

Psalms 120-134
The Psalms of Ascent
A Study Guide

Michael Burns

About this Study Guide

There was once a young man who grew up very proud of the fact that his dad could fix anything. Just knowing that brought him a great deal of comfort. It did not matter if a faucet started to leak, or a door needed re-hanging, or the roof needed patching, or even if a car needed work, he knew that his dad was up to the task. Not only was that very assuring and convenient, it allowed him to save a great deal of time that he could apply to other pursuits because he did not have to worry about all those repairs. He read a lot and became very proficient at playing basketball. Both of those pursuits helped him get through college and segued into a career as a teacher and high school basketball coach.

But then a problem appeared. He was suddenly living on his own and had no ability to fix any of the things that could and do tend to break or go wrong from time to time. He had grown so comfortable with his dad doing everything for him that he never bothered to learn the skills for himself. He was suddenly hit with the fact that he could not fix anything and that cost him a lot of money and headache through the years.

It is easy to shake our heads at this tale and see the young man's foolishness, but before we do that too fast, we should recognize that we might be guilty of that same folly somewhere in our own lives in some other area.

One area that many followers of Jesus just might find the tendency to let someone else do the hard work for them is in Bible study. There are so many commentaries and Bible study helps available that one could spend a lifetime working through just a fraction of them. But therein lies a problem. Many have become so dependent on those resources that they have never learned to study the Bible for themselves. If put in a situation where they suddenly need to do that, they feel quite lost and incapable of undergoing such an endeavor.

This study guide is intended to be a bridge for just that problem. The very fact that you are using this resource indicates that this is more than completely independent Bible study. Yet, it does not do most of the work for you. This study guide is more like watching a brief YouTube video on a specific car repair that gives you some options of how you might approach the problem, but you still need to fix it yourself. There are some prompts and guides throughout this study, but most of the work will be done by you. It will encourage you to read the passages, study the significance and meaning of each Scripture, determine the application for yourself, and do some further research on certain topics and subjects.

This study guide can be approached in two different ways. You will find it perfectly adequate as a solo study. You can go through this study guide on your own, approaching each "week" as a day and utilizing the prompts to spark your daily quiet time. But you may also choose to utilize the study guide as a group class. If that is your option, you will find a leader's guide at the end to help guide a group through a weekly formatted class together.

Let us look at the parts of week of this study guide.

Each Week - If you are using this in a group then there will be one Psalm for each week of your gathering. If you are doing the work alone then each week will correspond to one day of Bible study (although you may choose a different schedule than daily). Each day begins with a quote from the 4th century church leader Athanasius to help focus our minds on the importance of the Psalms.

Read - You will begin each session by reading the Psalm multiple times. Follow the brief instructions in this section for maximum effect.

Recite - This is where you will spend some time meditating on God's word. A suggested phrase from the psalm is provided, but feel free to choose your own phrase from that Psalm if you would prefer. You will spend several minutes quietly repeating and dwelling on that phrase, looking to the Spirit for new insights on the depth of that passage and how it connects with you right now.

Reflect - The first part of the Reflect section offers a brief centering thought on the Psalm. You will get just enough for each psalm to point the way for the journey you are taking in this Psalm, but it will not get into specifics or do any of the difficult work for you. That waits ahead for you to do.

The second part of the Reflect section is a number of questions. These questions will guide you towards some of the insights that you can glean on your own from this Psalm and some of the work that you can put in to better understand the meaning and application of the Psalm.

Respond - In this section you will find several suggested prayer prompts, but these are just a start. Allow them to launch you into a meaningful time of prayer. Try to learn to utilize the Psalm from that session to provide the language and direction of much of your prayer time that day.

Remainder of the Week - You will find three portions of this section, each guiding you towards the work that you will put in for the rest of the week (or the day if you are going through this alone).

The first portion provides a couple of questions that you can continue to dwell on and answer that will help you reflect on this Psalm.

The second portion urges you to develop your own specific application from this Psalm both for you personally and from the more communal perspective of your faith community.

The third portion suggests some further research and work that you can do that learn more about an aspect of this Psalm or Scripture and go deeper in your learning and knowledge.

The Psalms

The largest book in your Bible, about half-way through the book, is the Psalms. The English word "Psalm" is a rendering of the Greek term *psalmoi* which is a translation of the Hebrew word *mizmor*. Both the Greek and Hebrew word simply mean "song." In ancient manuscripts, there are several terms that served as the title for this collection of poems or songs. The Codex Alexandrinus uses the term *psalterion*, which refers to a stringed instrument. The Masoretic title for the collection is *t^ehillim*. The Codex Vaticanus prefers the term *psalmoi*. There are also indications that at times in antiquity, the term *t^epillot*, or prayers, was also used.¹

That means that at various times, the Psalms have been referred to as songs, songs accompanied with instrument, praises, and prayers. All are fitting titles for this majestic collection.

The Psalms are unique among the pages of Scriptures because they are the clearest example of the words, thoughts, concerns, and feelings of human beings that are written to and expressed to God. They

are, in that sense, our words to God. The Psalms are full of real-life struggles, heartache, pain, fear, anxiety, joy, gratitude, confusion, anger, angst, frustration, and many more human emotions.

The Practical Function of the Psalms

Although many more could be discussed, there are three primary functions of the Psalms that we will focus on in this study guide.

The first is that the Psalms help us to walk with God through our emotions. The instinct of many Christians is to put a smile on our face and claim to be happy no matter the circumstances. Anything less, we fear, might be demonstrating a lack of faith. But the Psalms call us away from that shallow response. They show the full gamut of emotion as people wrestle with the realities of life and the confusion that results from walking with God through those peaks and valleys. Rather than stuffing our struggles or denying any emotions, the Psalms teach us to bring them to God, good, bad, and ugly. They show us how to be real about those emotions, especially the challenging ones, how to bring them to God, how to process them correctly before God and learn true restoration, finding true peace in the process.

The second is the power of the Psalms to provide us prayer language. For nearly two thousand years now, the Psalms have been the prayer language of the church, and they served a similar function for the Jewish people before that. Thomas Merton says that, "Nowhere can we be more certain that we are praying with the Holy Spirit than when we pray the Psalms."² At times we struggle finding the right words, topics, tone, or focus for our prayers. When we immerse ourselves in the Psalms, we immerse ourselves in the ancient prayer language of God's people. The more we can learn to utilize the ideas, themes, and words of the Psalms in our prayer language, the more, as Merton intimated, we will find ourselves thinking the thoughts of the Holy Spirit and drawing closer to God in prayer.

The third function is as a guide from God for our lives. The Psalms do provide prayer and praise language and they do assist us in walking through our emotions as we intermingle with the words of our spiritual ancestors written and oft repeated to God. But in a strange and powerful way, that only Scripture can, the words of God's people to him, become his words to us as well. In the Psalms we find guidance for our hearts and souls. They are not just a collection of ancient love songs to a God no longer relevant in today's modern world. As the authors of these Psalms learned to traverse life's challenges and trials, they learned submission to God in every circumstance in life. They learned to be led by God. And as they recorded that journey, their Psalms become a signpost to a us when making that same journey through life. The Psalms show us the way to be real about the sorts of things we will experience in this life and how to stay connected with God through those times.

The Psalms and Canon

The term "canon" simply means "rule." It is the collection of texts that is considered Scripture. The Psalms are part of the Hebrew Bible, which Christians refer to primarily as the Old Testament. Those that were part of the Jewish faith, including Jesus, categorize the Hebrew Scriptures into three sections: Moses, the prophets, and the writings. Psalms would fall into the category of the writings.

For many years, the psalms was seen as little more than a collection of similar songs and poems with little attention paid to the way that they are ordered or if there was any intended order or internal flow

of the Psalms themselves. That has changed in the latter half of the 20th century as more scholars now believe that there is an intentional shape to the psalter.

