



SONGS

ON THE ROAD TO RENEWAL

A STUDY ON THE PSALMS OF ASCENT

Re·new·al

Oxford Dictionary : an instance of resuming an activity or state after an interruption.

The year 2020 has been one for the history books. In the early days of the pandemic back in March as everyone was getting used to the novel idea of quarantine and social distancing, our family was out playing in the front yard. Some neighbors strolled by on their bikes and we quickly struck up a conversation. The front yard talk went from "How is it going? How are things going in your family and at work?" to a realization with the rest of the world that we were living through history at this very moment. COVID-19 is sure to be read in children's school textbooks as "The Great Pandemic of 2020."

If there is one word that can summarize the longing of almost every human heart right now it is renewal. We want life to return to normal. We want life to resume after this massive interruption. The Psalms of Ascent are a collection of ancient songs that were sung by pilgrims on the journey to Mount Zion. Not all of the Jews lived in Jerusalem and when it came time to celebrate the three annual festivals--Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacle--they would make the long and ascending march to Zion. These were songs sung on the road to renewal.

When Jesus was a young boy, Mary and Joseph would have made this journey and sung these songs as they ascended the hill of the LORD. These songs were a reminder that life wasn't normal. Even for the Israelites they were a reminder that life wasn't the way it was meant to be and "normal" is God bringing renewal to all things. These ancient pilgrims faced danger from invading armies, the lust of false idols, and the false promises by their own kings and politicians that would lead their nation astray. But nothing can take away the Hope of Zion. Perfect worship in God's perfect presence in a place that God has prepared.

Today we sing these songs from the other side of the cross. Mount Zion is Mount Calvary where Jesus died. Our journey to renewal starts there, with the promise to every pilgrim traveler that perfect renewal is near by his blood. We sing and study these ancient songs living in a constant state of interruption, but our hearts long for renewal for the day when the dangers are no more, our lustful idolatries disappear, and when there is no king but Jesus. We too are pilgrims, we too seek the renewal God gives us as we travel on this wearisome road with our feet firmly planted upon the Gospel.

This collection of devotionals are meant to give you hope in our COVID-19 world and beyond it. It is written by fellow pilgrims taking the journey with you as we ascend the hill of the LORD together. The leaders and partners of CrossPointe Downtown bless you with it, as we seek the Renewal only God gives.

Pastor Ryan

Welcome!

We're so glad that you've decided to join us on this journey through the Psalms of Ascent! We've asked individuals and couples within CrossPointe Downtown to write three devotionals each on one of the Psalms of Ascent. The beauty of this is multi-faceted. First, you will get to see the unique perspectives of different people with our church as God speaks to them in the passage of Scripture. We affirm that the Church is a priesthood of believers and the Holy Spirit speaks to each of us equally in order to build up Jesus' Church! So, in consequence to seeing unique perspectives, we all get to be built up by each others' words even while we may be separate. We pray that this is a massive blessing to you and yours.

How to use the devotional

While we gather to hear the Word of God preached, it is also important that we take time to let His Word seep into our hearts through meditating on it and prayer. If you think of an hour glass, the top of it is wide, large enough to hold a lot of sand. As it trickles through the narrow opening in the middle, the sand is compressed until it reaches the base where it fills the space again. In the same way, we want to teach the scripture in a large context on Sundays, compress it down to a personal level during the week and then allow it to spread out to the body of Christ again in Community Groups and life.

Each of the fourteen weeks in this devotional have three segments: The passage, a place for journaling, and three devotionals. Bring the devotional with you on Sundays and use it to take notes. After the Sunday service, use the corresponding week to dig into the passage little deeper. Seek to hear God through the passage as you answer the questions for each devotional and then pray about what you can share with your Community Group that week.

If you're wondering how to begin doing this on your own, here is a useful guide:

- 1. Say it:** Read aloud, maybe even 2 or 3 times. Get a feel and understanding of the song.
- 2. Work it:** Write down truths, questions, and thoughts, as well as journaling feelings and emotions. Allow the passage to read you. Take the time and work through our devotionals three times a week.
- 3. Pray it:** Reflect back on your writing in prayer. Pray for the people who come to mind as you study and read. Pray for the devotional writer who is part of your church family.

Week 1

Repentance | Psalm 120

*In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.*

*Deliver me, O Lord,
from lying lips,
from a deceitful tongue.*

*What shall be given to you,
and what more shall be done to you,
you deceitful tongue?*

*A warrior's sharp arrows,
with glowing coals of the broom tree!
Woe to me, that I sojourn in Meshech,
that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!*

*Too long have I had my dwelling
among those who hate peace.*

*I am for peace,
but when I speak, they are for war!*

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Repentance: The Unbalanced Force
Ashley McGuirt

Psalm 120:1

"In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me."

The Law of Inertia, Sir Newton's First Law of Motion, states that an object in motion stays in motion with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an unbalanced force.

I think oftentimes our lives can mirror the Law of Inertia. We are, after all, creatures of habit; we wake up, we work, we come home and manage the household chores, and if we're lucky spend the last few hours of our day with the people we love. And then we do that again, and again, and again... I'm not saying that this is bad, but a lot like the Law of Inertia we stay in this direction at the same speed for days, weeks, months, or even years before that pesky unbalanced force comes along and we are stopped, or rather *pushed*, in a new direction. Maybe that unbalanced force is a job loss, a sick or hurting family member, or maybe, like for most of us, it's a global pandemic.

The unbalanced force meets our inertia and halts us to a sudden stop or hurls us in a new direction. This change from our normal path causes chaos and causes us to distress, yet in Psalm 120:1 we hear David cry, "In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me." Let us not miss the beauty of this verse. In distress the psalmist's inertia was halted and he was forced to change direction and turn to the Lord. Now I don't want to invoke the whole chicken or the egg debate, but if not for the psalmist's distress, would he have called upon the Lord?

Often in my own life I find it is my distress that reminds me of my need for Christ. It is in my distress that I am brought to true repentance. May we marvel at the fact that the same God who created the universe has compassion to not only hear our cries of distress but also to respond and answer them.

Brothers and sisters, I pray the 'unbalanced force' throwing you out of your inertia would do the same. I pray that our distress would not cause us to turn further in on ourselves or to the lulling of the world that promises freedom yet only leads to more chains, but instead we would turn to our loving Father, the only one who hears and who answers.

Reflect

Recall God's faithfulness in your life by remembering a time of distress that God used to bring you to repentance.

How does seeing God's intimate care for you in the above reflection change the way you may meet future distress?

Repentance: The Power of the Tongue
Dylan McGuirt

Psalm 120:2

"Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue."

"Lips are soft; but when they are lying lips, they suck away the life of character, and are as murderous as razors. Lips should never be red with the blood of honest men's reputes, nor salved with malicious falsehoods. Some seem to lie for lying's sake, it is their sport and spirit. The faculty of speech becomes a curse when it is degraded into a mean weapon for smiting men behind their backs. Those who fawn and flatter, and all the while have enmity in their hearts, are wicked beings; they are the seed of the devil, and he worketh in them after his own deceptive nature" (Huck, The Deceitful Tongue 2010).

Should we desire lying lips and a deceitful tongue? The clear answer is NO and in fact the Psalmist himself is crying out to God and begging for deliverance from those who have uttered slanderous words against him. These verses emphasize the power of the tongue. Our words can be used to build up and affirm or to tear down and destroy. However, when we look deeper, we can see another layer: we cannot do this of our own accord. We must be delivered. We must repent and turn to God. Our only hope for justice is to rely on God and his Spirit to help us hate sin. God is the only one who can do the delivering, and our only option is to cry out to Him. We will never be able to rid our tongues, ourselves, or the world around us from the sin which encompasses it. Therefore dependence on God and continual repentance is our path to sanctifying our tongues and ourselves until the day we can be made perfect in Him.

"The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." - Matthew 1:35-37

You can see above that Christ himself warns that the tongue is a powerful weapon to be used for good or evil and there will come a day when we will give an account for all the words we speak. I urge you to use the power of your tongue to repent. Be reminded that the Holy Spirit will empower us to use our words to build one another up and be justified.

Reflect

Where have you seen the 'power of the tongue' displayed in your life?

What actions can you take to help prevent you from using your words to tear down?

Repentance: Craving Peace
Ashley McGuirt

Psalm 120:6-7

"Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war!"

These verses feel particularly potent when evaluating the cultural moment we find ourselves in. From a global pandemic, to social, political, and racial unrest it seems that the world is at war around us. I can't help but ask, when did we become so numb to the pain of others, knowing that they bear the same holy *imago dei*?

The world tells us if someone sits in opposition to our views we are free and justified to cancel and invalidate. And even worse there are those who seek to stir up unrest for their own gain. Yet where is the peace of Christ which we are craving? Where is the Christ-like compassion to reach out and touch the leper's spots? I feel the same weariness that the psalmist felt. Too long, Lord, have we dwelled among those who hate peace. I wish to be for the peace of Christ, but when I speak your truth, it seems the world is only for war! Oh for our weariness to end and to be ushered into the peace of Heaven with our Father.

In my weariness God reminds me of Christ's words from John 15:18-20:

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

And so we continue running our race and pray for God to bring the peace we crave to the world, yet we know as His followers the world will reject us and be at war with us, for we are not greater than our Master. God has chosen us and pulled us out of the world to bring glory to Himself. While we are sojourners here, we are called to dwell among those who hate peace. May our only solace be to repent daily and experience the true peace of Christ.

Reflect

Where do you feel that the world is at war with you and you are craving peace?

Take a few minutes to pray for your weariness and for the Holy Spirit to lead you and renew you in your pursuit for truth and peace.



Hello CrossPointe family, Dylan and Ashley McGuirt here! Dylan and I have been a part of CrossPointe Downtown Church together since 2015 and to say it holds a near and dear place in our hearts is an understatement. Dylan has attended CrossPointe since his college days and when I was new to Orlando he took me to the Sunday service for our second date. Now before we get all the 'Aww, how sweet' comments, I should mention that unfortunately for Dylan the sermon that day, again on our SECOND DATE, was from Ephesians 5:22: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." This certainly made for interesting conversation very early in our relationship; yet one thing that stuck with me even from that very first sermon, was the fact that the church leadership didn't shy away from the 'hard' parts of God's word; their goal was not to gloss over and water down the gospel but to present it in its full power knowing that we may be offended but hopefully be drawn into repentance.

Well CrossPointe has been our church home ever since and its community has surrounded us, encouraged us, and pushed us further towards the pursuit of Christ all through dating, job changes, engagement, marriage, and now through our journey into first time parenthood.

Dylan and I love serving the Lord and CrossPointe as Team Leads on the Connections team, hosting a community group in our home (SoDo group! Represent!), and just getting to do life with all of you. In our free time Dylan and I enjoy working out in our home gym (dubbed 'Gym McGuirt' for those of you who like to train alongside us), playing with our dog Murphy, and having game nights with friends.

Week 2

Providence | Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

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Providence: Always Attentive
Bobby Hegedish

Psalm 121:1-2

***"I lift my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."***

God has always helped His people. Throughout the Old Testament, God's people are continually pursued, led, and protected by Him. You would think after all He did for them--such as rescuing them from being slaves in Egypt, keeping them fed and healthy through 40 years of wandering through a desert, and countless rescues from opposing people groups to name just a few--they would have learned to trust His ability to help them. Yet this would be a lesson not easily grasped. At one point Israel even asked Moses if they could go back to live as slaves in Egypt because the journey out was too hard! There are times they put their trust in God, but other times where they seek help elsewhere.

The prophet Isaiah had some hard words for Israel when they were looking for help outside the help of God: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord" (Isaiah 31:1). Yikes. Seems harsh to woe them like that. However, it's not so harsh when we consider how the help Israel wanted was from those God Himself rescued them from. To be honest, it is pretty hard to relate to seeking the help of chariots and horsemen when in a difficult situation today. However, I can relate to how easy it can be to trust things other than God to meet my needs, especially when I'm worried. There are many things we can look to for hope and help: security in money or stable finances, good health, being liked, climbing the ladder of success, etc. These things are not bad in themselves, but what happens all too easily is that we can tend to look toward these things to bring us the peace, hope, and joy that only God can provide in our hearts and lives.

