requested, but he received assurance of divine grace.

This illustrates an important truth: God's response to suffering may not take the form we anticipated.

We should not use Paul's experience to suggest that people should stop praying for relief. Rather, it teaches us that God's faithfulness cannot be reduced to whether He grants a particular request.

Understanding God's Nearness in Verse 18

Verse 18 identifies the Lord as near to those who have broken hearts and contrite spirits.

The Hebrew expressions communicate profound inward distress, including the experience of being crushed or deeply humbled.

In this context, brokenheartedness should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of personal wrongdoing.

David does not suggest that brokenhearted people are disqualified from experiencing God's presence.

Instead, he identifies them as people toward whom God extends His care.

Being broken does not mean being abandoned.

We sometimes assume that spiritual maturity requires emotional composure. We admire people who appear strong and unshaken by adversity.

But grief does not automatically indicate spiritual weakness. Tears do not necessarily reveal unbelief. Questions do not always mean someone has abandoned God.

Biblical Illustration: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus

John 11 records the death of Lazarus and the grief experienced by his sisters, Mary and Martha.

Both sisters told Jesus that if He had been present, their brother would not have died.

Their words expressed confidence in Jesus' power while revealing their pain over what had happened.

Jesus did not dismiss their grief.

John 11:35 tells us:

“Jesus wept.”

Although Jesus would raise Lazarus, He entered into the sorrow of those who were mourning.

This reminds us that compassion is not a substitute for faith. It is an expression of love.

When God Feels Distant

There is a difference between God's promised presence and our emotional awareness of that presence.

Grief, exhaustion, and prolonged suffering may leave believers feeling spiritually isolated.

Psalm 13 provides an example of faithful lament. David questioned how long he would experience what felt like God's absence.

His questions expressed genuine anguish, but they did not establish that God had actually forgotten him.

The Psalms demonstrate that believers can bring their pain and confusion directly before God.

Honest lament is not necessarily the opposite of faith. It can be an expression of faith seeking God amid suffering.

Practical Applications

1. Bring your disappointment before God rather than pretending it does not exist.
2. Remember that unanswered prayer does not automatically mean God has stopped listening.
3. Avoid offering simplistic explanations to people who are grieving.
4. Practice compassionate presence by listening, praying, and walking alongside those who are hurting.
5. Recognize that emotional pain and genuine faith can exist together.

Supporting Scriptures

2 Corinthians 12:7–10: God's grace sustains Paul despite his unanswered request for relief.

John 11:17–44: Jesus responds to the grief of Mary and Martha with compassion and power.

Psalms 13:1–6: David demonstrates how believers can bring feelings of abandonment and distress before God.

Romans 12:15: Believers are called to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

Key Lesson

God's nearness does not depend upon our emotional strength, and His faithfulness is not determined by whether we receive the answer we wanted.

Personal Reflection

1. Have you ever experienced disappointment that affected your relationship with God?
2. What is the difference between honestly questioning God and abandoning trust in Him?
3. How can we better support people who are grieving or struggling with unanswered prayers?
4. Why is it important to distinguish between God's presence and our feelings about His presence?

POINT III: When Faith Must Learn to Live With Unanswered Questions (vv. 19–22)

Key Scripture

Psalms 34:19 acknowledges that righteous people experience many afflictions while affirming the Lord's deliverance.

Understanding the Passage

David makes a statement that challenges the assumption that faithful living guarantees freedom from suffering.

He declares that the afflictions of the righteous are many.

Righteousness does not exempt us from grief, illness, betrayal, disappointment, or the uncertainties of life.

But David also affirms God's deliverance.

These two truths must be held together. If we emphasize only suffering, we risk overlooking God's faithfulness. If we emphasize only deliverance, we may create expectations Scripture does not guarantee.

Sometimes God delivers people from circumstances. Sometimes He sustains them through circumstances they would never have chosen.

When we consider David's assurance alongside the broader testimony of Scripture, we also discover that God's ultimate redemption extends beyond the limitations of this present life.

Trusting God Without Knowing the Outcome

There is a difference between trusting God for a particular outcome and trusting God because of who He is.

We are encouraged to pray for healing, reconciliation, protection, provision, and opportunities.

But our confidence in God must be grounded in more than whether our circumstances turn out as we desire.

Spiritual maturity involves learning to trust God's character even when we cannot predict His actions.

Biblical Illustration: The Three Hebrew Men

Daniel 3 records the experience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

When King Nebuchadnezzar demanded that they worship his golden image, they refused.

They believed God was able to deliver them from the fiery furnace.

But in Daniel 3:18, they declared:

“But if not...”

Even if God did not rescue them, they would not worship the king's gods.

Their obedience was not conditional upon receiving the outcome they desired.

We know that God ultimately delivered them from the furnace. However, their faithfulness was already evident before they knew how the story would end.

Faith is not merely believing that God can change our circumstances. It is continuing to trust Him when we do not know whether He will change them.

Understanding Psalm 34:20

David declares that God guards the bones of the righteous and that not one is broken.

This poetic language emphasizes God's preserving care. It should not be interpreted as a universal promise that faithful people will never suffer physical injury.