In classic interpretation, the Psalms are divided into five books with the ending psalm of each book being 41, 72, 89, 106, 150. But with the onset of the approach that sees an intentional shaping of the order of the Psalms and their connective themes, an amended classification has become more popular. Many now see Psalm 1 as an introduction in the Psalms and the theme of submission and obedience to God’s word as the source of life, while Psalm 2 introduces the vital concept of God as king. Psalm 146-150 serve as a capstone to the psalms and a praise and jubilation that culminate the collection and bring it to a close. In that interpretation, then, the outline of the Psalms would look as follows:

- Introduction** - Psalm 1 & 2
- Book 1** - Psalm 3-41
- Book 2** - Psalm 42-72
- Book 3** - Psalm 73-89
- Book 4** - Psalm 90-106
- Book 5** - Psalm 107-145
- Doxology** - Psalm 146-150

Genres of Psalms

Just as there a wide array of life situations, emotions experienced, and prayers to meet those challenges, so are there many different types of Psalms. One of the reasons that the psalms have been so beloved and utilized by Christians of all types over the last two millennia is that there seems to be Psalms for almost every occasion and circumstance.

If you are struggling with anger, frustration, and rage, then you can turn to the Imprecatory Psalms. If fear, sorrow, and regret are your current battle, then you will find direction and grace in the Psalms of Lament. You may need to strengthen your faith in the midst of danger or hard times, then the Psalms of Trust are for you. If you are feeling at peace, then the guiding hand of the Wisdom Psalms will encourage your soul. If you are feeling gratitude or on the other end and need to grow your gratitude, then the Psalms of Thanksgiving will be right up your alley. And if you are in need of some special focus on worship, the Psalms of Praise are just what the doctor ordered.

There are other genres of Psalms as well and some Psalms that are a mixture of genres and could be classified differently by different scholars. Below is one way to classify the various genres of psalms.³

GENRE	PSALM
LAMENT	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 17, 22, 26, 27, 28, 35, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 74, 77, 79, 80, 82, 83, 85, 86, 88, 90, 94, 102, 106, 108, 109, 120, 123, 126, 130, 137, 140, 141, 142, 143
(PENITENTIAL)	6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
(IMPRECATORY)	35, 55, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137
PRAISE	8, 29, 33, 46, 47, 48, 76, 84, 87, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 103, 104, 105, 111, 113, 114, 117, 122, 134, 135, 136, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150
(SONGS OF ZION)	46, 48, 76, 84, 87
(ENTHRONEMENT OF YHWH)	47, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99

ROYAL	2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144
THANKSGIVING	30, 66, 92, 107, 116, 118, 124, 138
TRUST	11, 16, 23, 91, 121, 125, 129, 131
WISDOM	1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128
LITURGY	15, 24, (see also 136)
HISTORICAL	78 (see also 105, 106, 107, 114)
MIXED	9, 10, 19, 25, 31, 32, 34, 36, 40, 65, 89, 119
UNCLEAR	50, 52, 62, 67, 68, 75, 81, 115, 133, 139

Table 1.0

In **Psalms of Lament**, the psalmist cries out to God for divine assistance in the face of trial. Usually, after describing the trouble, the psalmist gives reasons that God should answer, affirms their trust in God and returns to praise or the hope of praise. Penitential Psalms are a type of Lament that focus on confession, while Imprecatory Psalms are another type of Lament that give their frustration full vent as they invoke judgment or calamity on God's enemies, and by implication, the enemy of the psalmist.

Praise Psalms focus in on who God is, what he is done, and why he is worthy of praise. They call for praise of God, state why God should be praised, and then often repeat the call for praise. Psalms about Zion and the Enthronement of YHWH are subset types of praise Psalms.

The Royal Psalms cover the spiritual role of kings when it comes to their relationship with and praise of God. This connection they have to the king is the only thing these Psalms tend to have in common.

Psalms of Thanksgiving call for praise of thanks to be given to God, often in response to a specific event of God's intervention or deliverance. The typical Psalm of Thanksgiving offers a praise to God, describes a crisis or dangerous situation that God brought his people through, calls for praise of God in response, and then offers up that praise.

Psalms of Trust are those that reaffirm trust in God despite past or present circumstances which might cause one to doubt or waver in trust.

Wisdom Psalms are those that share characteristics with the wisdom literature of Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. They offer guidance and wise principles for the reader.

Liturgy Psalms are those that specifically lead in worship of God.

Historical Psalms are the Psalms that discuss and describe the historical past of the Jewish people.

Collections of Psalms and Authorship

In addition to the specific genres of Psalms, various Psalms have been categorized into collections based on the ascribed authorship or specific type of Psalm, or that they are considered to have once been a separate collection before being included into the larger collection of what we now know as the book of Psalms. The table below lists these collections and the Psalms included in each one.⁴

COLLECTION	PSALMS
DAVIDIC COLLECTIONS	3-41, 51-72, 108-110, 138-145
KORAHITE COLLECTIONS	42,49, 84,85, 87-88
ELOHISTIC COLLECTION	42-83

ASAPHITE COLLECTION	73-83
ENTHRONEMENT PSALMS	93, 95-99
SONGS OF ASCENT	120-134
HALLELUJAH PSALMS	111-118, 146-150

Table 2.0

Any attribution of the authorship of any Psalm comes from the superscriptions that appear at the beginning of the Psalms. Those are often thought to indicate authorship but do not necessarily state that or even imply it. The superscription of a Psalm to David or Moses or Korah might simply have to do with a connection of interpretation of that Psalm or that it came from that time. There are problems with the idea that superscriptions of, for example, a Davidic psalm having been written by David as several of those Psalms refer to the Temple, something that did not exist in David's lifetime. There is no hard and fast case that can be for the specific authorship of any Psalm and we should probably consider the Psalms to be anonymous. For more on the topic of authorship and superscriptions see *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* by deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (pp. 9-13) and *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50*, by Craigie and Tate (pp. 31-35).

Because authorship of the Psalms is uncertain, the time frame for when the individual Psalms remains uncertain, but the likely composition of the Psalms into the general form that we have them today spanned from the 10th Century BCE to the 5th Century BCE and the post-exilic period.

Major Themes of the Psalms

Many scholars have spent many years discussing and debating the theological center and primary themes of the Psalms. Many different ideas have been put forth, but the very fact that so many eminent scholars have not found precise agreement on the theological center should indicate to us that perhaps there is not one center other than that God himself is at the heart of the Psalms. Depending on the angle, we can see different aspects of God come to the forefront of the Psalms.

The Psalms certainly emphasize that God reigns on his throne. That is unquestionably an important theological base for the Psalter. But God is also a refuge for those in trouble and in stormy times. God is faithful and reliable. God is active and present in his creation. All of these are theologically important to the Psalms. As you read through the Psalms of Ascent in this study guide, look for the presence and role of each of these theological foundations in the ideas of the Psalm.

The major themes of the Psalms are largely reflected in the types of genres represented in the Psalms. If there is one unifying theme throughout the Psalms, it is the ability to work towards praising God despite the circumstances in life. If life is troublesome, lament but work towards giving God praise. Praise God for he is king. Offer thanksgiving for the good that he has done and praise him. If you are wavering in your trust, reaffirm it and work towards praise. In your grief, you fear, your anxiety, your depression, your doubt, work towards praise for that is the state that humans were designed to be in. Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord. As you work through the Psalms of Ascent, look for the themes of working through whatever circumstances in life may befall us, and the call to work towards praising the Lord.

Historical Setting and Background

Psalms is one of the more mysterious books in the biblical canon in that the authorship, time period, and location for the formation of most of the Psalms is unknown. That leaves us to only speculate about the specific background of each Psalm.

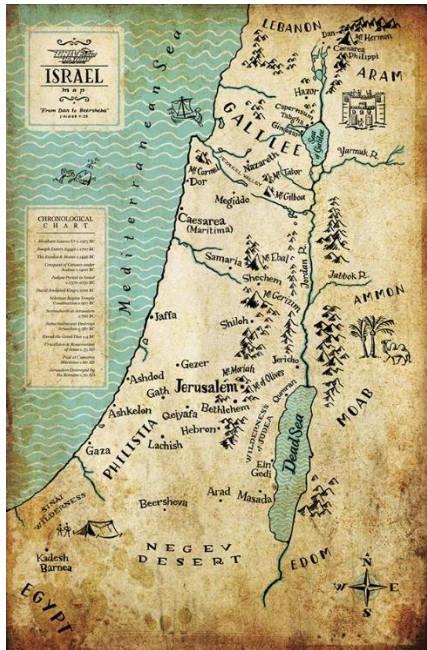


Figure 1.0

It seems that most of the Psalms find their setting in the life and times of the period of Solomon’s Temple before the exile, although some appear to have been written in a post-exilic setting. The Psalms became the hymns and liturgical language for the Second Temple period of Israel following the exile, up to, and beyond the period of the life of Christ.