Jesus longs for us to find our peace, hope, and joy in Him. He delights in our turning to Him for His counsel and His help. He is quick and eager to hear our prayers and come to our side. True peace and security are found in a right relationship with the One "who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 131:2). Not only does He delight in coming to His people's aid, but He specializes in redeeming what is broken and making a way when there is no way. Friend, you can lift your eyes up to the Lord who made heaven and earth because He knows you fully and loves you unconditionally. You can find your help in Him who works all things "together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Reflect

When was there a time you sought peace in something and it failed to provide?

How does knowing God loves to be your help change the way you face worries or insecurities?

Providence: I Am Helped
Bobby Hegedish

Psalm 121:3-4

“He will not let your foot be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep”

We live within the confines of time. Just 24 hours in a day. Most, if not all of us, have felt the tension of having so much to do but with so little time. The number of things to be done can often outweigh our energy and ability to accomplish them! There have been times in my life this reality has been a source of anxiety. During my last year of college, I was taking over 15 credit hours of class, working 20-25 hours at a local coffee shop, and serving countless hours in a campus ministry, which often felt like a full-time job in itself. For some people that type of schedule is normal, but for me it was burdensome. That season taught me I have limits. In fact, I think it's safe to say I burnt out. With each day that would pass I felt more tired and more out of control than the day before. The more out of control I felt the more I would grasp for it. Eventually, it occurred to me that God gave me limits for a reason and that resting in Him was something I had much to learn about.

My issue was not the need to “work harder.” The true problem was how diligently I worked to maintain my pace because I was living in the fear of failure and in the anxiety of looking like a failure to others. I had been walking with God for several years, and believed in my head He loved me and had a plan, but my heart had yet to grasp the truth that He was able to work out that plan in my life when I couldn't. His grace continued where my energy ended. His ability to provide continued when I couldn't provide for myself. His love continued when my heart grew numb from burnout. “He will not let your foot be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber” (Psalm 121:3). Jesus offers us a different way of living in the midst of a hurried culture. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29). A yoke was a wooden frame or beam used to connect two animals together to accomplish a task or carry out a burden. Jesus on the other hand, uses this term to express how taking His yoke through simple commitment to Him brings us rest, not burden. He delights in taking on the burden alongside us. We can rest because God never rests from accomplishing His work. We can sleep with peace because “He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 131:4). We can stand with stability in turbulent times because “He will not let your foot be moved” (Psalm 131:3).

Reflect

What is a circumstance or area in your life that doesn't feel stable?

How does knowing God never rests from working in your life change how you think about your circumstances?

Providence: Those Whom The Lord Keeps
Bobby Hegedish

Psalm 121:7-8

***"The Lord will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore."***

The journey of the Christian life is filled with times of intimacy with God as well as times of feeling distant or indifferent. A recent conversation with a friend reminded me how one of the great temptations for us can be in times of uncertainty, decision-making, and transition. It is during these times we can feel alone, unsure, and even further from God than we have been before. In today's culture of self-help and immediate gratification, we can feel the pressure to find the newest answer, the secret ingredient, or the key to unlock the way to a better situation or more happiness. In these times of uncertainty and change, we need not seek a new spiritual truth, but rather we can stand on and solidify ourselves on an old one: The sovereign and providential involvement of a present God.

Several job opportunities presented themselves to me after graduating college. It seemed that each time I took a step toward one of them the door would shut. This left me confused and feeling unsure of the future. I wanted to make something happen, to figure out the reason behind the shut doors. It was overwhelming and discouraging to think I knew what God was up to, only to hit a wall of confusion when something wouldn't work out. "The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore" (Psalm 121:8). The Lord was showing me how my peace and rest was not in me finding answers to the uncertainty of my circumstances, but rather in my experience of His loving care over the details of my life. Joy could be found in the daily realization that God Himself "kept" my life, my circumstances, and my plans in the never-tiring grip of His powerful, yet tender, hand.

The Psalmist encouraged those on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to press on as the Lord kept their life. Similarly, this Psalm speaks to those of us on the spiritual pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God's beloved Son. God knows the details of our situation. The happy ones and the messy ones. He cares, and He keeps all of our ways in His providential grip. He is able to lead, and He delights to do so. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31).

Reflect

When was a time you felt your circumstances were out of control?

How can being "kept" by God shape your experience of uncertain circumstances?



Bobby has been at CPDT since the end of 2019 and frequently serves on the worship team. He is engaged to his lovely soon-to-be-wife, Mary, and works as a travel assistant for Cru/Campus Crusade for Christ International.

Week 3

Gathered Worship | Psalm 122

*I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the LORD!"*

*Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!*

*Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together,
to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,*

to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

*There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.*

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

"May they be secure who love you!"

*Peace be within your walls
and security within your towers!"*

For my brothers and companions' sake

I will say, "Peace be within you!"

*For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.*

[illegible]

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Gathered Worship: Anticipation
Rhyan Ravish

Psalm 122:1

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'"

Do you remember being a child and your parents planning an exciting vacation or birthday party? Did you try to imagine all the details that would happen when the day arrives? Who will be there? What will we do? What will we eat? Or instead of thinking in the past, perhaps you have a future event scheduled. Are you anxiously anticipating its arrival? Are you joyfully overwhelmed with details that will make the day something to be remembered? Now, picture the Israelites planning their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. With much expectation and anticipation, they are brimming with excitement as they prepare for the journey. They are actually going to the temple where God dwells and they can't believe it! Remembering all that God has done for them, they are anticipating the gathering of His people. They are vividly picturing what it will look and sound like to worship with their brothers and sisters of the faith. Their hearts are not excited about worship, no, their hearts are filled with worship already!

I think it is easy for us modern-day Christians to take for granted our Sunday gatherings. For the introvert, it requires leaving a comfortable home and interacting with people. For the extrovert, it can easily become more of a shallow social gathering with no deep connection. Yes, we have all been uniquely crafted by our Creator, but we have been crafted to worship our Creator, together.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." - Hebrews 10:25

Community deepens worship. Gathering with the Saints is a good and holy event that cannot be considered insignificant. In fact, it bears much weight. It is these moments where we have the freedom to stir up one another to love and good works. As brothers and sisters, we are called to encourage each other in the ways of the Lord as we anticipate His coming! O Church, may our hearts be filled with worship as we "go to the house of the Lord." May our hearts be filled with worship as we stir up one another to love and good works. May our hearts be filled with worship as we anticipate the Lord's Coming where we will kneel with our brothers and sisters and cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

Reflect

How can you better anticipate Gathered Worship?

Who can you stir up to love and good works and encourage this week?

Psalm 122:2

"Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!"

Picture yourself during this point on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The perils of the journey are behind you, your heart has been filled with worship before and throughout the trip, you have been built up by the encouragement from fellow travelers, and your mind and your heart have been anticipating and preparing for this holy moment. You have arrived. And it is glorious. "In the gates! I'm really inside the gates!" It is almost impossible to take it all in but the Israelites can't help but celebrate the grace of their Redeemer. Fellow believer, it is like us waking up every morning and saying, "I'm redeemed. I've been redeemed. I am a chosen child of God!" No, the journey here hasn't been easy, but I am redeemed. No, my five-year-plan hasn't panned out like I had hoped, but I am redeemed. No, life and ministry isn't always easy, but I am redeemed. No, I don't have that job or relationship I've always wanted, but I am redeemed.

It's easy for us to tell ourselves that we cannot allow our failures or successes or busyness cause us to grow complacent, but the reality is, life is monotonous. Sometimes our daily duties are the same day after day and more times than not, we allow our hearts to grow stale and dull. Even with changing schedules and spontaneity, we can easily overlook the current condition of our heart. O Church, grace cannot become commonplace. The grace which we have freely been given is something to be regularly and habitually celebrated. Our status has forever been changed to "Child of God" and our salvation is sealed and secure. Glory! Hope! But oh, how easily we forget and misplace our faith.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." - Ephesians 2:4-10

Church, you are Redeemed! May you walk and talk as the Redeemed. May you joyfully celebrate as the Redeemed! May you breathe in deep the "immeasurable riches of his grace" as the Redeemed. And as your feet stand on the threshold of His gates, may your minds and your hearts be renewed as the Redeemed.

Reflect

How can you guard against growing complacent in the active work of God's grace?

In light of your redemption, how can you live a life of celebration?

Psalm 122:6-9

***"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! 'May they be secure who love you!
Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!'
For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, 'Peace be within you!'
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good."***

Psalm 122 is a song encouraging unity and peace by the power of prayer. First, we see David expressing how peace is something that should be desired, expected and promoted within the walls of Jerusalem. The same can be said about the Church. We cannot joyfully anticipate gathered worship if there is discord among those gathered. We cannot fully stand "within the walls and towers" and celebrate God's grace if we are harboring grudges or slanderous thoughts. I think David knew this when writing this song. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!" In other words, pray that its current state can verify the meaning of its name. Pray for the peace of the Church. Pray that its body can function as one with Christ as its head.

Next, we see David pleading and praying for peace in Jerusalem "for my brothers and companions' sake." It is for the good of every believer that there be peace and unity within the Church. In community, our humanity and sinfulness is on full display and the need for our brothers and sisters' prayers is most evident. We are a sinful people, and sinful people need prayer and community. May we strive to live with open eyes and hearts to the needs of the gathered church, the city, our families, our co-workers, whoever we encounter. May we endeavor to be a praying people, Church.

So what is the point? What is it all for? For the Israelites, their intentions were to sit and worship in the presence of their God. They planned, they prayed, they sought peace and pursued it. David expresses that the praying, the striving, the journeying, is all for the glory of God: "For the sake of the house of the Lord, I will seek your good." The presence of our Redeemer binds us to each other. Charles Spurgeon writes it this way, "If we honour our God we desire the prosperity of the church which he has chosen for his indwelling." Through the prayers of the Church and the gathering of the saints, God is glorified.

Fellow Saint, the race is long and hard but may we plan, pray and journey with one another and together sit at the feet of our Savior. May we pray for and actively promote unity and peace among our gathered Church. Then, as a unified body, may our hearts be filled with worship as we sit and celebrate His remarkable redeeming work for He is our reward.

Reflect

How can you pray for peace and unity among the Saints?

Is there discord among you? Are you harboring bitterness or anger toward a fellow believer? What do you need to do to make it right?



Rhyan has been a part of CrossPointe Downtown since it's beginning when we were still meeting in a home. She moved from Fort Myers, FL to help start the church back in 2011 with her husband, Josiah and has since become the proud mother of two children. She serves with CPKids, is a community group leader and loves to open her home to others!

Serving Others | Psalm 123

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Serving Others: A Song of Identity
Mary Smirnis

Psalm 123:1

"To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!"

Have you ever had to write your own bio? If so, what did you include? Your occupation, ethnicity, marital status, how many children you have?

In the US, one of the first questions you hear when meeting someone new is "So.. what do you do?" Our American culture places such a high value on occupations as a part of our identity that it's usually one of the first facts you learn about someone.

But we all know our identities must be more complex and meaningful than our occupation or any of these facts alone. For those who have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord of our lives, our primary identity is a son or daughter of the Most High God.

Psalm 123 begins in verse 1 as a song of identity. It begins with a visual of the faithful children of God turning their eyes to the One who is sitting on His throne in Heaven. The psalmist here speaks as the representative for his people. Lifting their faces to the heavens, their eyes are filled with faith, hope, and expectation. Gazing on God's beauty they're reminded of where He is, that is *on His Heavenly throne*. And their remembering causes their trust and confidence in Him to grow and bloom.

As God's children we have real, living, breathing relationships with God the Father. We make decisions together, we talk to each other through prayer, and we grow in our knowledge of God through the reading of His word. As God's daughter I've experienced His guidance, blessing, and friendship throughout my life and relationship with Him. We have a relationship based on love, forgiveness, and trust.

This psalm gives us a picture of how we can look trustingly towards God, knowing He is our Father, knowing He is enthroned in Heaven, knowing He is worthy of our admiration and confidence.

Reflect

Reflect on your identity. What comes to mind when you hear that word?

How can you draw near to God the Father today?

