

Next month will be five years since the absolute worst funeral I ever had to preside over, and hopefully ever will. Her name was Angel, oddly enough. She had just graduated high school. She was about to start a journey of new life filled with opportunities galore for friendships to continue, and, also, those to start from scratch at college. Then, all of a sudden, one early morning, my phone started ringing, and it was from the head of our property ministry team, but he was also a police officer. Unfortunately, only hours before, there was this young girl, who was killed in a car crash, and it was Angel.

She was part of the youth group. Actually, she wasn't just a "part" of it; she was the infectious enthusiasm that infiltrated through the varying degrees of teenage social awkwardness and all-around difficult times that so many of them had to go through in their young lives. She was, also, the one who went out of her way to make sure a new pastor felt welcomed in too. So the name was incredibly appropriate for how she brought the very love of God to life. Nevertheless, at eighteen years young, she was gone in the thick of the night.

I had only heard the tales of having to setup folding chairs to fit in numerous people into a sanctuary before that very funeral. The pews were filled to the brim, putting both Christmas and Easter worship services to undeniable shame; the folding chairs had to be setup at an unbelievably frantic pace behind the glass in the narthex hallway. Evidently, this young woman at eighteen years young, did not need much of a lifetime to impact the hundreds who showed up that day.

“I will bless the Lord at all times; the praise of God shall ever be in my mouth,” so says the Psalmist. To put it mildly, there were a wide variety of emotions in and outside the church building walls that day; but I have a feeling blessing and praising God were not quite near the top. Instead, it was more than expected to be frustrated, heart-broken, disappointed, depressed, even anger, including anger towards God. But the Psalmist says, “I will bless the Lord at all times; the praise of God shall ever be in my mouth.”

Well, the Psalmist can say that all they want, but the rest of us mere mortals cannot quite pull that off throughout our lifetime. We are going to have our not-so-pleasant reactions. We’re gonna have our

moments of not wanting to bless the Lord for the completely unexplainable happenings of absolute travesties against the most precious of life.

Of course, the Great News is that God doesn't need our blessing. *We* are the ones who need *God's* blessing. That day five years ago, God didn't need some staunch reassurance that all those people would keep on coming back to God or something. The heart-broken, the shattered, the dismayed children of God of all ages were the ones who needed *God's* reassurance: that God would take care of Angel from the horror of death into an eternal care of abundant life.

God didn't need *us* to make that happen. God had it already more than taken care of through Jesus Christ. And God most certainly did not stop there, but still managed just enough divine blessing leftover to comfort the most overwhelmed-by-grief family imaginable with hundreds of sisters and brothers in Christ, who had more than enough Holy Spirit flowing through them to not only put their arms around the heartbroken, but for that embrace to be powerful enough to be as if Jesus

Christ himself was putting his own arms around them; a reminder that that family was not about to go through this dark valley alone.

So don't worry, the Psalm will not always be true for us. We will have our moments of not praising or thanking God and God knows that. And even when we don't fulfill the words of Psalm 34, God will manage more than enough divine compassion to be there right beside us anyway. Because God does not need our blessing. *We* need God's blessing, and we most certainly have it because of a cross, because of an empty tomb, that not even the most heinous death will not stand between us and the love of God brought to life in Jesus Christ for all us. That no matter the circumstance, God's life-altering blessing remains forever. And for that Greatest News of all, we give thanks to God indeed! Amen.