The historical background for the Psalms is diverse although there is a focus of worship for most of the Psalter that is aimed at the Temple in Jerusalem. It would seem that since the time of David, the Psalms were incorporated into the worship at the Temple and during a time when there was no Temple, the Psalms continued to carry the function of drawing people to worship God. During the Second Temple period, the Psalms were the primary hymnbook for Israel, calling their heart and attention to God’s presence, which were almost always depicted as being in Jerusalem, the city of Zion, and the Temple more specifically.

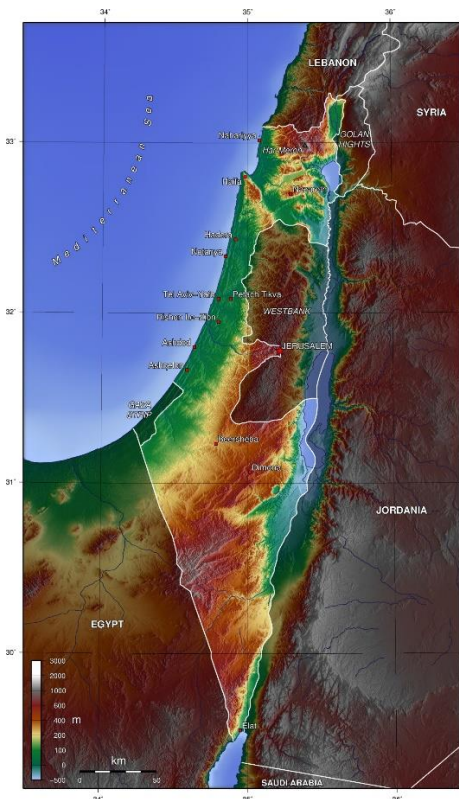


Figure 2.0

One of the key themes of the Psalms of Ascent is the ascent towards Jerusalem. Jerusalem is surrounded by hills and so approaching the great city requires any traveler to go up towards Jerusalem. Consider the elevation map of Israel that depicts the ascent necessary to go to Jerusalem.

See the figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, photographs of a model of ancient Jerusalem in Israel, which demonstrate the elevation of the Temple relative to the rest of Jerusalem. Both the elevation of Jerusalem and the elevation of the Temple give rise to the theme of ascending in the Psalms of Ascent of 120-134.



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3

The Psalms of Ascent

The Psalms of Ascent are a collection of Psalms 120-134. They are a unique among the Psalms for their character in unity. David Mitchell, in his book *The Song of Ascents*⁵, highlights the unity of this collection, noting that they share a common title with each Psalm being noted as “A Song of the Ascents”⁶. They were tied together, Mitchell says, in such a way that makes clear that a decision was made that they should never be split up. But that’s not the only point of unity in these Psalms according to Mitchell. They share a common mood, with no present fear, sorrow, or rage against enemies but only a constant mood of entering into a peaceful present following a tumultuous past. The Psalms focus on and revolve around the one city of Jerusalem as the geographical and thematic center. They are locked in on the one house of David as king. They share a common dialect and language found nowhere else in the Psalms that shows, according to Mitchell, the influence of Aramaic. They also share unique literary styles further demonstrating that they were compiled as a unit from their inception.

There is a great deal of unity in this small collection of Psalms, yet there is also diversity. There are both individual and community laments (120, 123, 126, 130), there are both individual and community hymns (121, 122, 124, 125, 129, 131, 134), wisdom Psalms (127, 128, 133), and a Royal Psalm (132).⁷

Mitchell cites more unity in the Psalms of Ascent, chronicling a storyline that runs through the Psalms. This has been observed as far back as Origen in the 3rd century. I will paraphrase it here:

- Psalm 120: An Israelite man of peace living among cruel pagans, longs for a place of peace.
- Psalm 121: He takes a journey to Jerusalem with his eyes fixed on the hills of Jerusalem, praying for protection on his journey.
- Psalm 122: The sojourner arrives with friends in Jerusalem and they admire the city, especially David’s palace. They sing a blessing for the peace of the city.
- Psalm 123: The sojourners begin to worship as they lift their eyes to God in the Temple and pray for mercy on Israel.
- Psalm 124: They offer thanksgiving for Israel’s deliverance in the past.
- Psalm 125: They affirm that the Holy One will continue to protect and deliver Israel.
- Psalm 126: They compare the deliverance and restoration of Israel to a wonderful harvest.
- Psalm 127: They declare that no house, whether a human habitat, a king’s dynasty, or the Temple, can be built without God and his favor and blessing.
- Psalm 128: They confirm that the foundation of their present and future is family and children. This is God’s blessing and harvest upon them.

- Psalm 129: They denounce Israel's past oppressors.
- Psalm 130: They confess the past help, mercy, and forgiveness that God has given them.
- Psalm 131: They enjoy the peace that comes after forgiveness, acceptance, and renewal.
- Psalm 132: They celebrate the ark's entry and pray for the preservation of David's dynasty.
- Psalm 133: They tell of the unity of the tribes of Israel and how this is part of the blessing from God that the sojourners will take with them as they return to their homes.
- Psalm 134: There is a farewell blessing for those ministering in the Temple and a blessing for those leaving. As they bless God, he will bless them.

The Structure of the Psalms of Ascents

The Psalms of Ascents have more structure to them than just the narrative described above. Mitchell also describes the chiasmic structure which helps us to see the flow and unity of this collection.⁸ I will paraphrase his chiasm below.

- A Ps. 120 - Surrounded by pagans in a distant place; departing for Zion.
- B Ps. 121 - Up to Zion for blessing.
- C Ps. 122 - Entering Jerusalem; David's throne bestows justice.
- D Ps. 123 - Eyes lifted up: humility rather than pride; servant to master.
- E Ps. 124 - Hostile waters; deep trouble; redeemed by the LORD.
- F Ps. 125 - Delivered from foreign domination.
- G Ps. 126 - Fertility and fruitful labor.
- H Ps. 127 - Solomon's Psalm. Building temple and nation.
- G Ps. 128 - Fertility and fruitful labor.
- F Ps. 129 - Delivered from foreign domination.
- E Ps. 130 - Hostile waters; deep trouble; redeemed by the LORD.
- D Ps. 131 - Eyes are not lifted up; humility rather than pride; child to mother.
- C Ps. 132 - The Ark enters the temple; king David's line sits enthroned.
- B Ps. 133 - Going down; blessing from Zion to Israel.
- A Ps. 134 - Surrounded by those that praise God in the Jerusalem Temple.

The Setting of the Psalms of Ascents

The Psalms of ascents have a strong theme and connection with a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The language used in the Psalms, according to David Mitchell, seems to come from provincial parts of Israel which would indicate that it was written from the perspective of Israelites who loved Jerusalem and would visit her at the time of the feasts.⁹ As we can see above, the narrative of the Ascents describes a sojourner who first arrives in Jerusalem, worships God while there, and then makes their way back home again, leaving with the blessing of God. It is a picture of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and back home again.

Mitchell believes that there is good reason to suspect that the Song of Ascents were associated specifically with the feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles). The Mishnah makes that connection explicit, describing how the Psalms of Ascent were sung and played during this festival.¹⁰ This seems to be part of a pattern in Book V of the Psalms. Psalms 113-118 were incorporated into the Passover celebration; Psalm 119 was read at the Feast of Pentecost and the Ascents utilized during Sukkot.¹¹

Many scholars believe that the Songs of Ascents were part of a celebration at this festival and were sung as the Levites slowly ascended the 15 steps in the Temple. This connection is documented as far back as the early Christian theologian Hippolytus in the early 3rd century. It is also described in the Mishnah¹² and by the early Christian Jerome in the 5th century.¹³

It would seem, says Mitchell, that “The Songs of Ascents, then, are a single liturgy, sung at the Feast of Sukkot by Levites enacting a ritual pilgrimage upon the Temple steps.” He believes that this can be traced to the time of Solomon, as it is the only period in Israel’s history that coincides with the various elements described in the Psalms of Ascents. Mitchell asserts that these songs were compiled on the occasion of the dedication of the Temple, noting that the central Psalm (127) is not coincidentally one that bears the name Solomon. These songs were originally, it seems, the liturgy for the dedication of the Temple and then carried on in future years as part of the Feast of Sukkot.