Serving Others: A Song of Learning
Mary Smirnis

Psalm 123:2

***"Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us."***

There was a time in my life when I couldn't think or talk about Heaven without my eyes welling up with tears. I would become overwhelmed with the picture of being with Jesus, without sin, in perfect communion. I was so acutely aware of our earth's flaws, of Heaven's perfection, and a longing for the total and complete presence of God.

The psalms of ascent were songs sung by the people of God as they journeyed to Jerusalem. The people of God used these songs to meditate on their relationship with Him - who they were to God and who God was to them.

And much like them, our lives with God feel like a journey. As we grow to be more and more like Jesus, we see with increasing clarity how much deeper our sin goes and how much greater God's holiness is.

In Psalm 123:2 there's this image of faithful servants looking up to their masters, the faithful people of God presenting themselves before Him. They were totally dependent and confidently reliant as they longed for His nearness.

The people of God thirsted after and longed for God's righteousness, for His perfect presence, for His word.

*"As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?" - Psalm 42:1-2*

Reflect

The servant watches for the master's hand to beckon him. Why is good to long for God's nearness?

What has God made known to us about Himself?

What has He revealed about who we are?

Psalm 123:3

"Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt. Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud."

In this season everyone has had their fair share of disappointments, grief, loss, and yes, suffering too. For me personally, the year began with a joyful engagement and the beginnings of plans for a wedding and life together. But when COVID-19 hit, so did a number of other things. In a matter of a few weeks, my fiancé and I were facing quarantine restrictions, potentially cancelling our wedding, a huge change to both our jobs, and renewed grief with increasing racial tensions in our country and community.

Amidst it all, my overwhelming sense was that God was leading me into peace and not anxiety. Waiting and not moving. Mercy and not judgement.

This psalm focuses the lens on a people waiting for God's mercy. All throughout history the people of Israel have been under threat from those who are in power. These are a people who know how much they desperately need to wait on God's mercy and deliverance. But their waiting isn't a bored, passive sitting around. Rather their waiting turns into prayer as the psalmist isn't content with being passive. Instead he begins to plead with God for His mercy.

Lamentations 3:21-24 points to the intentionality it takes to remind ourselves of God's great love, mercy, and faithfulness to us. It reads:

"But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'"

There is an active component to seeking and waiting on God's mercy in the midst of our grief and suffering. I'm so grateful that in our very moment of need, God is able and ready to give us a word of mercy like this one. Earth may not show us mercy, but Heaven has an abundant supply for us.

Reflect

How can you intentionally call the Lord's mercies to mind today?

What does it look like for you to actively wait on God's mercy for your needs?



Mary began attending CPDT in 2018 and loves serving on the hospitality team. She is engaged to her caring soon-to-be husband, Bobby, and works as a travel assistant for Cru.

Week 5

Help When We Falter | Psalm 124

If it had not been the LORD who was on our side—

let Israel now say—

if it had not been the LORD who was on our side

when people rose up against us,

then they would have swallowed us up alive,

when their anger was kindled against us;

then the flood would have swept us away,

the torrent would have gone over us;

then over us would have gone

the raging waters.

Blessed be the LORD,

who has not given us

as prey to their teeth!

We have escaped like a bird

from the snare of the fowlers;

the snare is broken,

and we have escaped!

Our help is in the name of the LORD,

who made heaven and earth.

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Psalm 124:1

"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side –"

When Linda and I were engaged to be married and planning where we would live, it became quite apparent to us that we could not afford to stay in New Jersey, especially if we would have only one income. A daughter was already in our lives, and her starting school in the fall would give us two choices: childcare or Linda staying home. We planned on the latter, but came up against resistance right away. Our daughter's biological father took us to court, having set out to prevent us from moving to more-affordable Pennsylvania. Many struggles led up to that court date, and difficulties remained for years, even after the allowance for us to move out of state. At times, it felt like we couldn't bear the pressure, had not God been with us, helping and guiding us through it all. A big part of it was remaining led by the Spirit instead of by our emotions, and not giving into sinful attitudes and behaviors. We weren't always successful, but had the LORD not been on our side, we would easily have succumbed to bitterness, anger, and other sinful actions.

Israel had many enemies and engaged in various battles in their journey to the promised land. First Pharaoh and the Egyptians, then the Canaanites, Philistines, Babylonians, and Assyrians – these empires either enslaved or exiled, or vehemently fought against them along their journeys. The Psalmist speaks of Israel's enemies rising up against them in consuming anger. The adversarial acts against them were likened to being swallowed up, to flood waters overtaking them, to being devoured like by a wild beast's teeth or trapped by a hunter, all very vivid pictures of overwhelming trouble with no chance of escape – had it not been the LORD who was on their side.

Adversity comes to us all in many forms and from various directions. Perhaps yours is a custody issue, like our experience. Perhaps it is a debilitating illness of self or a loved one. Perhaps it is financial loss and hardship that lasts way too long for survival to be possible. But whatever the trial – internal or external – our greatest enemy is not the people involved, but the sin that still remains, tempting us to doubt and disobey God. Sometimes Satan pushes our buttons; sometimes we are simply lured in by that old nature of ours that lies to us again and again.

The other person in your trial is not the problem. The one who seemingly opposes you is not your enemy. Ephesians 6 says we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness. Satan is our enemy, as well as the sin that tempts us. If God is on your side, He isn't necessarily against the one who seems to oppose you. There is one type of person who God is against, and that can be you and me at any given moment: *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble"* (James 4:6). The Good News is that God is on your side, and He proved it by giving us His Son, Jesus Christ. *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* (Romans 8:32).

Humble yourself today, for *he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25).*

Reflect

How are you showing you believe God is on your side, and that you are on His side?

What wrong attitudes about God and others is the Holy Spirit putting his finger on for you to repent? What will you do next?

Help When We Falter: Praise of God
Scott Reavis

Psalm 124:6

“Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth!”

I love going to the beach, especially if it is an exceptionally nice one. I’ve learned not to mind the sand that seems to get everywhere, and I’ve learned not to be bothered by the sunscreen that never seems to smooth into my white skin. I enjoy sitting on the beach, watching the waves and various species of birds navigate the water in their own way. I enjoy seeing so much sky all around, a vast canvas often painted with awesome clouds dancing around rays of the sun. But what I enjoy the most is getting in the water, getting knocked about by the Atlantic’s strong waves while I boogie board or body surf. I’ve even tried real surfing a little. But as enjoyable as the water is, the thought of encountering a shark can get me jittery. It’s not that the sharks aren’t always there – it is just that I haven’t seen one yet – and I try not to think about it too much.

This past summer while vacationing at New Smyrna Beach, our youngest granddaughter hounded me with questions about what I would do if I were to encounter a shark. She did this while we were in the water, I might add! I told her I’d punch it to try to scare it away. So, I wasn’t feeling too sure about that after hearing of a girl who was bit by a shark recently at the same beach – twice! She kicked it after the first bite, then it bit her on the ankle! Thankfully, her wounds weren’t serious. But I think being bit by a shark is one of the worst things that could happen to someone. I’ve not encountered a shark in the water yet, but I’ve had a few close calls of other types in my life. I don’t know about you, but realizing I’ve just avoided peril or been rescued from a catastrophe causes immense thankfulness and praise to flow out of me and to God. As the psalmist lists all the hazards and menaces against Israel, he closes the list with a praise! The threat of being swallowed up alive by angry enemies likened to an overwhelming flood gives way to worship and praise of the God who does not allow malicious mouths or a fowler’s snare to prevail.

The greatest snare to our souls is sin. But when we have experienced forgiveness and rescue, the result is praise. And we praise what we love and adore. Luke 7 records a story Jesus told about a moneylender who had two debtors. One owed a huge sum, the other a relatively small one. When they couldn't pay, the moneylender canceled the debt of both. Jesus asked, "Now which of them will love him (the moneylender) more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." Jesus affirmed, "You have judged rightly." Jesus had told this story in response to the Pharisee's judgment of a "sinner," a woman who showed Jesus much love by anointing him with perfume and wiping his feet with her hair. She came to Jesus with much love, because she knew her Redeemer.

Reflect

What danger and peril has God rescued you from? Is your heart blessing the LORD?

Who or what do you love, praise, or bless more than God? What is the Holy Spirit speaking to you now? What will you do next?

Help When We Falter: Creation
Scott Reavis

Psalm 124:8

"Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

There are few things that minister to my soul more effectively than gazing into the heavens and seeing magnificent stars and planets that God has made by his verbal command. Central Florida has some phenomenal clouds and sunsets, but the night sky can't really be enjoyed because of all the artificial lights. But when I am down in the dumps, web searches of Hubble Telescope photos or Moody videos help me to repent and then contemplate the vast known universe with its billions of galaxies containing countless planets, asteroids, stars, nebulae, quasars, and supernovas. It gets me out of myself like nothing else.

Job was a righteous man who suffered much. He didn't sin throughout his trials, as great and unprecedented as they were. My worst situation can't compare to his lightest trial. But then Job lodged complaints against God because all his suffering didn't make sense in light of his consistent righteousness. So God gave Job a course correction by reminding him of God's majesty and works. God had Job consider one of my favorite theaters of His creation, space:

"Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth?"
- Job 38:31-33

As Christians, we sometimes avoid astronomy (the study of the universe and its contents) because it's been twisted by astrology (i.e. horoscopes). God wants us to be led by His Word and His Holy Spirit, not by man's attempt to narcissistically read the stars. But the Word of God does speak of these constellations (Pleiades, Orion, Mazzaroth, the Bear) because God made them for His glory and our awe. They are there to display the glory of the LORD to all creation (Psalm 8). They are there to snap us out of gazing at ourselves and pull us into the presence of the Almighty.

In "Consider the Lilies," T.M. More writes, "God himself was able to lead Job to humility and repentance by a tour de force of the creation... The majesty, beauty, power, and intimate care of God revealed in things he has made, and daily sustains, brings Job to his knees and turns him from sliding into sin to pursuing holiness before the Lord."

God cares deeply for us and is compassionate upon us when our countenance has fallen. But there is a point where too much introspection and complaining of the soul can become sinful. Still, in His mercy, He calls us back. He reads us a story from His book of creation, so that we look up, and out.

So next time you're feeling a little blue, go for a walk. Look up, and around. See what God has done and what He continues to sustain by His lovingkindness. "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him (Psalm 8:3-4)?"

Reflect

Where do you go for help when in great need?

How can you incorporate enjoying God's creation into worshiping Him? What will you do next?



Scott has been at CPDT since 2018 and is currently an Elder Candidate and serves as a Community Group co-leader. He is married to Linda and they have 1 adult single son, 3 adult married children, and 8 grandchildren.

Week 6

Secured Hope | Psalm 125

*Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but abides forever.*

*As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the LORD surrounds his people,
from this time forth and forevermore.*

*For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest
on the land allotted to the righteous,
lest the righteous stretch out
their hands to do wrong.*

*Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,
and to those who are upright in their hearts!
But those who turn aside to their crooked ways
the LORD will lead away with evildoers!
Peace be upon Israel!*

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Psalm 125:1-2

“Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.”

I consider myself a bit of an over-thinker, especially with the way current events have been playing out over the span of this year. I often have questions running through my mind daily. At work, with family and friends, even kicking back and enjoying a movie or relaxing I often go back to these thoughts flooding my mind. *Is there meaning to all of this? What is God truly doing in my life and with the world? Is God angry at us? Will my faith fail?*

This passage is a reminder of the secured hope we have in the Lord. “Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion.” Now this is not saying we are literally a mountain located in Jerusalem, but rather saying God is with us. Mount Zion is referenced as a place where God dwells (Isaiah 8:18, Psalm 74:2). When we trust in the Lord, we are as unshakable as He is. And in the second verse we are assured that as the mountains surround the city of Jerusalem, the Lord will surround us His people. He protects us from all dangers and gives us hope in the midst of distress.

The Lord is always faithful to answer His children (1 John 5:14-15). Since He is faithful, our response should not be in worry or overthinking. We should have an attitude of joy and hope in the midst of chaos. God has ordained all things in eternity’s past and works all those things for His glory and our good (Romans 8:28). In these times of trials and pruning we are called to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for our protection and also to give us faith. His plans are always good and though we may not see or understand it, we can live in light of this until the day He returns. Take hope that when you trust in the Lord, you cannot and will not be shaken (Psalm 93:1, Psalm 104:5, Proverbs 10:30).

