

“It Would Have Been Enough”

Maeve Hammond | February 12, 2023

Psalm 34:1-10 | 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Let us pray. God, it is enough to know that these Words are yours. It is enough to know that your presence never leaves us. May your grace be enough to sustain us, and may it move us in this moment. Amen.

During my senior year of college, I enrolled in a class called “The Psalms and the Self” taught by Dr. Karl Plank, Davidson College’s James W. Cannon Professor of Religion. Dr. Plank opened our minds to reading the Psalms alongside other texts. When we read Psalm 121, “I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?,” Dr. Plank paired this Scripture with D.H. Lawrence’s “The Hills,” “I lift up mine eyes unto the hills, and there they are, but no strength comes from them to me.” Psalm 130’s contemporary twin was Arvo Pärt’s musical masterpiece “De Profundis,” which appropriately translates to “out of the depths.” One pairing that has always stuck with me is Psalm 34, “Taste and see how good the Lord is!,” and poet Denise Levertov’s “O Taste and See,” “The world is not with us enough, O taste and see.” In my work in ministry, I’ve noticed a few recurring questions that emerge from discussions around religion, spirituality, and Scripture: What do these old texts and their figures have to do with us today? Where is their place in modern society that has moved so far past ancient modes of living and values? What wisdom do we have to glean from the Word? And, how do we reckon with the legacy of some texts that have been wielded against the marginalized and the poor, texts that have justified war, violence, and white/Christian supremacy? Are these texts, indeed, *enough* for us, for people of faith, today?

Chances are, if you ask someone in a Protestant church their favorite book from the Bible, they’ll respond with “the psalms.” My cousin, who’s now in his thirties, hasn’t been to church for probably close to twenty years. Still, whenever we talk about Scripture and religion, he never fails to reference the psalms as his favorite sacred text. Why is this? They’re beautiful.

They're heart-wrenching. They're thousands of years old, and they still speak to pieces of our souls that desire this reflection of humanity, even if we feel far removed from the Word and the institution of Church (capital C). When I started this class with Dr. Plank, I knew that I liked the psalms, sure, but I tended to gravitate more toward action-driven pieces of Scripture. For the longest time, the Book of Esther was my favorite piece of Scripture. I was such a hard-core fan of Judith (the figure in the Apocrypha who famously, or infamously, cuts off the head of an Assyrian general), I had a sticker of her on my notebook. I knew all the words to the musical *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, somewhat chaotic renditions of Jesus' teachings, ministry, and death.

However, during my time in Dr. Plank's class, I quickly came to understand why the psalms have appealed to so many communities throughout time. The psalms tap into human emotion: they present sadness, joy, thanksgiving, anger, fear, awe, longing, disorientation, and much more. Not only that, but the psalms are also extremely embodied. Take for example Psalm 34: the *Jewish Study Bible* comments on its content, in this psalm, "frequent reference is made to parts of the body: mouth, tongue, lips, eyes, ears, face, bones; and to actions associated with them: seeing, hearing, tasting, shouting." They are *enough* for many people raised in Christian contexts, church-goers and church-avoiders alike, who are in need of comfort, validation, or a spiritual touchstone. They are also extremely contemplative and meditative—full of wordplay, references, and challenging and ambiguous language, the psalms are so much more complex than a single reading allows. One could spend weeks trying to trace the in-and-outs of a single psalm. Indeed, some people have. Artists, musicians, and authors—some we've heard today—have been drawn to the psalms for a long time, perhaps because they are so evocative of emotional highs and lows and because of their closeness to poetry. In class, we compared the ancient psalm and its corresponding contemporary text and discussed how the author riffed off of Scripture, played with and challenged its "meaning," and created their own version of a

sacred text. God's Word was enough to inspire these long-lasting, complicated, and both deeply personal and deeply universal artistic reflections and renderings.

Today, we've heard the following from Scripture: from Psalm 34, "Taste and see how good the Lord is!," and from 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, "I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready" and "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." As today's passages say, God is both the start and the end of our lives. God nurtures us and provides us with goodness. God wants us to taste, to dig in the soil and get our hands dirty, to inquire, to find out for ourselves, to search. God gives us spiritual nutrients. And, when we take our first sip, when we put our hands in the dirt and start planting, God is beside us to fill us up and make our garden grow (Candide!).