John 19:33–36 connects this language with Jesus Christ.

When the soldiers came to Jesus during His crucifixion, they discovered He was already dead and did not break His legs. John presents this event as the fulfillment of Scripture.

Jesus experienced tremendous suffering while fulfilling God's redemptive purposes.

His suffering reminds us that divine faithfulness cannot be equated with the absence of pain.

Understanding Psalm 34:21–22

The final verses contrast the ultimate destiny of the wicked with the security of those who trust in God.

Verse 21 speaks of judgment against evil.

Verse 22 affirms that the Lord redeems His servants and that those who trust in Him will not be condemned.

David directs our attention beyond immediate circumstances toward God's judgment and redeeming faithfulness.

The present condition of the righteous does not tell the entire story.

The Hope of Ultimate Redemption

Romans 8:18 teaches that present suffering cannot compare with the glory God will reveal.

This does not mean suffering is insignificant. It means suffering does not possess the final word in God's redemptive purposes.

There are losses we cannot reverse, relationships we cannot restore, and questions we may never fully answer in this life.

Christian hope does not require us to deny those realities.

Instead, it calls us to trust that God's purposes extend beyond our present understanding.

Practical Applications

1. Continue praying even when you cannot predict the outcome.
2. Distinguish God's ability to deliver from assumptions about how He must deliver.
3. Remember that some questions may remain unanswered in this life.
4. Seek encouragement through Scripture, prayer, and the support of fellow believers.
5. Allow the hope of God's ultimate redemption to strengthen your perseverance without minimizing present suffering.

Supporting Scriptures

Daniel 3:16–18: The three Hebrew men demonstrate faithfulness without certainty about their deliverance.

John 19:33–36: The Gospel connects Psalm 34:20 with the crucifixion of Jesus.

Romans 8:18: Present suffering is placed within the larger hope of future glory.

2 Corinthians 4:16–18: Paul encourages believers to maintain an eternal perspective amid affliction.

Key Lesson

Our inability to understand everything God allows does not mean that everything Scripture reveals about His character is untrue.

Personal Reflection

1. Can you recall a time when you had to trust God without knowing how a situation would end?
2. What does the declaration “But if not” teach us about spiritual maturity?
3. How can we maintain hope without minimizing the reality of suffering?
4. What does it mean to trust God because of who He is rather than only because of what we hope He will do?

CONCLUSION: When Life Leaves You Broken

Psalms 34 does not offer easy explanations for life's most difficult experiences.

Instead, it offers assurance about the character of God.

Through this study, we have examined three realities:

First, life can challenge what we believe about God. We must learn to distinguish God's promises from our assumptions about how He should act.

Second, disappointment with circumstances can become disappointment with God. We must recognize that grief, confusion, and unanswered questions do not automatically disqualify us from genuine faith.

Third, faith sometimes requires us to continue without complete explanations. We must learn to trust God's character even when we cannot predict or understand His actions.

This lesson also challenges us to become more compassionate toward people who are suffering.

We do not always know what others are carrying. The person who encourages everyone else may privately need encouragement. The person who appears spiritually strong may be struggling with grief or unanswered prayers.

Our responsibility is not to demand that hurting people explain away their pain. We are called to demonstrate compassion, offer prayer, and walk alongside them.

Above all, Psalm 34 reminds us that God sees, hears, draws near, and redeems.

Faith is not having an answer for every question. Sometimes faith is continuing to trust the God we know while living through circumstances we do not understand.

THIS WEEK'S APPLICATION CHALLENGE

Practice trusting God without demanding an immediate explanation.

During the coming week, take time to identify a situation that has challenged your expectations, caused disappointment, or left you with unanswered questions.

Bring that situation honestly before God in prayer.

Consider whether your struggle involves something God has actually promised or something you have assumed He should do.

Then identify one practical expression of faith you can demonstrate while waiting. That might involve continuing to pray, seeking wise counsel, extending forgiveness where appropriate, asking for support, or offering compassion to someone experiencing a difficult season.

Finally, reach out to one person who may be carrying a burden. Rather than feeling obligated to provide an explanation or solution, offer encouragement, prayer, and a willingness to listen.

SCRIPTURES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Scripture	Focus
Psalms 13:1–6	Bringing unanswered questions before God
Psalms 42:5–11	Holding on to hope during emotional distress
Job 1:20–22; 42:1–6	Trusting God amid suffering and limited understanding
Isaiah 43:1–3	God's presence through difficult circumstances
Lamentations 3:19–26	Remembering God's mercy in seasons of affliction
John 11:17–44	Jesus' compassion toward the grieving
2 Corinthians 12:7–10	Sufficient grace amid unanswered prayer
Romans 8:18–39	Suffering, hope, and the assurance of God's love
Hebrews 4:14–16	Approaching God confidently for mercy and grace
1 Peter 5:6–7	Entrusting our anxieties to God's care

FINAL THOUGHT

Life may challenge our expectations. Suffering may leave us with questions. Disappointment may test our confidence in God.

But Psalm 34 reminds us that our circumstances do not place us beyond His attention or care.

Life may leave us broken, but we are never beyond the reach of God's faithful care.