Reflect

What are the things currently causing you distress in life (work, financial issues, current events, etc.)?

How can we surrender these stressful situations to the Lord in light of Psalm 125:1-2?

Secured Hope: Hope & Perseverance
Daniel Feliciano

Psalm 125:1-2

“For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong.”

The famous actor Will Smith once said one of the keys to life is running. He goes on to say when you run and hear that voice in your head saying to “Give up, just quit,” and you learn how to defeat it, you will learn to not quit when things get hard in your life. This has stuck with me since I was a child when I heard him say this. For the believer, perseverance is a call to endure even in the most difficult of times. Christ, who lived among us and was tempted in every way we were (Hebrews 4:15), lived a sinless life and endured even until His death. We are called to suffer and persevere so that it might produce hope in us (Romans 5:3-5).

Many so-called “Christians” will often abandon their faith when suddenly Jesus isn’t enough to prevent marital hardships. They stop running the race after the bank account is at zero and God isn’t the magical genie they thought He was. It’s easy to endure and stay faithful to God during easy, restful seasons full of blessing, but what about when it feels as if God is silent? What about in the midst of a global pandemic? During culture wars and political debates? When we can’t seem to find peace or we are forced to run with the punches, these are the best opportunities to press into Jesus and His promises in the word.

Perseverance is also a supernatural work that only God can enable us to do (Philippians 1:6). In the text we see that God is faithful to His people by promising that evil will not remain so that the righteous will not fall. We live in a fallen world with corrupt laws and governments, wicked rulers, and sinful and broken people that surround us daily. Yet Christ is faithful in securing us in Him to persevere until the end. He gives us the strength to do life righteously even when our flesh fails us. The call of the gospel is not one that is easy nor does it seem attractive, but we are promised true shelter in a Jesus Christ, our savior, from evil and we are enabled by the Spirit to endure. Even when all odds are against us.

Reflect

Where is the pressure of life hindering your ability to go forward?

Is the call of the gospel something you constantly believe and preach to yourself?

Psalm 125:4-5

“Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts!”

This is the proclamation and promise in the text. Do good to those who are good. This is interesting to dive into because according to the scripture, "None are good, not one" (Romans 3:10-12). With that being the case, the only proclamation left in the text is the verse right after. "But those who turn aside to their crooked ways the Lord will lead away with evildoers!" If we are not good, then we stand condemned. We are evildoers who must be judged and eternally damned. That's the bad news.

The good news is that Jesus stands before us as our righteousness because of the cross. If Christ had not died for us, we would stand condemned like the evildoers of Israel. Led away into a fiery pit for eternity. But thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ that He has taken the punishment, the shame, the full wrath of God upon Himself. And what's left? Grace. The Lord will sow good unto us because He does not see evil, but good. Our sin is gone and no more; what's left is Christ's righteousness.

This is glorious! That even in the midst of chaos in this world and with our imperfections God actively loves and pursues us. He not only washes us clean, but adopts us to be His sons and daughters. If we believe this, then we must live in light of it. Our deepest desires should be to please God and serve Him and worship. We should be prayerful for ourselves and others. We need to live in constant repentance of our shortcomings and sin. All that to say, this is not a spiritual checklist that makes us more righteous or "closer to God." Rather, this is a byproduct of the work God has done in you and me. If we are truly His chosen people, the Holy Spirit is the seal of this and will empower us and equip us to do good. And those who are good will never perish not because they were born good, but because God justified them. We are now at peace with God (Romans 5:1-2). For the evildoer, this is bad news because it means and eternity of judgement. But for the justified, those the Lord has made good, this is our peace and our hope. We will get to be with Jesus in perfect communion, united with Him forever and ever.

Reflect

Do you believe the good news? What about the bad news?

Are you being reminded of this? Do you meditate on it daily and proclaim it as truth?
Are you living in light of it?



I've been attending CrossPointe for about three and a half years now. By God's grace I've found not only a biblically sound church, but a place full of gracious people I can call family. When I strolled in on that first Sunday visit, I was sure that I had found my home church. It's been a blessing to grow and work alongside many people. I've been serving in the Artist Ministry just about my whole time at CrossPointe and now will be jumping in on helping lead the Student Ministry. I attend the SODO Community Group and have made awesome relationships there as well as growing in community with Christ at the center of it all. It's been a great experience to see God's faithfulness while being at this church and I truly can't wait to see what's next for myself and the church! Also I have a pretty cool mustache and I consider that an upgrade from when I first stepped into the church.

Week 7

Joy | Psalm 126

*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.*

*Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them.”*

*The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad.*

*Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like streams in the Negeb!*

*Those who sow in tears
shall reap with shouts of joy!
He who goes out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.*

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Psalm 126:1

“When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.”

Have you ever lost something and then found it again, maybe after weeks or months of searching for it? For me, it’s typically jewelry—a watch, an earring or a bracelet. But I always feel joy when I find it again. When something that is lost is restored to us, it just feels good.

Last week two items that I haven’t been able to find in stores for a long time were back on the shelves. I was thrilled! I texted my friends right away to tell them the good news, and I’ve been talking about it for days. Who knew that toothpaste and caffeine-free Pepsi could bring me such joy?

In Psalm 126, the author speaks of great joy “when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion.” We read of laughter and shouts of joy. That’s what happens when lost things are restored. But verse four shifts to a prayer, asking for more restoration. It appears that the author felt the pain of knowing that despite past blessings, all was not as it should be.

Similarly, we live in a time when we can point to blessings, like finding a lost ring or the restoration of our favorite toothpaste or soda. Or bigger blessings, like a great job, the birth of a longed-for child, a new friendship, a great vacation, etc. But the laughter and joy are fleeting, as we also endure the pain of loss, suffering, sickness, anxiety or fear. We long for a day when ALL good things are restored.

Verses five and six in Psalm 126 promise joy. But this joy isn’t fleeting. These verses look ahead to the day when Jesus will make all things new. When all the good and beautiful things that have been lost will be restored. When the broken become whole. When “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

I’m thankful for my toothpaste and soda, but I’m even more thankful for my certain future—joy forever.

Reflect

The Message paraphrases Psalm 126:1, “It seemed too good to be true.” When did God do something for you—other than your salvation—that seemed too good to be true?

What have you lost that you’re looking forward to seeing restored on the new earth?

Joy: Sowing In Tears
Debbie Barron

Psalm 126:5

Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!

What does it mean to “sow in tears” as we read in Psalm 126:5? If it results in “reaping with shouts of joy,” I want to know how to do that. The Psalmist uses a farming metaphor to describe it; I picture a farmer crying as he places seeds in the soil. But what does it look like on a practical level? What does the Psalmist intend to communicate?

I recently read a book about lament called *A Sacred Sorrow*, by Michael Card. I looked up the definition of lament, and one dictionary calls it “a passionate expression of grief or sorrow.” According to Card, lament is THE path of worship. As we pour out our hearts to God, we encounter His presence as He meets us there in the middle of our pain. I think of “sowing in tears” as the act of lamenting—crying out to God in grief or sorrow. It could be sorrow over my own sin, grief over a loss or sadness for the pain so prevalent in the world. As I sow tears of pain, God meets me there. I encounter Him. And I find joy.

Going back to the farming metaphor, gardeners and farmers everywhere know that in order for seeds to germinate into plants, they must be planted in good, fertile soil. Our tears must be sown in good soil, too. What is the best soil for that? God, Himself. As Eugene Peterson writes in *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, “All suffering, all pain, all emptiness, all disappointment is seed: sow it in God and he will, finally, bring a crop of joy from it.”

A few of the Psalms we are studying in our series were penned by King David. He provides a great example of lament. David pours out his heart to God in many of his Psalms. He brings his tears of pain, anger, sorrow and repentance to God, again and again. And he meets God there, in the middle of his laments. See Psalm 13 for a great example. May we, like David, take our tears to our Father, and may those acts of worship lead to joy!

During this time of pandemic, we have encountered much loss. Many have lost loved ones. As a single woman, I have lost physical affection and time with several friends. As I continue to work from home, I have lost the companionship of my coworkers. I missed out on two concerts that I was excited about and the end of the college basketball season. I could go on and on. I have also lost intangibles such as peace of mind, security and freedom. What have you lost? What are you grieving? May I suggest that you take your pain to God? Sow in tears. Eventually you will reap joy—joy in God Himself.

Reflect

What have you lost during the pandemic?

How has God used your tears to bring forth fruit?

Joy: The Gospel
Debbie Barron

Psalm 126:3

“The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad.”

I was a toddler when my dad began to pull away from me. He just didn’t know how to interact with a small chatterbox who was full of questions. It was easier for him to check out mentally and emotionally. I think it was then that I developed an insatiable thirst for love. I set out on a quest for the love that I couldn’t get from my father. For the next 20 years I mostly sought that love through achievement—good grades, athletics, and being the best daughter and friend I could be. I was held captive by a desperate desire for love.

When I was 22 I surrendered my life to Jesus. That summer I learned through a small-group Bible study that I couldn’t make God love me more by being good; neither could I make Him love me less by being bad. Furthermore, He would always love me. I learned that I could be secure in the love of my heavenly Father because of Jesus’ death on the cross for my sins. There was such freedom in that!

In the New American Standard Bible, Psalm 126:1 says, *“When the Lord brought back the captive ones of Zion, we were like those who dream.”* The nation of Israel had been in some type of captivity, but God restored them. In verse three we read, *“The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad.”* The people of Israel were joyful because they had been rescued from captivity.

In verse four of Psalm 126 the focus shifts: the Psalmist begins a prayer that looks to the future. Despite the release from captivity, the Psalmist asks God to do it again. The restoration wasn’t permanent. The author knew that they needed more. I see in this a foreshadowing of the condition of the Church. Fast-forward a thousand years or so, and Jesus performs another restoration. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus rescues us from captivity. In Him we are set free and experience joy in our salvation. Despite that, we ache for more. Like the Israelites of old, we experience a restoration from captivity but also a longing for a future, more complete restoration.

In my own life, though I know intellectually that I am secure in the love of God, I don't always feel that way. And to this day, I struggle with looking to people to meet needs that only God can meet. In many ways I'm still that little girl, longing for the love of her daddy that she didn't get. Like the Psalmist, I can pray for release from that captivity and look to the day in the future when I will be permanently released from the bondage of my current struggles and live in complete freedom in my Father's love. When I will "come home laughing, with armloads of blessing" (Psalm 126:6b, The Message).

Reflect

What has held you captive, either in the past or now?

What will a fully restored you look like?



Debbie Barron is a coach, mentor, writer and friend. She has served with Cru for 27 years. She has been at CrossPointe Downtown for nearly four years and is part of Ryan Walker's community group. She loves Disney World, Ireland, botanical gardens and sports. She is single, but there are two important men in her life—her nephews.

Week 8

Providence | Psalm 127

*Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.*

*Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.*

*It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,*

*eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.*

*Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward.*

*Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children of one's youth.*

*Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them!*

*He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.*

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Psalm 127:1

***“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”***

In high school, we had a class shirt that featured a large question mark, and underneath was the question, "Are you living for the dot, or are you living for the line?" I remember many people were confused about how a question mark could be pursued as a life goal, let alone be bothered to consider which part! But this was simply a metaphor to catch the attention, to create mindfulness, as it was about a reality we all must face: are you living for the here and now? Or are you living for the eternal?

We are often very focused on our needs of the present, about the financial security we can amass, the reputation we can build, the greater goals we can achieve. In all these things we see our "house," but what if all the effort we are putting forth is merely towards building a house of straw? Or an empty vessel missing its greater inner substance? St. Augustine, in his book, *City of God*, juxtaposed a wealthy man, his life filled with anxiety over his riches & strife with his neighbors, with a man of moderate standing, grateful to God, content with what he had, secure in conscience, his life filled with the sweetest peace with those around him. Augustine begs the question, who do you think is happier? While both had their blessings ultimately from the same source, the providence of God, only one had his eyes opened and given the spiritual blessings which bring fullness to the rest.