Psalm 120 - A Psalm of Rescue

Gathering in the Lower Court

Do you consider yourself to be ascending towards God in what you do so that you can say, "I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead?" For each step along your journey you have the fifteens Songs of Ascents to recite.

- Athanasius

Read



- Read Psalm 120 out loud at least three times as a class.
- Read Psalm 120 at least twice very slowly and silently to yourself, allowing time to allow each word and phrase to resonate.

Recite



Take 2-3 minutes to meditate on your own on the phrase, "Save me, Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues." Listen for the Spirit to reveal new things about this meaning and application of this phrase.

Reflect



A Thought of Reflection

Standing for peace and being outraged at the lies and oppression of the powerful are not contradictory positions. The sojourner desires peace and calls on God, trusting that he will answer. She laments the hypocrisy, the fake news all around, and a culture that has embraced division. The sojourner must see the world as it is and trust God alone and divorces herself from worldly allegiances or else, she will become satisfied with the world and blind to its inequities. The sojourner must be dissatisfied with the world and constantly striving for a better way, God's way. But never forgetting that this will cut against the grain and being criticism.

Preparation for Reflection

1. What title would you give to the first stanza (vv. 1-2)?

2. What title would you give to the second stanza (vv. 3-4)?

3. What title would you give to the third stanza (vv. 5-7)?

4. The terms rendered “call on” and “answers” in verse 1 of the NIV are in the present tense. The Masoretic Text indicates that these terms could be rendered in the past tense.¹⁴ How does it slightly shift the meaning of this psalm if we were to understand those terms in the past tense?

5. What does the Lord save us from according to this Psalm?

6. Read Psalm 57:4 and 64:3. How does that help to interpret verse 4?

7. What is the most prevalent metaphor employed in this psalm and how is it used throughout this psalm to get across the primary point of the psalmist?

8. How can the negative words of others affect us? How can God rescue us from the tongue and speech of those that might oppose us?

9. What emotions does the psalmist express in this psalm? How does this psalm help you learn to deal with those same emotions in a godly way?

10. What are your own tents of Kedar? How do you escape them?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- That God will provide comfort and direction during these confusing and challenging times.
 - That God will give discernment to the body of Christ about what is true and what is not.
 - That God will help you to reject the ways of the world while maintaining a strong love for the world.
 - That God will continue to rescue his people and to provide rescue for those that are lost in darkness right now.
 - That God will provide comfort for the oppressed and distressed.
- Application: What will you take away from this psalm to guide you throughout the rest of your week?

Remainder of the Week



- **Questions for Reflection**
 - What allegiances do you have that make it difficult to see God's equal view of the world?
 - What do you want to leave behind and escape?
 - What lies most tempt your ears?
- **Application**
 - What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
 - What is the personal application that you away from this psalm?
- **Further Study**
 1. What and where are Meshak and the Tents of Kedar?
 2. Look up the Hebrew word shalom that is translated peace in this psalm? How does a more expanded definition of that word add to your understanding of this psalm?

3. What is the most repeated word in this psalm? What does that tell us about the primary theme of this psalm?

4. In what other psalm of ascents can you find the phrase “maker of heavens and earth”? What thoughts about God does that phrase invoke?

5. A merism is a word pair that summarizes the total by naming opposite boundaries or extremes (such as “as far as the East is from the West). What two merisms can you find in this psalm? What function do they serve in making the point of the psalmist?

6. Where do I most need God’s protection and help?

7. Do I truly trust God and rely on him for comfort and security?

8. Do I really believe that God will protect me and use circumstances for my good?

9. Which picture of God in this Psalm is most encouraging?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- that God’s people will continue to look to him for our answers, our help, our security, and comfort.
- that he will keep watch over us.

- specifically, for those that have slipped and are struggling in their walk with Gods.
- that the Lord will keep you from harm.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- What are some of the things of the world that I am often tempted to turn to for comfort and security rather than God?
- Do I truly live my life and manage my emotions as though I believe that the Lord watches over me?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you away from this psalm?

Further Study

10. Read an article in a Bible dictionary on merisms and learn about that concept in the Bible.

Psalm 122 - A Psalm of Belonging

The Second Step

It is necessary, my child, for each person who reads the psalms to know that everything in them is God-breathed.

- Athanasius

Read



- Read Psalm 122 out loud at least three times as a class.
- Read Psalm 122 at least twice very slowly and silently to yourself, allowing time to allow each word and phrase to resonate.

Recite



Take 2-3 minutes to meditate on your own on the phrase, "May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels." Listen for the Spirit to reveal new things about this meaning and application of this phrase.

Reflect



A Thought of Reflection

The sojourner arrives in Jerusalem with friends and neighbors who have made the journey with him. They praise God that they belong to his worshipping people. It is here in the city of God, surrounded by the people of God that he truly finds his place in the world. They rejoice and praise God's name for the community that he has put together and continue in worship of him. God's people today do not have one city or geographical location to traverse to, but when we come together, we are no less God's people or part of his kingdom. Like our forbearers, we can strive for the life of God's people so that his kingdom will continue to prosper and advance in the world. But we always do so with the recognition that we are merely channels that allow God's wisdom, grace and mercy to flow through us.

Preparation for Reflection

1. Would you classify Psalm 122 as?
 - A. A corporate hymn of thanksgiving
 - B. An individual lament
 - C. An individual hymn of thanksgiving
 - D. A royal psalm.
- ii. Explain your answer

2. What title would you give to the first section (vv. 1-2)?

3. What title would you give to the second section (vv. 3-5)?

4. What title would you give to the third section (vv. 6-9)?

5. If we look at just the first three psalms of ascent (120-122), what is the geographical progression that seems to be presented in these psalms?

6. What are the three separate references to a house in this psalm and what verses are they found in?

7. If the house of the Lord represents the presence of God and the house of David represents justice and equity for God's people, what is being indicated by the placement of these references to a house?

8. Does your closest circle of friends call you to worship God and glorify him with your life?

9. What do you worship in life if we judged that by what you spend your time on and where you place your greatest trust and hope?

10. What is the benefit of being in a community of worship?

11. What is the difference between a life focused on the prosperity of God's kingdom and one that focuses on our own prosperity?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- for greater unity among God's people and in your church.
- that your faith community will seek God's kingdom first in their lives.
- that God will continue to show his wisdom through the mission of gathering the nations.
- for the peace and security of God's people, the church.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- Where do I most experience and become aware of the presence of God?
- What consistent actions do I take to find peace in the presence of God?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you away from this psalm?

Further Study

- Look up the word, "Shekinah" in a Bible dictionary and study out the concept represented biblically by that term.

Psalm 123 - A Psalm of Presence

The Third Step

You should take whatever help you can from the psalms as though you were picking from the fruits of paradise. Become familiar with them so that they are within your sight when the need arises.

12. Athanasius

Read



- Read Psalm 123 out loud at least three times as a class.
- Read Psalm 123 at least twice very slowly and silently to yourself, allowing time to allow each word and phrase to resonate.

Recite



Take 2-3 to meditate on your own on the phrase, “so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he shows us his mercy.” Listen for the Spirit to reveal new things about this meaning and application of this phrase.

Reflect



A Thought of Reflection

What defines your identity? What are you proud of or, conversely, ashamed of? Do your own actions and achievements define who you are or does God’s character and being in his presence define your identity? Do your eyes look to yourself, another person, or certain situations to go your way for relief, or do you rely on God’s presence? There will be constant internal and external presence to not rely on God’s presence and to see ourselves through the lens of the world. There will be a constant temptation to respond to the world’s ridicule to act in ways that they approve of which will end the ridicule. We can easily forget to bathe ourselves in God’s presence resolve to remain faithful to his will. We need to lift our eyes constantly towards God to be reminded about what is true and who we are. When we do so, we will realize that God loves us despite our failures and weaknesses.

