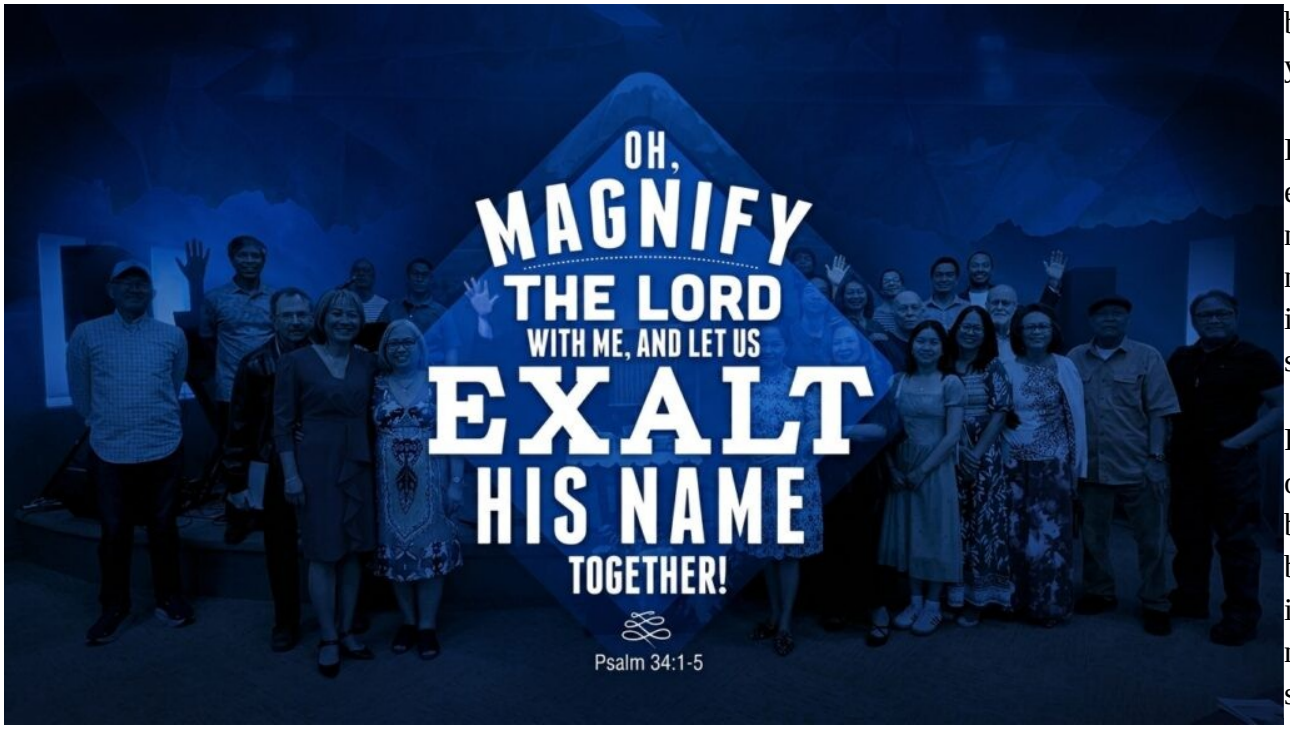
Radiant Faces, Unashamed Witness: Psalm 34:1–5 and the Everyday Culture of Evangelism



by Dennis Robbins

There Is Light in a Look: Why Joyful Christians Cannot Stay Silent

❧✦❧

A Song from the Lowest Place

David did not write Psalm 34 from a palace balcony. The superscription places it in one of the most humiliating episodes of his life: “Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.” Fleeing Saul, the anointed king-in-waiting had stumbled into the Philistine city of Gath. Recognized and terrified, he saved his life by feigning madness, scratching at the doors of the gate and letting spittle run down his beard (1 Samuel 21:10–15).

From that low place David sings one of the loftiest vows in the Psalter. That is the first lesson of this psalm: praise is not the luxury of the comfortable. It is the testimony of the rescued. And rescued people, as we shall see, cannot keep quiet.

> *I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.*
> — ***Psalm 34:1–5 (ESV)***

❧ ✦ ❧

Praise as a Way of Life (Psalm 34:1–3)

"At All Times"

David's vow is total in scope: "I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psalm 34:1). The Hebrew adverb tamid, "continually," is the word Moses used for the lamp that was to burn regularly before the LORD and for the regular burnt offering presented day by day (Exodus 27:20; Numbers 28:3). David borrows the vocabulary of the tabernacle's unceasing worship and applies it to his own mouth. Praise is not an occasional act performed on Sunday morning. It is a lifestyle, a priestly flame that is never allowed to go out.