May we also consider Hezekiah, who was noted as an outstanding leader, fostering his people in prosperity, and in wisdom securing his city with great defenses and walls. Yet, the Assyrian threat that came proved all man's efforts futile without the aid of the Almighty. No preparations averted the destruction of the city; only when Hezekiah went to the house of the Lord and called out for God to protect the city, did Jerusalem experience deliverance.

In this life, all that we do or procure is but a hollow shell or a passing fancy, blown away by the wind, unless it is grounded in and by Him who is eternal. "The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17). Our kingdoms rise and fall, but there is only one that lasts forever and only one king who cannot be moved. Let us ready our hearts to remember He is the one who provides all things and in Him is that which endures.

Reflect

What kind of house are you building?

Whose kingdom are you living for?

Providence: Trusting The Source
Ruth Butler

Psalm 127:2

"It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for [the Lord] gives to his beloved sleep."

Busy busy busy...our lives are filled with constant movement. Working diligently at our jobs, keeping our houses in order, maintaining friendships, guiding our children; we strive and work hard to accomplish our goals. If we look a little deeper, we may find ourselves using our busyness for purpose and security, even getting it wrapped up in our identity by distinguishing ourselves through our accomplishments: I have a college degree, she has an award from her company, he's the lead at his work. It even spreads to our children: my child is on the dean's list or captain of their sports team. All this toil day after day, is it ever enough? Does it lead us to sleep better knowing we are further along than we were 5 years ago? Or are our nights filled with tossing, minds running with anxious thoughts about what we need to be doing next? Does any of our strivings guarantee our future? In Luke 12, Jesus tells us of a man who produced amounts so plentiful, he had to increase his storage, only to die the next day. Proverbs 18:11 tells us that a man's wealth is like a strong wall...in his imagination.

While God does tell us to work diligently (Colossians 3:23) and our accomplishments are not bad things, they are not what provides for us, nor are they truly the work of our hands. David is aware of his ability and his efforts to hone his skill, but he puts his talent in its place (Psalm 18:34). Rather than boosting his own ego or soothing his fears with his greatness, David seizes the moment to honor God as the one who bestows all gifts upon him. He perceives God as the one who gives the ability to work and graciously blesses his children's efforts. Instead of looking to ourselves, Psalm 127 calls us to acknowledge the true source of all providence. A farmer can toil in the dirt for months, yet unless God grants the rain and sun, nothing grows. We can preach and attempt to persuade, but it is only the Holy Spirit who brings life and regeneration. The Bible doesn't ask us to give up all labor and become slothful, but it does instruct us to open our eyes to where our blessings really come from. In doing so, we shift from an anxious illusion of control, ego, and strife to a peaceful rest in gratitude and praise. In this, we can give thanks, feel secure in His blessings, and accept His gracious gift of sleep.

Reflect

What tasks are you anxious to accomplish?

In what areas of your life do you need to acknowledge and trust God's provision?

Providence: Most Precious Gifts
Ruth Butler

Psalm 127:3-4

"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!"

What blessings come from the giver of all life! God graciously brings new life to his regenerate just as he graciously brings new life in the womb. Many people long to start a family and some couples may try for years to conceive, but in the end, it is the Giver of life who holds such blessings in His hands.

However, when such presents are received, are they always seen as such? In the midst of sleepless nights, crying toddlers, and teenage attitudes, do we always remember to give thanks for these which God has given us? The world we live in often speaks of children as a burden, something that will dampen social life, inhibit careers, and prove extremely costly, but this is not how God sees His children. Jesus shows his care as he directs his disciples to let the little children come to him (Matthew 19) and tells us how precious each is in the sight of God (Matthew 18).

Many verses in Proverbs tell us how children bring joy to the lives of their parents, and a crown to the heads of grandparents. The unconditional love of a child is like no other; despite our shortcomings, our flaws, we are the world to them, as expressed in the sentiment of Proverbs 16:7, "The glory of sons is their fathers." God uses children to bring forth maturity: a life focused on self turns hollow, but children compel us to look outside ourselves and see the needs of others. And our benevolent God is not bound solely by the water of the womb, but also gives family by the blood of His son, for God gives spiritual children to those who follow him. As Paul calls Timothy his son spiritually, or the congregation of Corinth his children in the faith (1 Corinthians 4:15), we recollect that God always keeps His promises, like those told long ago in Isaiah 54, "For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married."

Whether our children are biological or through the Spirit, let us remember that we are but stewards and these belong to Him. Whatever children God places in our hands, He calls us to aim them carefully, like arrows, by His word and His spirit. We must be diligent so once they are out of our hands and shot into the world, they may continue to fly the path that proves true. It is but a brief moment that we have them, let us pray for God's spirit to allow us to treasure them as we should, and guide them according to his will.

Reflect

In what moments do you need to remember to give thanks for your blessings?

Who has God placed in your life that you may contribute to their spiritual growth?



Ruth has been attending CPDT since 2013 and serves with CrossPointe Kids. She is married to John and has two wonderful children with one more on the way. Ruth is a traditional artist who loves using her talent as a witness to God's glory.

Week 9

Happiness | Psalm 128

*Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways!*

*You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.*

*Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.*

*Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.*

*The LORD bless you from Zion!
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life!*

*May you see your children's children!
Peace be upon Israel!*

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Happiness: The Fear of The Lord
Scott Reavis

Psalm 128:1

***"Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways!"***

When I was a new believer, I kept hearing testimonies of people claiming to have seen visions of Jesus. Having struggled with doubt, I was convinced that if I could just see Him too, I would really believe and have victory in my life. One night as I was lying in bed, I again prayed, "LORD, I just want to see you." When I opened my eyes in my dark bedroom, I saw a figure before me, and was nearly scared to death! Well, with my eyeglasses off in a dark room, what I was actually seeing was the outline of my legs as I was lying on my back with my knees up! Even so, that night I was cured of the desire to actually see Jesus with my physical eyes, and at the same time acquired a fear of the LORD that helped me to walk in His ways. In this experience, God spoke to my heart something like, "You really want to see Me? Let's try that out!"

There has been much debate on whether or not we should really fear God. I've heard it said that God doesn't want us to be afraid of Him; but to deeply respect Him. But in so many instances in scripture where individuals encountered God or even His representative angel, their logical and correct response was fear. Here are just a few:

Moses and Israel on Mount Sinai - Exodus 19, Deuteronomy 9, Hebrews 12:21

Zechariah, when he saw the angel in the temple - Luke 1:12

Mary, when the angel Gabriel greeted her - Luke 1:29

The early church after the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira - Acts 5:11

John, upon seeing the resurrected Jesus on the island of Patmos - Revelation 1:17

Coming face-to-face with the Almighty God conjures emotions and reactions greater than deep respect. Still, in God's mercy and lovingkindness, He or His angel usually speaks, "Be not afraid." He always has a purpose and benefit for the fear of the LORD - that those who know it will walk in His ways. For example, the recap in Hebrews 12 of Moses' experience on Mount Sinai points to the purpose beyond the fear: "You have come to...God." In Jesus, fearing God is accompanied by an invitation to come to His throne of grace with confidence - confidence that we are accepted because of the cross of Christ.

So what does fearing the LORD and walking in His ways look like in our modern context? First of all, I think it means daily living in the gratitude of knowing that God could have crushed me because of my rebellious and hideous sin against Him and others, but instead, He gave up His Son to take my place of punishment. It means turning my back on sin and Satan's lies and believing God instead. It means grabbing hold of all that I have in Christ so I can let go of everything else and be open-handed. It means acknowledging Him in everything I do, that He would receive the glory because He is working in me. It means that when I fail to do these things over and

over again, I can and should quickly turn back to the cross where I find renewal, and the mercy of a Father who doesn't ever give up on His child in whom He has invested so much.

Reflect

What does the fear of the LORD look like in your life? What is it producing?

What course-corrections or attitude adjustments (repentance) is the Holy Spirit pointing out to you, that you may fear the LORD and walk in His ways? What will you do next?

Happiness: Zion
Scott Reavis

Psalm 128:5

***"The LORD bless you from Zion!
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life!"***

So often I have come across words or phrases in scripture unfamiliar to my own context, and I've glossed over them. Such is the case with the word "Zion." In our contemporary setting, this word brings thoughts of those who support the development and protection of the Jewish nation, Israel: *Zionists*.

I really should not quickly pass over less-familiar words in scripture, and neither should any Christian. While the development and protection of various people groups is a good thing, the Christian should recognize that we are part of a Nation that will transcend and outlive any other nation on earth. This is not because we are something special in and of ourselves, or because we should assume and assert superiority over others - far from it. But because of Jesus and His Kingdom purposes, 1 Peter 2:9 tells us *"...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession..."* What is also profound about this is that as Gentile believers (probably most of the people reading this), we *"were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world"* (Ephesians 2:12).

Hebrews chapter 12 uses Moses' experience on Mount Sinai to tell us what this new Zion is, and what it means for Christians - including Gentiles who have been grafted in to God's chosen people... *"For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing*

fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest... But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem..." (Hebrews 12:18, 22).

Looking for and toward Zion – the establishment of God’s people AND a reigning, righteous King, is a strong theme in the Psalms of Ascent. God’s Old Testament people cried out across generations in hope of Zion firmly founded upon God’s promises and His loving rule. What those prior to Jesus’ first coming could not see, we now are able to see. But our eyes are still eyes of faith. We won’t see things as they ought to be until His second coming. Everything has indeed been put under Christ, but *“at present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (Hebrews 2:8)*. We groan inwardly (Romans 8:23), longing for our redemption, and God’s Kingdom to come. For, *“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2)*.

Jesus’ disciples were as tired and troubled of their age as we are of ours. They wanted to know the sign of His coming. He exhorted them to take care that no one leads them astray. That truth holds firm even today. While we too see false messiahs rising up, hear of wars and rumors of wars, feel earthquakes and famines (and pandemics), the time is not yet, but we know and trust that all things are in Christ’s control, and for His purposes. He said, *“and this gospel of the kingdom (Zion) will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14)*.

Reflect

What are your eyes focused on? Are they set on God’s coming Kingdom, or on the unstable and ever-changing circumstances of today?

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about your participation in the bringing about of His kingdom? What will you do next?

Happiness: Posterity
Scott Reavis

Psalm 128:4

“That is the LORD’s blessing for those who fear him.”

You may have noticed that I used a paraphrase version (NLT) for this particular verse. Most direct translations use the noun “man” as the object of the blessing; *“Behold,*

thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD." I don't intend to change scripture or be thoughtlessly up-to-date or politically correct. But I also don't believe God's blessings are only for men who fear the LORD. There are plenty of scriptural examples of females and males alike enjoying God's blessing.

The preceding verse of this Psalm (verse 3) is also male-centered (at least the first sentence is): *"Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table."* There is no denying that in the ancient world as well as today: it's a man's world. While that is a bad thing where men oppress others and lord-over with their authority, it is a good thing where men use their power and authority to bless, give, and serve, while also denying self. The blessing of fearing God definitely extends to every human being, no matter the station or status:

"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the LORD." - Isaiah 54:1

"Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, 'The LORD will surely separate me from his people' and let not the eunuch say, 'Behold, I am a dry tree.' For thus says the LORD: 'To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.'" - Isaiah 56:3-5

In ancient times and biblical places, more than today in Western societies, blessing and prosperity were very much tied to marrying and having children. But not all believers today will have a spouse. Not all Christian couples are guaranteed children. Not all godly grandparents will see their children's children. And in a non-agricultural society, we don't really measure success by how much our gardens produce. But in the New Covenant we can know we are blessed and it is well with us because of the cross of Christ. We have every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus--our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life! We have purpose, peace with God, and Christ Himself as our treasure, just to name a few. And, as great as kids and grands are, all Christians have the ability to be blessed with many, many spiritual children. Just consider the blessed fruit of the (single) Apostle Paul. That is good fruit of a healthy fear of the LORD! - Matthew 24:14

Reflect

How have you seen the blessings of the LORD in your life?

How is the Holy Spirit prompting you to bear fruit for His kingdom, perhaps by expanding your spiritual family? What will you do next?



Scott has been at CPDT since 2018 and is currently an Elder Candidate and serves as a Community Group co-leader. He is married to Linda and they have 1 adult single son, 3 adult married children, and 8 grandchildren.