Preparation for Reflection

1. What title would you give to the first section (vv. 1-2)?

2. What title would you give to the second section (vv. 3-4)?

3. In Psalm 121, the psalmist lifts his eyes to the mountains. To where, in verse 1, does he lift his eyes now? What does that intimate?
4. If these psalms are about the sojourner arriving at the Temple and are largely focused on God's presence in Jerusalem and the Temple, why does the psalmist mention, in verse 1, that God is enthroned in heaven.
5. What is the most repeated word in this psalm? What does that tell us about the focus in this psalm?
6. What emotions does the psalmist express feeling in this psalm?
7. What has the sojourner endured from the ungodly in verse 4? In what ways can Christians receive that same type of treatment today?
8. This psalm calls for faithfulness. Why would we want to remain faithful to God when we are ridiculed by the world for doing so?
9. What does it mean, specifically to ask God for mercy? What do we need to give up in order to seek and receive mercy from God?
10. What do we know about God that makes seeking his mercy at the risk of ridicule from the world worth it?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- that you keep your eyes focused on Jesus as Lord and King.
- that your church would be attentive to God's will and singularly focused on that.
- for God to continue you to help you pursue and be aware of his presence.
- that your faith community would not be ashamed of or swayed by ridicule from the world.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- Do I tend to keep my eyes fixed on the world, my critics, myself, or on God?
- What is my response when I am criticized or ridiculed?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you away from this psalm?

Further Study

- The word "ridicule" in verse 4 (NIV) can be translated "mockery." Look up the word "mockery" in a Bible dictionary and a concordance and study out that concept in the Psalms.

Psalm 124 - A Psalm of Protection

The Fourth Step

The words of the psalms can serve as a guide for every aspect of human life. The psalms help us understand both the disposition of our souls as well as our emotions and thoughts.

- Athanasius

Read



- Read Psalm 124 out loud at least three times as a class.
- Read Psalm 124 at least twice very slowly and silently to yourself, allowing time to allow each word and phrase to resonate.

Recite



Take 2-3 minutes to meditate on your own on the phrase, “praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth.” Listen for the Spirit to reveal new things about this meaning and application of this phrase.

Reflect



A Thought of Reflection

The wise traveler disciplines herself in a mindset of gratitude. We can focus on the obstacles and trials or on God’s protection through those times. We face much opposition and many dangers, including be enemies and trials that are tangible or internal. We must acknowledge that we would have been swallowed up quickly were it not for God. We must recognize our need for protection and rescue and the reality that our only reliable help is God. Part of our praise and worship is to recognize our need for God’s protection and humble reliance on it.

Preparation for Reflection

1. What title would you give to the first section (vv. 1-5)?

2. What title would you give to the second section (vv. 6-7)?

3. What title would you give to the third section (v. 8)?

4. In what ways does this psalm serve as the second half of Psalm 123?
5. How does the if/then statement of verse 2-5 frame the praise of God in this psalm?
6. What calamities are listed in verses 3-5 that would have befallen Israel without God's protection?
7. List all the metaphors you can find employed in this psalm. How does the metaphoric language make this psalm more effective?
8. What merism do you find in this psalm? How does it enhance to effect of this psalm?
9. What are some of the real external or internal dangers or opposition that you face right now?
10. What is the psalmist's response to the dangers that would have swallowed him up or swept him away?
11. Why is praise of God's protection and rescue important?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- in gratitude and thank God for all that he has done to protect you in your life, to protect your loved ones, your fellow believers, and the church. Be as specific in your gratitude as you can.
- For God's protection for the oppressed and marginalized in the world.
- That God's people will continue to trust in him and his ways and not turn to the world or the ideas of the world for protection or comfort.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- What are the things that God has done in my life that are worthy of remembrance and praise?
- What would my life look like today without God in my life?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you away from this psalm?

Further Study

1. Verse 8 says that our help is in the name of the Lord. The word "help" is the Hebrew *ezer*. Use a Bible dictionary and a concordance to study the meaning and usage of that term in the Old Testament. How does studying that term help you understand both the role of God in the Bible and of women?

3. What title would you give to the third section (v. 8)?

4. How does the geography of Jerusalem serve as metaphors for God in verses 1-2?

5. How does verse 3 draw upon the imagery of Psalm 1 to make its point?

6. How are the good described in this psalm? How are those who are not good described? What is the relationship each has with the Lord?

7. How stable or fragile do you think your life is? Are you constantly in fear of messing everything up with a bad choice?

8. What does it look like for you to trust God fully?

9. What does it mean for God to be king of your life?

10. What other scepters or crooked paths are you tempted to trust?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- for three specific people that you have selected to focus on in your prayer that they would grow in their trust for God and in their reliance on God's kingdom and his ways in the world.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- What area of my life is most difficult to trust God with completely?
- Does my life and actions reflect the truth that those in power in the earthly realm are limited and temporary in their influence and that God is the one in whom I must place my hope and trust?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you away from this psalm?

Further Study

1. Most sojourners who came to Jerusalem for the festivals were not rich or influential. They were often poor, had just enough to sustain life, and were routinely victims of injustice in daily life. Use a Bible dictionary or a book on daily life in Bible times to study out the day-to-day experience of the average to poor Israelite.

Psalm 126 - A Psalm of Restoration

The Sixth Step

The Psalms are written in such a way that you might be speaking them yourself. When you say the psalmist's words aloud, you offer them to God as your own.

- Athanasius

Read



Read Psalm 126 out loud at least three times as a class

- Read Psalm 126 at least twice very slowly and silently to yourself, allowing time to allow each word and phrase to resonate.

Recite



Take 2-3 minutes to meditate on your own on the phrase, "Then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.'" Listen for the Spirit to reveal new things about this meaning and application of this phrase.

Reflect



A Thought of Reflection

The traveler casts himself as one whose head is wet with the midnight sweat of worry. He hasn't slept well. He looks back to a time when God had restored Zion and the people slept and dreamed well. The psalmist is realistic about the disappointment and struggle of the present but also remembers the joy of the past and that informs his hopes for the future. He turns the dream of the past into the hope for the future rather than a reason to simply lament the present. He recognizes that the current trials are temporary and need not define our present or control our emotions. Yet, never does he dismiss or ignore the tears as though they are not a reality. Doing so, allows him to be present with people in pain, but point them towards an eternal future of joy.

Preparation for Reflection

1. What title would you give to the first section (vv. 1-3)?

2. What title would you give to the second section (v, 4)?

3. What title would you give to the third section (vv. 5-6)?

4. Why does the psalmist repeat the idea of fortunes being restored in verse 1 and 4? What impact does that have on the psalm.

5. How does the response of the nations in this psalm differ with the response of the nations in Psalm 42:3 and 3:3. Why do you think there is such a stark difference noted in this psalm?

6. What metaphorical theme is employed in verses 5 and 6? Why do you think the psalmist used that imagery?

7. What word is repeated the most in this psalm? Why do you think the psalmist uses that word so often?

8. Describe a time in your walk with God that was characterized by joy and happiness. What made it that way?

9. Describe a time in your walk with God that was characterized by trial and sorrow. What made it that way?

10. How does knowing God and the Scriptures help keep the balance between being realistic about present struggles while also being motivated and animated by the joy that awaits? What specific verses help you find that balance?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- that God will continue to fill his kingdom people with joy, gratitude, and allegiance.
- that God will allow your church to reflect his glory in specific ways in the larger community.
- for those that are struggling with mental illness, depression, or struggling in their faith.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- What has God done for you in the past that most encourages you?
- What are you sowing right now that God can use to bring about joy in the future?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you away from this psalm?

Further Study

- The NIV translates two different Hebrew words as “joy” in Psalm 126. Use a concordance to determine what those two words are and how they are used in this psalm. What is the difference between these two words? How are they used in the rest of Scripture? Why do you think the NIV chose to use the same English word?

Psalm 127 - A Psalm of Control

The Seventh Step

Let no one attempt to embellish the psalms with persuasive extra words or attempt to alter in any way what is said there.

- Athanasius

Read



- Read Psalm 127 out loud at least three times as a class.
- Read Psalm 127 at least twice very slowly and silently to yourself, allowing time to allow each word and phrase to resonate.

Recite



Take 2-3 minutes to meditate on your own on the phrase, “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.” Listen for the Spirit to reveal new things about this meaning and application of this phrase.

Reflect



A Thought of Reflection

God is the builder and protector of everything we accomplish and have. He is our provider, not our jobs or anything else. God may use those things as means of his provision, but it is so important to keep in mind that he is the source. He builds our families, careers, etc. This is important because the builder is in control. We often want to take over and build and provide because it brings us control. Even the legacy we leave in our children is not within our control. We have to challenge this need to be in control. Until we turn control over to God, we will never be able to enjoy the true legacy he has in store for us.

Preparation for Reflection

1. What title would you give to the first section (vv. 1-2)?
2. What title would you give to the second section (vv. 3-5)?
3. How does the imagery of the terms “build” and “house” from verse 1 create and advance the themes of this psalm?