God is the beginning and the ending. God is the Alpha and the Omega. God is enough. One of our Spiritual Mothers, St. Teresa of Ávila, has a famous quote about God's enoughness: "Nada te turbe, nada te espante, sólo Dios basta," or, "Let nothing shake you, let nothing frighten you, whoever has God lacks nothing, God alone is enough." This is my own translation, which differs slightly from the one you may know, perhaps from the Taizé song: "Let nothing upset you, let nothing frighten you, everything is changing, God alone is changeless, patience attains the Goal. Who has God lacks nothing, God alone fills every need." Yes, these translations are different, but they share the same sentiment: *God is enough.*

As Christians, we are called to rely on God's love, Christ's peace, and the Holy Spirit's comfort. We are called to reflect deeply on Scripture. We are called to serve each other in gratitude and praise. We are called to worship both boldly and meditatively. I think, with all of these "asks," we can sometimes get caught up in being a "perfect person," or, really, "a model Christian." We can get trapped in a comparison game with the works of others, or we can feel too overwhelmed with expectation that we shut down. This situation is not new to Christians of any age. 1 Corinthians, an undisputed Pauline epistle, is exactly about the comparison game we

play as humans. In Bart D. Ehrman's *The New Testament*, he writes, 1 Corinthians is about "what problems had arisen in the church that he [Paul] addresses and how he deals with them...The congregation that Paul addresses appears to have been riddled with problems involving interpersonal conflicts and ethical improprieties. His letter indicates that some of its members were at each other's throats, claiming spiritual superiority over one another and trying to establish it through ecstatic acts during the course of their worship services." Ehrman actually uses the language of "upmanship" to describe the people in Corinth. They were engaged in a battle against themselves to prove that they were the most righteous, the most dedicated, the most *perfect*. They were trying to prove their enoughness in the eyes of God and community.

I think any of us would be lying just a *little* bit if we said we didn't relate to the Corinthians' motivations and actions. I know for myself, I often feel like I have an engine running inside of me telling me to keep going, push farther, prove that I am *truly* enough. But, what if we—right here, and in this space—forgive ourselves for our supposed sins of not doing enough, not being recognized enough, not producing enough, not *being* enough? What if we listened to the poets, artists, and musicians who read the psalms and decided to make something beautiful, captivating, or even strange in our human realm out of them? What if, maybe, we turned our anxiety about enoughness into contemplation and nourishing action? What if we could recognize the all-too-human feelings we find in Scripture and know that, yes, it is sacred to hurt, to cry, to fail, to feel deeply? What if we knew, *really knew*, that God has us from beginning to end, holding us in freely-given grace? What if we saw ourselves reflected in the divinity of the holy Word? And, what if we considered ourselves and the things we think and create *sacred* because of this inherent speck of divinity within God's vast universe of comfort, care, and acceptance? It is our sacred right to make meaning out of the Word and the Spirit's movements. It is our sacred right to slow down, to contemplate, to create. It is our sacred right to feel God's love within us and accept ourselves. If God is enough, then we are, too, enough. If

we can see the sacred around us, in books, in a bird's call, in song, maybe we can more easily recognize and accept the divinity within, around us, and in each other.

As I close this sermon, I want to leave you with perhaps one of the most romantic and beautiful moments I've witnessed recently. (And, I promise, this does relate to enoughness—I'm not just here to gush) Recently, my two friends got married, and I flew to Seattle with my partner to be in attendance. At the altar, as the couple were saying their vows, my friend, Mike, shared a word in Hebrew that he felt deeply represented the love he felt for his spouse, Madeline: *dayenu*. You'll see the Hebrew spelling on the screens. According to the website MyJewishLearning.com, "*Dayenu* is a song traditionally sung during the telling of the story of Exodus at the Passover Seder. The song's stanzas list a series of kindnesses God performed for the Jewish people during and after the Exodus and concludes each with the word *dayenu*" (2023). The word *dayenu* means "it would have been enough." [Pause] Mike expressed his love for Madeline before witnesses with something akin to this, "If I had known you for a year, it would have been enough. If we had dated for a long time, and then we had broken up, it would have been enough. If I had never been with you at all, but only knew you as a friend, it would have been enough. If I had known you for a day, it would have been enough."

Denise Levertov's Psalm 34-inspired poem goes like this: "The world is not with us enough, O taste and see." Let us bring the world closer to us. Let us know our mistakes, our faults, our ugly. Let us see ourselves reflected in every psalm. Let God's divine love echo in every corner of our lives into a resounding wholeness. Let us remember it would have been enough just to love and be loved. Amen.

Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament*

The Jewish Study Bible

Dayenu: <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/dayenu-it-would-have-been-enough/>