Week 10

Perseverance | Psalm 129

"Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth"—

let Israel now say—

"Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth,

yet they have not prevailed against me.

The plowers plowed upon my back;

they made long their furrows."

The LORD is righteous;

he has cut the cords of the wicked.

May all who hate Zion

be put to shame and turned backward!

Let them be like the grass on the housetops,

which withers before it grows up,

with which the reaper does not fill his hand

nor the binder of sheaves his arms,

nor do those who pass by say,

"The blessing of the LORD be upon you!"

We bless you in the name of the LORD!"

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Psalm 129:2

"Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me."

Recently, my 5-year-old daughter came to me and explained how she had been working at a task that was really challenging for her, and that she kept trying and trying until she finally accomplished her purpose. She proudly reported to me: "That was perseverance!" Now, I'm guessing what she wanted to do would've taken seconds for me, and probably didn't take her all that long in the scheme of things. But her mindset in the midst of frustration and hardship was to keep going until the goal was reached. Perseverance is defined as "persistence in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success." Other words that we see used interchangeably are endurance, patience, and long-suffering. By its very definition, perseverance involves suffering and waiting, life not being as you want in the moment. There's a looking ahead, a longing for something better. There's a desire for what is good and right to be accomplished.

In this life, we have much pain and suffering. Things often don't look anywhere near the way we want them to look. We have little glimpses of perfection, but then the sinful reality of our fallen world sets in, and they vanish as quickly as they came. You get accolades at work for a job well done, and then the next day a coworker has an issue with something you did and it causes tension. You're enjoying some beautiful scenery in nature, and then you see litter on the ground. You have a blissful night with your spouse, and then the next morning you're arguing. You gaze into the face of your newborn thinking how absolutely perfect your life is, and then at 4am when you've been up for hours with a baby that won't stop crying, you wonder why you wanted to be a parent at all. You have everything ready and beautiful for the holiday celebration you're hosting, and then your family arrives and the complaining and passive-aggressive comments begin. How we long for perfection, and how absolutely unattainable it is in this life! But there's hope. If we lift our eyes to the One who created us, and will set all things right upon His return, we can keep going, even when life is far from what we would hope for. Paul tells us: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:2-4).

Reflect

What situation are you in right now that requires perseverance?

What truth do you need to remember in order to persevere today?

Perseverance: Sovereignty In Suffering
Jen Bright

Psalm 129:3-4

“The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows. The LORD is righteous; he has cut the cords of the wicked.”

One story I always think of when I’m suffering is that of Joseph. As a young man, he found favor with his father and this fostered jealousy amongst his brothers. Not only that, he also began to have dreams that pointed to his family being beneath him, even bowing down to him. This stirred up such hatred in some of his brothers that they threw him into a pit and plotted to kill him. While they argued between themselves about how best to deal with him, slave traders came along and they ended up selling him. He was taken to far-off Egypt, where he would go through many more struggles over decades. After being falsely accused of a crime and spending years in jail, and being forgotten by those he helped, he finally had the opportunity to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams and was raised to second-in-command over all of Egypt. After he led in wisdom and stored up food for the coming famine, his family did indeed bow down to him as he had dreamed all of those years ago. If ever there was a need for perseverance, patience, endurance, and long-suffering, this was it.

All of us have situations in our lives that don’t seem fair, that don’t make sense. There are circumstances that seem to go on endlessly, ones we just can’t seem to improve or escape from. These cause so much pain and agony at times, that it feels like we cannot go one step further. We simply can’t understand why these hardships are necessary, and what their purpose is. But we know the One who does! Isaiah 46:9b-10 says, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’” You see, in the story of Joseph, God wasn’t surprised by the evil, scrambling to figure out what to do with this unfortunate situation. God tells us that He “sent” Joseph to Egypt (Genesis 45:5) and that he “intended”—not allowed, as we often like to say—these seemingly terrible circumstances of Joseph being sold for “good” (Genesis 50:20). And what was His greater purpose? Sending the One who would deliver His people for all time, people of every nation, tribe, and tongue (Genesis 49:8-10, Revelation 5:5-10). God’s purposes are so much higher and more transcendent than we can imagine. When Joseph was sitting there in jail on day 874, he couldn’t fathom that through all of this, God was making way for Christ to come and deliver His people. But we don’t have to understand to have faith in the One who does!

Reflect

Can you think of a painful situation that didn’t make sense at the time but now you see fruit from?

In what circumstances right now do you need to submit and trust in God’s higher purposes?

Perseverance: Trusting in God's Purposes
Jen Bright

Psalm 129:5

"May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward."

When people treat us wrongly, the following thoughts tend to go through our minds: *How dare they? I don't deserve this. God needs to convict them of their sin!* We are interested in ourselves and what we want. But how often do we ask, "What about God's glory?" When we begin to think about the glory of God as our highest purpose and calling, our thoughts start to shift. We develop a sensitivity to what robs God of what He is due, and we also cultivate a deep compassion toward those who are so blind, lost in knowing and living out what they were created for. All of us want glory, but it's God's glory we were made to share in, not our own.

An idea that we often forget is that suffering and glory go together. They are a perfect pair, and cannot be untwined. We love to think about heaven and being free of all pain, sickness, sadness, and brokenness. But what we must remember is that suffering is what creates in us that glory that we will share in. You can't share in Christ's glory if you haven't shared in His suffering! Therefore, we must realize when we are in a painful situation that it's not something we just have to get through, or get out of, but that God is using it to shape us into the person who will share glory with our beloved Jesus. This inner work that He is doing brings us to a glory beyond all compare. "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

God cares so deeply about this inner work He is doing, that He purposes every difficult situation. Our situations are fleeting in His grand design, but the work He's doing in us is eternal. He's using all of it for our good and to accomplish His purposes, if we love Him (Romans 8:28), and to transform us, as "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and that hope does not put us to shame" (Romans 5:3b-5a). We often agonize over our choices and decisions, not sure what will be best. Or we focus on the pain others have caused us, allowing hurt to turn into bitterness and poison our lives. At the end of our journey here, we could have chosen a variety of paths, and gone through a myriad of situations. We will have experienced pain from many hurts others have caused us. What really matters? That God has created His heart in us. That we love Him and others. He will complete the work He has started (Philippians 1:6); we can be certain of that!

Reflect

Is there a person you harbor bitterness toward that you need to confess to God?

What decision have you felt unsettled or anxious about that you can walk in faith in?



Jen partnered with CrossPointe Lake Nona in 2008, and transferred to CPDT in August of 2017. She has 5 children--Allison, Adrienne, Andy, Abby, & Wendy--and teaches 4th grade at Eagle Creek Elementary School. She enjoys worshiping through song and teaching children the Word of God, and loves being a part of her "second family," the Ravish community group.

Week 11

Hope | Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,

O Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness,

that you may be feared.

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

my soul waits for the Lord

more than watchmen for the morning,

more than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the LORD!

For with the LORD there is steadfast love,

and with him is plentiful redemption.

And he will redeem Israel

from all his iniquities.

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Psalm 130:1-2

***“ Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!”***

I remember sitting there taken aback for a split second. My client had just retold a traumatic story from their experiences in overseas ministry that involved all their family, their guests, and an angry riot that rocked their safety. As he's crying retelling the story, he gets to the end and immediately looks up, attempts to take a deep breath, drying his tears, and looks me straight in the eyes and says, "But, God is so good; I am okay."

Here in verses 1 and 2, we see the psalmist in pain. "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! ...Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy." I think what I love most about the Psalms is the permission it gives us to let out every bit of ourselves to God. He can handle our anger. He can handle our grief. He can handle our doubts. He never says get it together, do better. No, he says, "Come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

My client did not have to immediately assure me that God is so good and he's doing just fine. He, like all of us, has suffered a traumatic incident. Fundamentally, God is good and he is okay, but mentally and emotionally, we have to tend to the humanness inside ourselves that has been rocked. Thankfully, there is a process for this called Lament. *"Lament in the Bible is a liturgical response to the reality of suffering and engages God in the context of pain and trouble" (Rah). "To have a healthy emotional, spiritual, and mental life, we must be honest with ourselves...To have healthy fellowship with God we must be honest and realistic about our circumstances and our reactions to them" (Kapic).* The psalmist here is being so honest, releasing all that is inside of him pleading for reprieve. The hope in lament is where we will venture into over the course of this study because the ultimate hope of Lament is not that the situation will change, but that God would come close to our human suffering and engage with us in our pain.

Activity (individually and corporately): take the next few minutes to write your own lament in four sections- Speak- your truth without judgment, Recall- any spiritual truths that come to mind, Hope- meditate on recall, Hold fast- engaging with God, asking him to come and be close.

Reflect

What stirred in and through you during this process?

Prophetic Lament, Soon Chan-Rah

Embodied Hope: A theological meditation on pain and suffering, Kelley Kapic

Hope: Patient Hope
Chancey & Heather Carothers

Psalm 130:5-6

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning."

Growing up in East Tennessee, camping in the mountains was always a beloved activity. Though I don't get to camp much anymore, I can still smell the aromas of cooking over the campfire, the sounds of God's creation in the stillness of the night, and the chill that comes with the setting of the sun (because no one wants to camp in the hot, humid summers!). Waking up in the morning, especially first, I always dreaded leaving the warmth of my sleeping bag and getting up to start the fire, but all the while knowing the relief from the damp cold would only come with sunrise. Sitting next to the fire, cold and wet from dew, I would be filled with anticipation and hope for what the sunrise would bring: warmth, dryness, and more hiking and fun activities in the woods. In those moments, the Psalmist's refrain of waiting with anticipation more than the watchmen for the morning rang so true. I knew what the hope of the morning brought in camping, but all I could do in those moments was to wait patiently, silently (so I didn't wake anyone else) for the hope of the sunrise.

In Psalm 40:1, David writes that "I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry." Know that, while the Lord hears every cry, He may not move and answer us on the timeline we expect or desire. The prophet Micah echoes this same sentiment in Micah 7:7, saying, "But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me." For both of these writers, you can almost hear the anticipation (and maybe even desperation) in their words. They have given everything over to the Lord, knowing that He hears their every word, and He even is with them in the silence of their waiting and hoping. In Psalm 62, David writes about his hope in the Lord, even saying that "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from Him." Our hope in the Lord can take on many forms and expressions, whether we are crying out to Him with words or sitting patiently, silently waiting for His answer and redemption.

We can have this patient hope because we know that God will show up. It may be in His own way and timing, but He will. Scripture is full of the benefits of waiting patiently on the Lord. Those who hope in the Lord will "Renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40: 31). We also see that "The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him" (Lamentations 3:25). We are promised that "The Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him" (Isaiah 30:18). And finally, we are promised in our patient waiting that "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). We can

rejoice that the Lord has given us everything we need to hope in Him and wait patiently, with the knowledge that He will come through for us in His perfect timing.

Reflect

Where in your life are you having to wait in patient hope for an answer from the Lord? Do you find yourself in the still, silent anticipation or in crying out to the Lord?

What do you think the Lord is trying to teach you in your personal season of patient hope?

Hope: Everlasting
Chancey & Heather Carothers

Psalm 130:7-8

O Israel, hope in the Lord!

***For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.
And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.***

"Hope is not wishful thinking, but it is audacity to believe: 'after everything I've been through, there is more ahead of me'" (Morgan Harper Nichols). I love this poem. It puts teeth to hope because it can so often seem elusive. Hope is a concept thrown around in scripture but the audacity of this passage is found in these two verses. After all the Israelites have been through, being oppressed by nearly every major earthly kingdom, The Lord is steadfastly for them, pouring out his redemption and clinging to the promise that He will redeem them.

Here is the mind-blowing thing about this passage, the Israelites were running on a far less tangible hope than we have today. Hebrews 6:18b-20 speaks to this, saying, "We who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." The Israelites' hope was just a promise of what was to come, but for us, this hope is a promise already fulfilled through Christ.

At the start of the week, we took a look at Lament and how God desires to meet us in our humanity of pain and suffering. We moved forward into the patient and sometimes silent hope of the day to day movement of life. Here, we end at the ultimate hope, that was fulfilled by Jesus' death on the cross. Through that hope, we

can endure the suffering of living in a fading world knowing that our hope is not in it, but in the finished work of Jesus.