The sons of Korah voice the same resolve on behalf of a whole nation: "In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever" (Psalm 44:8). Notice the word boasted. It is David's word as well: "My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad" (Psalm 34:2). Biblical boasting is not self-promotion but God-promotion, the glad and public exaltation of Someone genuinely worth talking about.

> *Some are foolishly squeamish upon this point, but they should remember that when modesty robs God it is most immodest.*
> — ***Charles H. Spurgeon, The Treasury of David, Psalm 34:2***

"Magnify the LORD with Me"

Verse 3 turns the private vow outward: "Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!" Praise in Psalm 34 refuses to remain solitary; David's joy overflows into invitation. To magnify the LORD is not to make God larger than He is. It is to make Him appear, in the eyes of others, as great as He truly is, the way a telescope brings a distant star near. And notice who David expects to be listening: "the humble" (v. 2). The frightened, the

broken, and the outcast, people very much like David at Gath, are precisely the audience most ready to hear good news about a God who rescues.
C. S. Lewis observed that praise is not an afterthought to delight but its fulfillment.

> *The praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.*
> *— C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, "A Word about Praising"*

❧ ✦ ❧

The Deliverance beneath the Doxology (Psalm 34:4)

Why is David's praise so insistent? Because it rests on fact, not feeling: "I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4). Biblical praise is always testimony-shaped. David sought, God answered, and the fears that had driven him to act the madman were dismantled. Praise rooted in remembered deliverance does not evaporate when circumstances shift, because it is anchored in the character of the God who acted.

❧ ✦ ❧

The Radiant Face (Psalm 34:5)

Look and Be Lightened

The Hebrew verb behind "radiant" carries the twin images of flowing and shining. The King James margin even offers the alternate reading "they flowed unto him," like streams running toward their source. The same verb appears in Isaiah 60:5, where Zion watches her scattered children come home: "Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult." The picture is of a face that catches and reflects light.

Scripture offers a gallery of such faces. Moses came down from Sinai, and "the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God" (Exodus 34:29). The council looked at Peter and John, "and they recognized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). And Paul tells every believer that the same is now true of us: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

> *As there is life in a look, so is there light in a look.*

> — *Charles H. Spurgeon, Exposition of Psalm 34*

Notice the order. Radiance is never the product of trying to look radiant; it is the by-product of looking at Someone else. A church that tries to manufacture a friendly image will produce something forced and fragile. A church that keeps “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2) will discover that the light takes care of itself.

Never Ashamed

The second half of the verse is a promise: “their faces shall never be ashamed.” In Hebrew thought, shame was the public exposure of misplaced trust, the humiliation of the one who leaned on a reed that snapped. David knew that shame intimately. Yet the one who looks to the LORD will never be left standing exposed. Paul applies the principle directly to the gospel: “For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame’” (Romans 10:11). An unashamed face and an open mouth belong together.

❧ ✦ ❧

Radiant Faces at East Valley: A Culture of Witness

What would it look like for the members of East Valley International Church, or any congregation, to receive Psalm 34:5 as a charter for personal evangelism? Three marks emerge from the text.

Friendly: The Warmth of Reflected Light

A radiant face is approachable. Before a word is spoken, the countenance of someone who has been with Jesus communicates welcome. Personal evangelism usually begins not at a podium but in the parking lot, the grocery line, and the break room, with the simple warmth of a person who is not afraid. Peter captures the tone: “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). Radiance invites the question; gentleness answers it.

Christ-Honoring: The Light Points to Its Source

The moon has no light of its own. Our faces shine only because they are turned toward Christ, and our witness must point there as well. The psalmist models it: “Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul” (Psalm 66:16). Notice the

subject: what he has done. Christ-honoring evangelism is neither a sales pitch for church programs nor a defense of our personal goodness. It is a report about the Deliverer.

Consistent: Praise as a Habit, Not an Event

David said “at all times” and “continually.” Evangelism, like praise, withers when it becomes a quarterly event and flourishes when it becomes a daily disposition. Another psalm prays for exactly this kind of steady overflow: “But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, ‘Great is the LORD!’” (Psalm 40:16). A culture of evangelism is simply a congregation of people who have made “Great is the LORD!” part of their ordinary speech.

> *Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.*
> — ***Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1 (1647)***

❧ ✦ ❧

A Closing Word

David entered Gath with spittle on his beard and shame on his face. He came out of the LORD’s presence with light on his face and praise in his mouth. That is the journey of every believer, and it is the story we have been commissioned to tell. This week, look to Him first, in His Word, in prayer, and in worship with His people. Then lift your face toward your neighbor, and let the light do what light does.

Prayer

Gracious Father, You heard David in his fear, and You have heard us. Turn our eyes to Jesus until our faces shine with His glory. Fill our mouths with Your praise at all times, and make East Valley International Church a people whose joy invites others to magnify Your name with us. In the name of Christ our Deliverer, Amen.