4. What is the triple meaning of “house” alluded to in this psalm? How does that factor into the theme of this psalm?

5. How do the references to children factor into the themes of “build” and “house”?

6. What is result, according to verse 5, for the person who has many children? Why would that be the case?

7. What do you spend the most time trying to build or protect in your life? How much time do you intentionally spend ensuring that God is in control of that?

8. How do you respond to fear, doubt, anxiety, or loss of control? What do you do in those times? How effective are your methods of turning those things over to God?

9. What Scriptures provide you with the clearest advice of what to do when fear in any of its many forms tempts you?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- that your spiritual community will remain focused on God and diligent about ensuring that everything you do is built on his will and ways.
- for complete reliance on God.
- for God’s protection over your children and the children of others in your church.
- for wisdom as parents and

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- What serves in your life as a constant reminder of God's faithfulness in your life?
- Do you truly trust in the Lord to be the builder of your house?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you take away from this psalm?

Further Study

- Use a biblical dictionary to study out the concept of inheritance in the Jewish culture. How does this add to your understanding of this psalm?

Psalm 128 - A Psalm of Joy

The Eighth Step

You should speak in simplicity what is written in the psalms so that the meaning of the words becomes clear to you and the people who join with you in prayer.

- Athanasius

Read



- Read Psalm 128 out loud at least three times as a class.
- Read Psalm 128 at least twice very slowly and silently to yourself, allowing time to allow each word and phrase to resonate.

Recite



Take 2-3 minutes to meditate on your own on the phrase, "Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to him." Listen for the Spirit to reveal new things about this meaning and application of this phrase.

Reflect



A Thought of Reflection

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of everything we need in life. When we fear and revere God, we will have everything we need. When we fear God, we will find joy. Trusting in God for our needs is more than just trusting him for daily provision and survival. This is about recognizing and trusting God's way as the best way. God wants to bless our lives in every way, but trust demands that we realize that his provision may not always feel pleasant in the moment.

Preparation for Reflection

1. What title would you give to the first section (vv. 1-4)?
2. What title would you give to the second section (vv. 5-6)?
3. This psalm is often classified as a wisdom psalm. What internal evidence would you point to that would confirm that?

4. What are some of the terms used in Psalm 128 that are also utilized in Psalm 127?

5. What phrases used in verses 1 and 4 help us to understand that this is one complete thought or section?

6. Why do you think verses 5 and 6 are often considered priestly words?

7. What are the promises for the one who fears the Lord?

8. How can being blessed help us to know and love God better? What are the dangers of being blessed?

9. What blessings are you tempted to value more than your relationship with God itself, allowing those things to become an idol?

10. What is the connection between obeying God and joy?

11. What are the eternal blessings that God has promised us? How do those give us joy?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- In thanksgiving for all that God has done for you to usher you into his kingdom. Be as specific as you can.
- For your family, whatever that may look like (parents, spouse, children, grandchildren, etc.).
- For the next generation of your descendants that have yet to be born (so if you only have children, pray that God will bless your grandchildren; if you have grandchildren, pray for your great-grandchildren).

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- What evidence in your life would point to your sustained fear of the Lord?
- What blessing have you seen from fearing the Lord?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you away from this psalm?

Further Study

12. Use a biblical dictionary to study out the concept of fear of the Lord.

4. The word translated “greatly” in verses 1 and 2, is translated “too long” in 120:6 and “no end” in 123:4. It could also be translated “many times.” If we couple that with the repetition of the word “oppressed in verses 1 and 2” what feeling does it convey on the part of the sojourner?

5. Read Hosea 2:15 and Jeremiah 2:2. What does “youth” refer to in this psalm?

6. What are the nature and agricultural references in this psalm?

7. What is the imagery of verse 3 communicating?

8. What verse serves as the turning point of this psalm?

9. What people or trials or circumstances have opposed you? How do Psalms like this help you to think about those situations?

10. What things would you ask God to strike out of the world?

11. How do you remain focused on God’s perspective of the world and not cave into the opposition view and start to act to please them?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- For those that have oppressed or mistreated you or those close to you.
- That God will protect you from the wicked but also help you to love them.
- That God will deal with the wicked and bring their oppression to an end.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- How do you respond when you feel like you are being oppressed or going through trials that result from your faith?
- How does Jesus change the final wish of verse 8 for his followers?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you take away from this psalm?

Further Study

- Use a biblical dictionary to study the use and imagery of Zion throughout the Old Testament, and the psalms in particular.

4. What title would you give to the fourth section (vv. 7-8)?

5. Would you classify this as an individual lament or a corporate lament? What is your reasoning?

6. Carefully look at the names utilized to address God throughout this psalm. What pattern do you detect? When is that pattern broken?

7. How is the term “out of the depths” from verse 1 used in other biblical passages such as Isaiah 51:10; Ezekiel 27:34; Psalm 69:2, 14; cf. Jonah 2:2-6? What is the point of the imagery in this psalm?

8. What word is repeated consistently in verses 5 and 6? What is the psalmist trying to get across with the repetition?

9. This psalm opens with a desperate prayer for God to hear. What do you pray about most urgently?

10. What are things you are tempted to put your hope in?

11. What can be the most challenging thing about waiting for the Lord in faith?

12. How might your faith community behave differently if every member's belief in their need for God's mercy was as great as what is expressed in this psalm?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- for God to be attentive to your cries and for you to be focused in prayer.
- and thank God for his constant mercy and forgiveness. Spend some time thanking God for specific sins that he has delivered you from.
- that he will continue to allow you to grow in putting your hope in him.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- What is going on in your life right now that you most need God's attention concerning?
- What are your feelings when you have to wait on the Lord?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you away from this psalm?

Further Study

- Use a biblical dictionary to study the use and meaning of the divine name, YHWH, in the Old Testament.

Psalm 131 - A Psalm of Humility

The Eleventh Step

If you sing the psalms wisely when you experience testing and persecution, you will be protected by God who watched over the psalmist. The devil will flee, and demons will be driven away.

- Athanasius

Read



- Read Psalm 131 out loud at least three times as a class.
- Read Psalm 131 at least twice very slowly and silently to yourself, allowing time to allow each word and phrase to resonate.

Recite



Take 2-3 minutes to meditate on your own on the phrase, "My heart is not proud, LORD, my eyes are not haughty." Listen for the Spirit to reveal new things about this meaning and application of this phrase.

Reflect



A Thought of Reflection

The sojourner recognizes their limitations and place before God. The wise person becomes aware of their own need for humility and their rightful place in relation to God. He is God and holds a rightful place and we are humans and have our place. The goal is to wean ourselves from the need to be in control or thinking that we know more than we do. Only after we commit to constant and consistent pursuit of true humility can we fully trust God.

Preparation for Reflection

1. What title would you give to the first section (v. 1)?

2. What title would you give to the second section (v. 2)?

3. What title would you give to the third section (v. 3)?

4. What four negative statements begin this psalm (note that “or” in the fourth line of verse 1 is actually “nor,” a negative term). What is the effect of beginning the psalm with these negative statements?

5. What three positive statements are made in verse 2? What is the effect of those statements?

6. How do the words of verse 3 connect with Psalm 130:5-6 to tie these two psalms together?

7. What brings you worth and identity in the world?

8. What are your temptations to trust in your own abilities and not see your limitations realistically?

9. What are the positive outcomes of having appropriate limitations and trusting in God?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- for humility and to embrace your proper place before God.
- that you can accept the things that you will never know or understand and allow God to be in control of those things.
- for you and others in your faith community to put your hope in God alone.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- What is your consistently biggest obstacle to fully trusting God?
- What is the area of your life that you have the most difficulty in trusting God?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you take away from this psalm?

Further Study

- Use a biblical dictionary to study the meaning and use of “heart” in the Scriptures.

Psalm 132 - A Psalm of Commitment

The Twelfth Step

If you have sinned and recite the psalms, you will feel ashamed of yourself and stop sinning.

- Athanasius

Read



- Read Psalm 132 out loud at least three times as a class.
- Read Psalm 132 at least twice very slowly and silently to yourself, allowing time to allow each word and phrase to resonate.

Recite



Take 2-3 minutes to meditate on your own on the phrase, "Let us go to his dwelling place, let us worship at his footstool." Listen for the Spirit to reveal new things about this meaning and application of this phrase.