Reflect

What do you find yourself placing your hope in life currently?

How could life look different when your hope is centered on the Kingdom of God?



Chancey and Heather Carothers have been attending CrossPointe Downtown since 2014 (Chancey) and 2016 (Heather). They met in community group at CrossPointe and were married a little over a year ago. Chancey is a Intensive Care Unit Pharmacist at ORMC, and Heather is a Mental Health Counselor out of Simmons Counseling in Maitland. They attend the Sodo community group (that Chancey co-leads with Dylan McGuirt), and are a part of the Hospitality ministry.

Week 12

Humility | Psalm 131

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child is my soul within me.
O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time forth and forevermore.

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Psalm 131:1

***"O LORD, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not raised too high;"***

Jesus told this parable in Luke 18:10-14: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

A "heart that is lifted up" and "eyes that are raised too high" are expressions for a proud heart and haughty eyes. It may be easy for us to check humble heart off the proverbial list of righteousness when we come to a verse like Psalm 131:1. But that's because we aren't really taking the time to consider what a proud heart looks like. Jesus knew this was true. It's why he chose the parable he did! Those that were listening trusted in themselves. Self-examination would require admitting there was a possible fault and so Jesus juxtaposes the self-exalted and the humble to get their attention.

It's much easier to commend ourselves than we may think and, to be fair, it certainly has its advantages. We may earn respect or influence or increase our status or position. Being humble is also more difficult than we like to think because it means we must be willing to lose something and often that something is what we hold most dear. However, like most things in the Kingdom of God, there is a paradox that we need to embrace: to be exalted is to be humble. No book or TedTalk on achievement or success will tell you that, but it's right in the epicenter of the gospel. May we never forget that the only Man who ever had the right to boast in himself for anything chose not to. Instead, he laid down his life and God exalted him.

Reflect

What scenario or area of life do you tend to have a proud heart in? When do you see it?

According to the parable, what would being humble look like in this situation for you?

Psalm 131:1

***"I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me."***

My brother-in-law told me recently about how his son had a habit of telling his father that he didn't know what he was talking about when something didn't make sense to him. My brother-in-law, getting really frustrated by this continual response, finally told his twelve-year-old, "You need to trust that I know what I'm talking about here. Instead of telling me that I don't make any sense, why don't you say, 'I don't understand?' I can help you from that point." This scenario between a father and son paints a dramatic picture of a conversation many have with God. The skeptic--or even believer--wrestling with his or her faith, says, "See! This stuff doesn't make any sense! There's no way God can be real." Their posture is a proud heart and haughty eyes. But the reply of the one who has humbled themselves before God is, "I don't understand. Even still, I trust you."

This reminds me of the story of Job. After Job's affliction, allowed by God at the hand of Satan himself, and at the end of a rather long and drawn-out conversation between Job and his three friends regarding the topic at hand, God rebukes Job. What's interesting is that in spite of Job's ability to remain faithful and not denounce God, what caused him to be rebuked was his pride in the matter. You see, Job believed he could explain God. This was a grave mistake and one that led Job to repentance. Job says, "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (Job 42:3). Society will either try to explain God away or define Him in a reasonable sense, but there are many moments where the Christian can do neither. He can only submit.

It's important to see that the Psalmist's "hope" is not based in the abstract, but rather in what he knew to be true based upon the law of God. This is what "occupied" his mind; the foundational truth about God that informed him that he could trust God even when he didn't understand Him. Like the son who must first say, "I know my father; he knows what's best for me," before he can submit to his counsel, so the follower of Christ must trust his Father before he can humbly submit. When we occupy ourselves with the grace of God in Jesus, we begin to see first ourselves and then others rightly.

Reflect

What tends to occupy your thoughts when you're most unnerved or scared?

What would occupying your thoughts on the grace of God in Jesus look like?

Psalm 131:2

***"But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child is my soul within me."***

Being a father of two young children, a three-year-old and a six-year-old, I have seen what weaning looks like twice over. Any parent will tell you that this can be a painstaking process, because what our child wants most of all is what he or she knows already and is accustomed to. God gave children the craving for what will keep them alive; a hunger that pains until it is satisfied. But as anyone knows, what sustained the child in the beginning of his or her life cannot be what will sustain them forever. The child must learn to be accustomed to new flavors and new textures in order to expand their palette towards things that will sustain them as they grow. While the process seems terrible to an infant, the parent knows that without it, their child won't be able to survive.

This is what the apostle Paul spoke about to the church in Corinth when he wrote, "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh" (1 Cor 3:1-3a). While the Corinthians should have been more mature in their faith by that time, they were led by desires of their flesh. Instead of a Holy Spirit-driven love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control marking their actions, it was human "jealousy and strife." Ultimately, this was due to an immaturity in Christ, an inability to understand and apply the gospel to their lives and current conflict. The milk and food are different degrees of the same thing. They are both food but used for different stages in one's life. What will sustain the Christian is the gospel. Just like we never move on from food, we never move on from the gospel of Jesus Christ. What changes is our ability to understand and apply it to our lives in concrete ways.

Yes, weaning can feel painful because it's stripping us of what's familiar and comfortable, but it is also a process. King David had to learn this painful process as he was stripped of safety, comfort, and dignity over and over again until he could say, "I have calmed and quieted my soul." Our Father is patient towards us in this process. The Holy Spirit is relentless in conforming us to the Son and Jesus, the Bread of Life, is ever ready to feed us when we're hungry. The responsibility on our end is to feast on the gospel and trust in our Father's goodness to wean us from sin and satisfy us in Christ. What we initially seemed unable to stomach becomes the very thing we depend upon for our nourishment.

Reflect

What are you hungry for today?

How do you typically seek to nourish yourself spiritually? Is it working?



Josiah has been at CPDT since 2012 and currently serves as the Associate Pastor and a Community Group leader along with his wife, Rhyan. They have two awesome kids, Desmond and Elliot.

Week 13

Obedience | Psalm 132

*Remember, O LORD, in David's favor,
all the hardships he endured,
how he swore to the LORD
and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
"I will not enter my house
or get into my bed,
I will not give sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,
until I find a place for the LORD,
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."
Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah;
we found it in the fields of Jaar.
"Let us go to his dwelling place;
let us worship at his footstool!"
Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place,
you and the ark of your might.
Let your priests be clothed with righteousness,
and let your saints shout for joy.
For the sake of your servant David,
do not turn away the face of your anointed one.
The LORD swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:
"One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.
If your sons keep my covenant
and my testimonies that I shall teach them,
their sons also forever
shall sit on your throne."
For the LORD has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his dwelling place:
"This is my resting place forever;
here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless her provisions;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.
Her priests I will clothe with salvation,
and her saints will shout for joy.
There I will make a horn to sprout for David;*

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Obedience: Draw Closer
David Kaplan

Psalm 132:1

***“Remember, O Lord, in David’s favor,
all the hardships he endured...”***

Life is hard. You are not that important. Your life is not about you. You are not in control. You are going to die. I’m going to just stop there. Cue evil laugh. You’re probably thinking, “Does this guy need a hug or something?” Eh, maybe so (thanks COVID), but that’s not really what I’m getting at. For most of us, when it comes to suffering hardship, we spend most of our lives trying to get as far away from it as possible. I know I have. Despite our efforts, we inevitably experience it and the awful feelings that ensue. Somehow, some way, and by some means we have all found ourselves being reminded of the five essential truths mentioned to start this devotional and it hurts badly. Where is God in all this?

Early in Psalm 132, we are reminded that David’s life has been littered with hardship, to put it lightly. Most of us will never experience what he has. Quick recap of David’s life.... Before becoming king, he ran for his life from Saul. After he became king, his own son, Absalom, was going to kill him, leading to him having to escape from his own kingdom (2 Samuel 15:14). Additionally, David had multiple failed attempts to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. Following those attempts it took strenuous years to finally prepare the temple. Yikes.

Did God forget about David through all this? Not a bit. When death knocked on David’s door, God delivered him each time (2 Samuel 22). God redeemed the suffering of David. As followers of Christ, our purpose is union with Him, regardless of our circumstances. He wants to be with us. Just like David, we endure hardship, tragedy, loss, and God is waiting at each pain point to meet us. God promised us this when He gave His only son Jesus to die for us. He promised that no matter how hard life is, He’s committed to redeeming us. He’ll never let us off the hook. He honors our pain and turns our suffering into joy. He’ll pay any cost to be with us. He already has. Jesus.

Reflect

Looking back, how was God near to you in your suffering?

We’ve all been marked by suffering, how are you marked by eternity?

Obedience: Promise Kept
Ryan Walker

Psalm 132:13

"For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place"

There is something about making promises that gets me in trouble. I find that I make them with good intentions and a desire to see them through, but somehow when it comes time to keeping them I fall short. Don't get me wrong there are many promises I've kept, but there have also been many that have gone unanswered due to my desire or ability to see them through.

I remember when my daughter Adalyn was younger I promised her that we would get ice cream over the weekend. Somehow the circumstances of the weekend changed, looking back I can't remember exactly what it was that kept me from not fulfilling my commitment, but I did remember that I need to be careful promising things I am unable to deliver on. It was obvious that I was limited in my understanding and ability to follow through.

It is a good habit to keep our word; it gives us the credibility necessary for our relationships to thrive. Psalm 132 shows us that the credibility of the relationship we have with God is not built upon our reputation in keeping promises *but God's*. He has kept every promise, fulfilled every vow, and anything that is left undone that he has said he will do, he has given us every reason to trust him until the promise is proven to be kept.

This Psalm shows us the promise has been made. The book of Revelation tells us that the promise has been fulfilled, "And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true" (Revelation 21:5).

On that throne is David's descendent, the Son of God and the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. On that throne is the promise-keeper himself. David was the best of kings perhaps the world has ever seen but even by his own admission he says in Psalm 51:3, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."

As we are on this pilgrimage, obedience to Christ and his word is a non-negotiable to reach the glory that awaits us in heaven. However, it is Christ's obedience that ultimately gets us there. Even in our unfaithfulness, he has been faithful to ensure that the promise is kept.

Reflect

What is a personal example of a promise you failed to keep?

How is the credibility of our relationship with God based on God's faithfulness and not ours?

Obedience: How Do We Know?
David Kaplan

Psalm 132:17-18

***“ There I will make a horn to sprout for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.
18 His enemies I will clothe with shame,
but on him his crown will shine.”***

Promises are a pretty common part of our lives. I think I can safely say that we have all made promises and we have all probably broken some of the promises that we have made. Why do we break some of the promises we make? The most obvious answer is that our hearts are sinful. Secondly, we have limits and because of those limits, we are not always strong enough or smart enough to keep the promises we make. In the same way we would agree that child-proof locks are smart to protect kids from danger, we are protected by our limits. Embracing these limits then allows us to see more clearly our need for a God whose promises are always kept.

In scripture, God makes some absurd promises if you think about it. Speaking to Abram, “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). He told Abram he’s going to make an entire nation from his line, and he doesn’t even have his own child yet. Not only that, but he’s going to bless the entire world through Abram’s line specifically. Years later God says to David, “And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16). God is telling David that someone from his line, a relative, is going to reign forever! The godly among Israel knew that they had yet to have a king who could reign forever, meaning that they’ve all been sinners. They deduced it had to be someone else who would come to fulfill the conditions of David’s covenant.

The promise to David that his descendant would reign forever is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the only perfect man who could fulfill these conditions, and showed us in His life. But this promise wasn’t just to David; we look to Isaiah and see it was also made to us! “Come, everyone who thirsts...and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David” (Isaiah 55:1-3). Through Jesus Christ, God assures us that He will never leave us or forsake us. He has chosen us as His dwelling place by the grace and mercy freely given to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because we thirst, we too can have our hearts quenched in His love. God always delivers on His promises.

Reflect

What does God see when He looks at you?



David & Vanessa have been at CPDT since 2014, and are part of the Ravish CG in Baldwin Park. They have also coordinated Financial Peace University classes at CPDT. Both David & Vanessa work in the Wealth Management industry and have a passion for helping families with their finances.

Week 14

Community | Psalm 133

*Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.*

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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Psalm 133:1

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!”

In The Message paraphrase, Eugene Peterson writes, “How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along!” Raising three children to get along is one of the hardest parts of being a parent for me. But when they do, how wonderful, and how beautiful it is. It doesn’t take much of a memory for me to realize that my parents had the same hard job I have now. It seemed like I was always in an argument with one of my siblings. Dwelling in unity can seem like a foreign concept in a house with fighting siblings. Even as siblings grow older, the rivalries can often be alive and well, and some of these never recover and it is only discord, which leads to a divided family.

Let’s look at this verse as it applies to the church. When you come to Christ you become a member of God’s family. While we want for God’s family to be perfect, we realize that this is not the case. God’s family is really a beautiful mess. However, God doesn’t run around like a flustered parent wondering, “When will my children ever get along?” Instead, He brings about unity as we submit our lives to the Spirit in obedience. He is actively working to unify his family.

Unity is important because we are the family of faith making the pilgrimage to the temple on Mount Zion to worship God together. We are called to help each other along the way. There is no room for being jealous of one another, or for slander, gossip, or division. Satan is going to throw all the division he can at us, using what already exists in this deeply-polarized world. A pleasant life is found when we pursue the good of the family, when we help the wounded traveler among us by serving our sister or brother. As we journey on the road of renewal, we make the pilgrimage as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Imagine for a moment with me the many people who made these regular journeys together. Fellow travelers who hadn’t seen one another since the last journey would link arms again. They would grieve when they heard of the loss of a loved one. They would share meals over the campfire, joy in the new celebrations of life, all the while making the pilgrimage in ascending the hill of the Lord. It was a glimpse of heaven, because once they were united in the great assembly, they gathered as a family of God’s children. Welcome to the church! The messy, but beloved, eternal great assembly. Instead of fighting each other, we fight for unity with one another. How wonderful, and how beautiful it is!

Reflect

Did you have siblings and what did the disunity look like in your household?

Why is it important to fight for unity?

Community: Anointing
Ryan Walker

Psalm 133:2

"It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!"

The Apostle Peter reminds the exiled, persecuted, and scattered church in the first century, "You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). He is reminding this weary church of their anointing. They have been chosen by God for a task. What was this task? To offer their lives as a spiritual sacrifice to God. To live life as an offering of worship.

The year 2020 has been a hard one for a lot of us, but our situation is nothing like the church in exile that Peter was writing to. Although we have a different situation, the message is the same. He is building us up as a spiritual house, a temple, an anointed priesthood (like the priesthood of Aaron). And rather than bringing the sacrifice of bulls, or goats, or lambs, we offer ourselves.

If the church is a priesthood of believers, then your sisters and brothers are anointed by God to take this journey alongside you. It means that God put them in your life for a reason. Our world of faith is filled with endless opportunities because our fellow travelers are anointed by God to help us along the way. The church does not just gather for the great assembly, but we are the collective witness of Christ to the world today. My life is not just the sum total of my decisions, but it bears the fingerprints of many who have shaped me--and will continue to do so--on the journey. Life together is hands on, trusting, building, and growing. That is the imagery Peter gives, and the anointing oil flowing from the head, the beard, and the shoulders of Aaron is the Spirit's divine authority stamped upon his church to bring internal and external renewal.

I'll always remember those conversations I didn't want to have. Those conversations with someone who loved me enough to help me even when it hurt and I didn't want it. Turns out those were some of the most anointed conversations of my life. They inspired me to the depths of my faith, and gave me the courage and confidence to know I am God's anointed for others as well. Don't reprove the priesthood of believers; to do so is to reprove Christ. Embrace your calling as a minister, a co-laborer, and member of Christ's church. A world of opportunities awaits as you and others around you as you recognize the anointing God has on your life in Christ to be the priesthood together.

Reflect

Who are some of the anointed people in your life that have shaped you to be built up as part of God's spiritual house?

Why is it important that we see ourselves in the church as a priesthood of believers?

Community: The Blessing of Community
Ryan Walker

Psalm 133:3

"It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore."

Mount Hermon is the 2nd highest mountain of Lebanon towering over 9,200 feet. In the morning the clouds roll in and those who are up in the mountain are waking up to the cloud coverage and the fresh dew covering everything. As a kid my family would rent houses in the Smoky Mountains. The elevation of these mountains was nothing compared to Mt. Hermon, but the idea was the same. The clouds were thick in the morning and it seemed like the day would be dreary and bleak. It was actually quite the opposite. The dew would dissipate as a result of the warmth of the sun, and you would then see the light of day. The day was then filled with the blessings of all the mountains had to offer.

Sometimes when you wake up in the morning, you can't see clearly because the clouds are covering the landscape. If we are honest we know those days aren't easy, but we also know that the blessing of the sunshine awaits. The Lord has commanded blessing.

The blessing of community can be a bit like the dew gathering on the mountain. It is cloudy, dreary, the humidity is thick, and we wonder if the sunshine will ever come. This is why the blessing of community is built upon Christ. We can face the "family" we have dislikes for, frustrations with, and even feel divisive towards, through the blessing of the community Christ has established.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who led a fugitive community of seminarians in Nazi Germany, wrote a famous work called "Life Together" and it speaks about living in the blessing of community. He says "Not what man is in himself as a Christian, his spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of community. What determines our brotherhood is what that man is by reason of Christ. Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us."

This is the wonder and beauty of brothers and sisters getting along. Beth Moore says, "Let's love each other even when we wouldn't like each other. After all eternity is a mighty long time to spend together... Just think about it. Every time brothers and sisters in Christ study together, worship together, eat together, or laugh our heads off together, amid all of our distinctions, we really do get a small taste of heaven."

Reflect

What are some natural hindrances to community for you?

How is pursuing community through the blessing of Christ a pursuit of eternal unity?



In 2001 when I came to UCF for college I had no idea God would change my life for ever. He saved me and brought me to CrossPointe Church in Lake Nona.

Over time God would stir my heart to ministry and serving 10 years at CrossPointe Lake Nona. In 2006 I married my incredible wife Carrie. In 2009 we had twins Camden and Adalyn, and almost exactly 2 year later we had Lily.

In September 2015 I became the lead Pastor at our amazing church at CrossPointe Downtown. Pastoring here is one of the greatest honors of my life!

Week 14

Blessing | Psalm 134

*Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD,
who stand by night in the house of the LORD!*

*Lift up your hands to the holy place
and bless the LORD!*

*May the LORD bless you from Zion,
he who made heaven and earth!*

[illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Blessing: Bless The Lord
Kyle Pizzuto

Psalm 134:1

"Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD!"

When I think of blessing someone, I think of providing something to that person that they need. A common way to "bless" someone is by helping their financial need. It could be as simple as giving someone in need a few bucks or helping a friend who's struggling to pay rent. Another way we might bless another person is by giving them some of our time, whether that be helping a friend move furniture or taking the time to listen to their struggles and pray with them. All these ways we "bless" people are ways that we can provide something that they need. We are sacrificially giving up something we have to meet a need that someone has. But this is not the case when it comes to blessing the Lord. For we know that there is nothing that God needs from us. He has been perfectly content before the universe was created. So what does it mean for us to bless the Lord?

The Hebrew word used to express "bless" in "bless the LORD" can be translated to "kneel." This implies that the way we bless the Lord is by offering our praise and adoration to the Lord. One might ask why God even bothered to even create us if he doesn't need anything from us. If we are meant to worship the Lord with our lives, would this imply that He needs our worship or that He wasn't content without having a creation to praise and adore him? Not at all. For we know we serve a triune God, a God that has had perfect fellowship for all of eternity. The Father has always been bestowing His love upon His Son, and the beloved Son has always reciprocated His Father's love and delighted in doing His Father's will. The Spirit is the One whom the Father makes his love known through. It's always been a perfect fellowship in the Godhead. God created us because it pleased Him to extend His love to His creation and include us in this perfect fellowship. He desires for us to appreciate the love He has extended to us. We bless God when we do this. John Piper's famous statement expresses this truth: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." Let us "bless" Him by adoring Him for His character, praising Him for all that He's done for us, and loving Him above all else.

Reflect

What difference do you think there is between the way you think about blessing God and the way He desires you to bless Him?

Blessing: Lift Up Your Hands
Kyle Pizzuto

Psalm 134:2

“Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD!”

I remember while growing up having gone to many different churches. Whether it was for vacation Bible school, a Sunday service, or a Wednesday night youth event, I was exposed to a lot of different approaches to worship. Some worship services were calm, mellow experiences where we recited older hymns. Others felt like I was thrown into the middle of an AC/DC concert. One thing I always noticed was whether or not the church was the “hand-raising” type. I remember one of my first times being exposed to a hand-raising church and thinking to myself, “Well, these people seem to be really feeling the worship service. Guess I better give it a shot.” As I practiced incorporating this new element into my worship, I had to pay attention to when the song was reaching its crescendo so that I could shoot my arms into the air at the perfect time. Did this chorus warrant a single hand or was it cathartic enough to go for the double hands? How long did I have to keep my arms up now? Would my descending hands at the wrong time make me appear to not be feeling this part of the song? Should I have been training my shoulders for this? I found the whole ordeal becoming a bit exhausting. So why is the lifting of hands a common part of worship?

There are a few things I’ve found to be represented in the lifting of our hands. The posture of our arms wide open is symbolic of surrender. As followers of Christ, we are commanded to surrender to God and to deny ourselves. The posture of our heart is full abandonment of the things that are idols in our lives. We are submitting ourselves to His will. Another aspect of our faith represented by outstretched arms is a sense of welcoming. Psalms 42:1-2 reads, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” The church longs for God’s presence and so we welcome Him to work in our lives. In this study of the Psalms of Ascent, we see pilgrims journeying to Mount Zion to be rejuvenated in God’s presence. They sang these psalms on their journey with a heart welcoming God to replace our worries and fears with faith and trust in Him who provides. So whether you prefer to physically raise your hands in corporate worship or you find yourself better focused on the lyrics with your hands by your side, let the posture of our hearts be one of abandonment of sinful ways and welcoming of the hope and assurance God’s presence brings.

Reflect

What do you hesitate to surrender to God that hinders you from more intimately pursuing Him?

What are some things you’d like to see God introduce into your life?

Psalm 134:3

"May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!"

I don't know about you, but I often find myself needing to get some sense of escape or retreat from the circumstances I find myself in. Sometimes I want to go travel and take a trip somewhere to break the monotony of my usual work routine. Other times, it's just as simple as needing to get out of the house to get some fresh air by going for a bike ride. Currently, I find myself needing to take a break from writing these devotionals to keep my sanity. Every one of us will find himself needing an escape from his circumstance at some point. Where will we run to? God's people would make the pilgrimage to Mount Zion to escape the troubles of life and seek renewal in God's presence. They ran to the One who can comfort us and provide peace in the midst of our worst situations. The song *Safe Retreat* by Kings Kaleidoscope comes to mind:

*When the storm clouds rise
And the sky is dark
And I'm pressed with anxious care
I've a safe retreat in the strong, high tower
For no ill can harm me there*

In Psalms 61:3, David declares to God, "For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy." God had delivered David from the hands of his enemies time and time again. God was the fortress David was able to rely on for his protection against threatening circumstances. Now we may not have people hurling spears at us or coming to our houses to kill us, but we will face tribulations in this life. Many of us have seen plenty of struggles in the year 2020. Fortunately, we have a great high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses and our struggles. We can confidently draw near to Him that we may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4).

Our heavenly Father crushed His Son so that we could receive the Spirit of adoption as sons and cry out "Abba! Father!" (Isaiah 53 & Romans 8). Let's make sure that above all other escapes and retreats that we daily run to our Father who hears our prayers and delights in giving good gifts to His children.

Reflect

What's your instinct when you feel overwhelmed or facing trouble?

What are some truths and promises God has declared that we can tightly hold onto in the midst of strife?



I've been going to CrossPointe Downtown for about 9 months now. I moved to Orlando from St. Paul, Minnesota but am originally from Louisiana. I go to Dylan and Chancey's community group. I was beginning to help with CrossPointe Kids prior to the coronavirus. I'm an engineer at Blue Origin and love sports and the outdoors.