Reflect



A Thought of Reflection

The first ten verses of this psalm look back to Israel's commitment to God. It depicts the people of God in an idealized fashion back when they unwaveringly sought God's presence and God's presence filled his temple and protected the land. But God calls them away from these idealized memories of the past and calls them to commitment to him now. They need to stop wishing for the past and look to the future. They should base their commitment in the present on God's future and not on what they dream about the past

Preparation for Reflection

1. What title would you give to the first section (vv. 1-10)?
 - What titles would you give if we break this larger section into sections of vv. 1-5; 6-8; 9; 10?
2. What title would you give to the second section (vv. 11-18)?
 - What titles would you give if we break this larger section sections of vv. 11-12; 13-15; 16; 17-18?

3. What is the primary subject of verses 1-5 as it concerns David?

4. What verses in this psalm do verses 17 and 18 echo?

5. What does the imagery of verses 4 and 5 convey about David's passion to fulfill his vow?
What is the point about commitment being made to the sojourner?

6. What promise does God give in verses 13-18 concerning the throne and a ruler for his people?

7. Are there times in the past, whether as a church or individually, that you look back on in idealized fashion and wonder why God doesn't work as mightily now as he did then?

8. What is the impact if we focus our hearts on the age to come as our great hope rather than on the glories of the past?

9. How does our desire for a better reality help us to be committed to and worship God?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- for God to help you to remain committed to him.
- For three specific people that you are close to and are close to God that God will help them remain committed to him.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- What is your consistently biggest obstacle to being fully committed to God?
- Have you ever made any promises to God in your life? Have you kept those promises?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you take away from this psalm?

Further Study

- Use a biblical dictionary to study the significance of Ephrathah and the fields of Jaar.

4. What title would you give to the fourth section (v.3b)?

5. What two images are compared to unity in this psalm?

6. Review the use of the word good (which is the same Hebrew word) used in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2:18. How might the imagery of that passage contribute to the understanding of the theme of Psalm 133?

7. What does this psalm imply will be the result of unity?

8. What are some of the biggest obstacles to unity in community?

9. What can you do to bring about unity in parts of your community where unity is strained or nonexistent?

10. Is there a person or group of people with whom you need to seek and work towards reconciliation?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- for God to help you be unified with others.
- for those that would consider themselves to be your enemies.
- for unity among believers.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- Are there any individuals or groups with whom you are not unified?
- What can you do to bring about greater unity in the body of Christ?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you take away from this psalm?

Further Study

- Use a biblical dictionary to study the concept of anointing oil and the significance of Mt. Hermon.

Psalm 134 - A Psalm of Blessing

The Fourteenth Step

If you have received help from the psalms, you will never be moved from the truth but will put to shame deceivers who prey upon those who have gone astray. Human cleverness will not defend the truth. Rather divine Scripture itself is truth's best defence.

- Athanasius

Read



- Read Psalm 134 out loud at least three times as a class.
- Read Psalm 134 at least twice very slowly and silently to yourself, allowing time to allow each word and phrase to resonate.

Recite



Take 2-3 minutes to meditate on your own on the phrase, "May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who is the Maker of heaven and earth." Listen for the Spirit to reveal new things about this meaning and application of this phrase.

Reflect



A Thought of Reflection

All people are invited to join the blessing of serving God. Or if they have been serving him quietly or in secret, they are invited to join in blessing and serving him openly and wholeheartedly. All of God's people need to join and praise him together. We have come on different paths, but we now praise God together. He is the maker of us all and will bless us all as one people.

Preparation for Reflection

1. What title would you give to the first section (vv. 1-2)?

2. What title would you give to the second section (v. 3)?

3. Use a concordance to translate the first word of this psalm, translated "praise." What are other options to translate that word? How else is that word translated and used in this psalm. How does the psalmist use that term to frame this psalm?

4. As the people acknowledge God's presence in their lives, how does the psalmist show that God reciprocates that action?

5. Where does the psalmist say that the Lord will bless his servants? Why do you think he invokes that as a blessing?

6. Is your instinct to be open to invitations or to refuse them as your default?

7. Is there any place in your life where God might be inviting you to grow or step up in your recognition or worship of him that you have yet to acknowledge or accept?

8. Do you seek the Lord's blessing with all your heart soul, mind, and strength?

Respond



As you move into a time of prayer focus on the things you normally pray for but today take some time to pray:

- for God to call more each day to worship him.
- God to bless those within the community of disciples.
- for God to bless you as you go out into the world and to have wisdom as you reflect his image.

Remainder of the Week



Questions for Reflection

- What can you do to grow in your recognition of God's presence?
- What area of your life do you specifically need to ask God for blessing as you go out into the world on a daily basis?

Application

- What is the application that you take away from this psalm for your faith community?
- What is the personal application that you away from this psalm?

Further Study

- Use a biblical dictionary and concordance to study the Hebrew word *barak* (blessing) and the various ways that it is used in the Old Testament.

Leader's Guide

Week 1

Psalm 120

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-3. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
4. If we shift those terms to the past tense, it shifts the focus of the psalm from a cry of distress in the present to a statement of assurance and trust in what God has already done.
5. Make sure to note that the emphasis throughout this psalm is on verbal assaults and the damage they can do to the sojourner.
6. Sharp arrows is a metaphor for the tongue or negative speech.
7. The most prevalent metaphor in this psalm is speech related.
8. Help the class to start working towards applications of this psalm during their discussion here.
9. Stress that one of the primary functions of the psalms is to teach us to take our emotions to God and walk through them with him in prayer and expression. Learning to identify and process our emotions with God is vital.
10. The psalmist laments settling in Meshek or the tents of Kedar. Meshak is mentioned in Genesis 10:2 and is linked with Tubal and Javan. In Ezekiel 27:13, it is described as a trading partner with Tyre and in 38:2 and 39:1 as part of the kingdom of Magog. Ezekiel 32:26 describes the people of Meshak as uncircumcised and spreading terror in the land of the living.

Kedar was a son of Ishmael (Genesis 25:13) and the descendants, the Kedarites, are described as warriors whose glory is about to end (Isaiah 21:16-17).

These are likely being used as a metaphor for places far away from Jerusalem and the shalom of Israel.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the "Further Study" section.

Week 2

Psalm 121

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-2. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
3. The most repeated word is “guard” which speaks of God’s active protection and involvement in our lives.
4. Psalm 124:8; 134:3.
5. The first merism is in verse 6: “The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.”

The second merism is in verse 8: “The LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”

6-9. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the “Further Study” section.

Week 3

Psalm 122

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

1. Psalm 122 is classified as an individual hymn of thanksgiving. The individual sojourner, who is part of a larger group, rejoices at the prospect of going up to Jerusalem.
- 2-4. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
5. In Psalm 120, the sojourner laments about being far from Jerusalem. In Psalm 121, the sojourner sees the hills of Jerusalem and begins to offer thanksgiving to God. In Psalm 122, the sojourner breaks into full thanksgiving upon arriving in Jerusalem.
6. Verse 1 and 9 begin and end the psalm with a reference to the house of the Lord. Verse 5 refers to the house of David. 7.
7. The references to the house of the Lord in verse 1 and 9 begin and end with the idea of the sojourner being in God's presence which brings security and peace. Verse 5 references the house of David as a symbol of justice and equity which implies that wholeness and justice are to be found in the presence of God for his people.
- 8-11. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the "Further Study" section.

Week 4

Psalm 123

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-2. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
3. The sojourner now lifts his eyes to the God alone rather than just to the mountains of Jerusalem. This seems to indicate his reliance and focus on God alone.
4. In the Jewish worldview, heaven and earth overlapped at the temple, so to mention that God sits enthroned in heaven is not to distinguish from his place in the temple but emphasizes it.
5. The most repeated word in this psalm is “mercy”.
6. Answers will vary.
7. The sojourner has endured ridicule and contempt from the arrogant and proud. Seek to have students be specific about the type of ridicule and contempt that Christians face into today’s context. Be sure to help them relate what kind of ridicule and contempt they might be prone to in their own specific experience.
8. Answers will vary.
- 8-10. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the “Further Study” section.

Week 5

Psalm 124

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-3. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
2. Psalm 123 is a lament psalm that ends with a complaint and no real resolution. Psalm 124 serves as closing words of trust and praise in response to the lament of Psalm 123.
3. The statement characterizes *if* God had not acted for Israel what *then* would have happened disastrously to Israel.
4. Psalm 123 lists the complaints of the sojourner and serves as more of a lament, whereas Psalm 124 cites reason for gratitude and serves as a resolution of the lament.
5. The if/then statements in these verses cite the things that would have happened had God not been on the side of Israel which serves as the stage for much praise and thanksgiving.
6. Answers found in Psalm 124:3-5.
7. Metaphoric language would include:
 - a. Swallowed us alive (v. 3)
 - b. Anger flared against us (v. 3)
 - c. engulfed by a flood (v.4)
 - d. torrent swept over (v. 5)
 - e. waters swept us away (v. 5)
 - f. torn by their teeth (v. 6)
 - g. escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare (v. 7)
 - h. snare has been broken (v. 7)
8. In verse 8 we find the merism, maker of heaven and earth. Answers regarding the effect will vary.
- 9-11. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the "Further Study" section.

Week 6

Psalm 125

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-3. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
4. The psalm builds on the fact that the rocky foundation and mountainous terrain of Jerusalem insulate it from earthquakes and helps protect the city from invaders to picture the spiritual stability and protection that God provides for his people.
5. This psalm builds upon the difference between the wicked and the righteous that is addressed in Psalm 1 and continues throughout the psalms as one of its foundational themes.
6. The good do good and are upright in heart and it is presumed that God will do good to them. The unrighteous are crooked in their ways and do evil and will be banished by God.
- 7-10. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the "Further Study" section.

Week 7

Psalm 126

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-3. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
4. In verse 1, the psalmist recalls God's past actions of restoring fortunes. In verse 4 he calls for that action to be taken once again. This both calls the sojourner to trust in God because of his past reliability but also raises hope and expectation that God will act again.
5. The responses in Psalms 42 and 3 are of a mocking tone. This psalm clearly refers to a different time in history and different response of the nations. This is a hopeful psalm and so focuses on the positive responses of the nations in the past, hoping for that time to be repeated in the future.
6. The psalmist uses agrarian metaphors of sowing and reaping, probably to indicate that they will benefit in the future from the action they are taking now, even though those actions or the present circumstances might seem painful.
7. The psalmist uses the word "joy" (NIV) in verses 2, 3, 5, and 6.
- 8-10. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the "Further Study" section.

Week 8

Psalm 127

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-2. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
3. To build is a necessary action in order to complete a house. This psalm is built around the idea of God establishing and keeping one's inheritance and future intact. God is in control.
4. House refers both to dwelling and dynasty. Thus, the imagery of a dwelling is meant to serve as a metaphor for the dynasty and legacy that the sojourner wishes to create and pass on. There also seems to be a direct allusion in this psalm to house as the Temple of God in Jerusalem.
5. The inheritance of children are the whole point of building the house and legacy. They are the sign of God's blessing and control in one's life.
6. The one who has many children is blessed because children were a guarantee of the future and a sign of God's continued faithfulness as inheritance and the promise of being God's people could be once again passed on to the next generation.
- 7-9. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the "Further Study" section.

Week 9

Psalm 128

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-2. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
3. A wisdom psalm is one that provides instruction in wise and right living.
4. Terms used in both psalms include: blessed, house, children, man (mighty one).
5. "Fear the Lord" in verse 1 and "fears the Lord" in verse 4.
6. The words used in verses 5 and 6 seem to be from the authority and position of a priest being spoken to the sojourner.
7. The answers come in verses 2-3 and are confirmed as hopes in verses 5-6.
- 8-11. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the "Further Study" section.

Week 10

Psalm 129

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-3. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
4. Together these terms seem to indicate an overwhelming feeling of unending oppression that has brought the community to a near breaking point.
5. "Youth" was a term referring to the time of Israel at the Exodus.
6. Nature and agricultural references in this psalm include plowmen, furrows, cut me free from the cords, grass on the roof, a reaper, a gatherer.
7. The agricultural imagery of verse 3 expresses the severity of Israel's oppression as the plowman plows deep and long furrows into the field.
8. Verse 4 is the turning point of the psalm as the focus goes back to God.
- 9-11. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the "Further Study" section.

Week 11

Psalm 130

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-4. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
5. Some elements of this psalm indicate an individual, such as the repeated use of “I” and “my.” But the call for Israel to put their hope in God in verses 7-8 would indicate a corporate focus. Some commentators believe that the first person used in this psalm is a personified voice of Israel rather than a single individual.
6. Three times, the psalmist uses YHWH (LORD) followed each time by the more generic “Lord”. Only in verse 7 is that pattern broken when YHWH is used twice.
7. The sea was used as an image to depict chaos and evil in the Old Testament.
8. The word “wait” is repeated 5 times in those two verses which seems to convey the angst and struggle of waiting.
- 9-12. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the “Further Study” section.

Week 12

Psalm 131

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-3. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
4. They are: not proud; not haughty; do not concern; nor (am I concerned) things. The effect of these words is to set up boundaries between God's realm and ours and cause us to seek humility.
5. They are: I have calmed and quieted myself; I am like a weaned child; like a weaned child I am content. These statements also emphasize the humility and place of the human before God.
6. Both emphasize hope and trusting in the Lord.
- 7-9. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the "Further Study" section.

Week 13

Psalm 132

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-2. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
 7. These verses recount David's vow to God to create a dwelling place for him.
 8. Verses 17 and 18 echo verses 9 and 10.
 9. David expresses hyperbole to make the point that he will keep going until his vow to prepare a place is fulfilled. It calls the sojourner to the same level of commitment to God.
 10. God promises that he will bless his people and that he will rule over them personally.
- 7-9. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the "Further Study" section.

Week 14

Psalm 133

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-4. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
5. Oil and dew.
6. God says that his unified creation is “good” in Genesis, but in 2:18 it is not “good” for man to be alone. This seems to bolster the theme of togetherness and unity.
7. Verse 3 indicates that unity and God’s blessing are connected concepts.
- 8-10. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the “Further Study” section.

Week 15

Psalm 134

Read (10 minutes)

- Have three different readers recite the Psalm to the class
- Then give students an opportunity to quietly read the Psalm on their own several times

Recite (6-8 minutes)

- Have as many students as would like to share their insights from meditation on the specific phrase. Give the class time to comment on the insights of others if they would like.

A Thought of Reflection (2-3 minutes)

- Share the thought of reflection with the class and give any of your own brief insights on the psalm.

Reflection (25 minutes)

- 1-2. Take three or four suggestions briefly discuss each suggestion as a class and why that would be a fitting description of that section.
3. The Hebrew word *barak* in verse 1 is translated “praise” in the NIV but is usually understood to mean “bless.” The same word is used in verse 3. In verse 1, the sojourner blesses God. In verse 3, God blesses the sojourner.
4. Just as the people bless God and he blesses them, as they recognize his presence, he recognizes their presence.
5. God blesses them as they go out. It is God to be in Jerusalem and in God’s place, but they will have to return to their lives and the rest of the world and will need God’s blessing all the more.
- 6-8. These are questions of self-reflection and examination.

Respond (10 minutes)

- Lead the class into a time of corporate prayer

Remainder of the Week (2-4 minutes)

- Remind the class of the personal reflection questions for the week and encourage them to undertake the extra work in the “Further Study” section.

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¹ Nancy deClaisse-Walford, et al., *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 2-3

² Thomas Merton, *Praying the Psalms* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2014), 11.

³ Jason Derouchie, *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2013), 342

⁴ deClaisse-Walford, et al., *NICOT*, 25.

⁵ David C. Mitchell, *The Songs of Ascents: Psalms 120 to 134 in the Worship of Jerusalem's Temples*, (Newton Mearns, Scotland UK: Campbell Publications, 2015), 4-10.

⁶ Mitchell notes that Psalm 121 has a slight variant on that with "a song for the Ascents."

⁷ deClaisse-Walford, et al., *NICOT*, 890.

⁸ Mitchell, *The Songs of the Ascents*, 13.

⁹ *Ibid* 28-29.

¹⁰ *Ibid*. 31.

¹¹ deClaisse-Walford, et al, *NICOT*, 890.

¹² *Ibid*, 887.

¹³ Mitchell, *The Songs of the Ascents*, 32-33.

¹⁴ deClaisse-Walford, et al., *NICOT*, 892.