

Praying with David

Five Psalms of Ascent



Study Notes

February 2021

Lifegroup 

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NEW LIFE BASE CAMP
Rest Breathe Pray Prepare Go

Lifegroup @ Base Camp

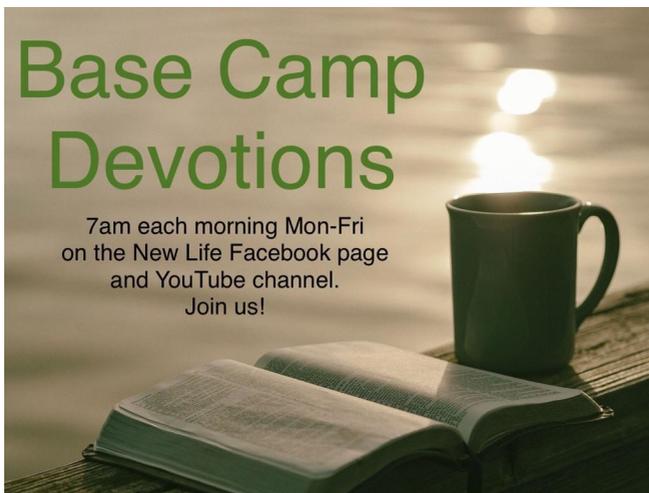
Praying with David

5 Psalms of Ascent

Introduction to the series

This is the second series of Lifegroup notes linking with our daily Base Camp Devotion videos which focus on a short passage of Scripture, a handful of verses at a time. The following five studies are based on five Psalms of Ascent.

For each study, watch the video of the devotion together (the link for the video is given at the top of each study); then discuss in your groups the three questions that follow. Why not finish each study by using the words of the Psalm that you've been studying as the basis for your prayers, as you pray for each other, for New Life Baptist Church, and for the wider church?



Study 1

Psalm 121

<https://youtu.be/rRcerKRdlc0>

Psalm 121 is one of the 15 songs of Ascent. They were sung by groups of pilgrims on their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is situated in the hills so people could see it as they approached; but only as they lifted their eyes. This would have been an emotional experience for them and yet, as blessed as they were by lifting their eyes to that great city, they recognised that the source of their help was not Jerusalem, but the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

So as we look at this great Psalm today, let us also make the effort to lift our eyes higher to the Lord. Here are three questions to consider:

Question 1: Verse 1 recognises that our help comes from the Lord. In what ways has the Lord helped you? Let the answers form prayers of thankfulness.

Question 2: What is the benefit of knowing that God neither slumbers nor sleeps (verse 4)?

Question 3: How does the Lord preserve you (verse 8)?

Kingsley Armstrong

PTO

Study 2

Psalm 126

<https://youtu.be/tL8lq6zZZtc>

This is a Psalm to sing when we are discouraged in the work of the Gospel, the work of God. It was probably sung by Jewish pilgrims as they travelled up to Zion for sacrifice and forgiveness at one of the great Jewish festivals. Zion was the city where God met with his people in the temple. The Psalmist recalls a time before Christ of great revival and joy, perhaps when the exiles returned from captivity. There was joyful witness and worship. (verses 1-3).

In verse 4 the tone changes as the Psalmist faces up to what is now happening as he turns to prayer. (The Negeb was a dry area south of Jerusalem which became fertile when the streams flowed.) In the last verses he reminds us that a walk with God features times of sadness and struggle and times of joy and celebration like the annual growth cycle.

Question 1: What (or who) is our equivalent to Zion in these years after the coming of Christ? Can you recall a time of joyful worship and easy witness? Can we join the psalmist and say “The Lord has done great things for us”?

Question 2: The psalmist has seen God acting in the past and he expects Him to act again. Does your faith grow from past experience to meet new challenges with positive anticipation, or do you meet new challenges with stress and anxiety?

Question 3: Although the psalmist expects God to act, he also knows his own action is essential. Sowing he says is done in tears, it is hard, but essential for a harvest. What sort of activity do you regard as sowing in your Christian walk?

David Morrell

Study 3

Psalm 127

<https://youtu.be/8akm J42JEw>

Psalm 127 firmly puts God's work at the centre, and our efforts on the periphery. He is our inspiration, but if we forget to abide and listen, we can easily find ourselves not walking hand-in-hand with Him, but a degree or two to the right or the left. Let's make some space to take a Spirit-directed, careful look inwards and ask our Lord where He wants us, and what He wants us to do, right now. Remember Psalm 37 v 23 (NLT): *The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in **every detail** of their lives.*

(By the way, if I could have, I would have included a whole chapter from Eugene Petersen's wonderful book on the Psalms of Ascents, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. I cannot recommend it highly enough to you!)

Please read Psalm 127 together from a couple of versions, and then consider these questions...

Question 1: Cast your mind back over past experiences. Can you recall times when God built something apart from your effort? Did He ever clearly re-shape/refocus something you tried to do, or did he show you His plans for

something, even if they seemed like foolishness in human terms? Share these testimonies if you're comfortable to and encourage each other!

Question 2: *'The character of our work is shaped not by accomplishments or possessions but in the birth of relationships: "Children are God's best gift." We invest our energy in people. Among those around us we develop sons and daughters, sisters and brothers even as our Lord did with us...'* (taken from *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, p 110).

When you think of how your time and attention is occupied, do you think there are any good or 'worthy' things/achievements/goals which might be detracting from prioritising relationships in the way Jesus modelled? How do our contexts (our families, work settings, social circles, church, local communities etc.) affect how we spend our energy?

Question 3: Both being prepared (e.g., Matthew 25v1-13, Proverbs 6v6-8) and being responsive (e.g., Luke 12v11-12, Isaiah 30v21) are wise things to do. Yet we can fall into unhealthy extremes, trying to over-anticipate God's will, or waiting for supernatural confirmation before making any decision at all. Can you see tendencies like these at play in your own life, or in aspects of our church community? What can we do to recentre ourselves so that

we are sure of being in sync with the Lord's activity on earth...that He really is the one building the house?

Lord, use me as thou wilt, do with me what thou wilt;

But, O, promote thy cause, let thy kingdom come, let thy blessed interest be advanced in this world!

(taken from *Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, pg. 321)

Zoe Campbell

Study 4

Psalm 131

<https://youtu.be/MyLPtoILv-w>

Psalm 131 is titled A Song of Ascent of David. Some commentators suggest that there are two possible occasions for its composition, which you may like to look up, however whatever the occasion was, this short Psalm is a beautiful denial of pride, arrogance and selfish ambition – an intensely personal song of humility. *“It is one of the shortest psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn. It speaks of a young child, but it contains the experience of a man in Christ.”* (Charles Spurgeon)

Humility is one very important virtue that every Christian must have but we need to possess it in a way that glorifies God.

Question 1: In Verse 1 we see David's declaration of humility, where he renounces pride and arrogance. When we choose to submit to the Lord in all we do and surrender every part of our lives to Him how does this help us? Here are some scriptures you might like to look up: Psalm 18:27; Psalm

25:9; Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1Peter 5:5; Proverbs 11:2; Proverbs 15:33; Proverbs 18:12; Matt 18:4; 1Peter 5:6; James 4:10.

In the second part of verse 1 we see that David has learned to focus on his present situation and not to concern himself with things too profound or beyond his understanding. Is this a helpful attitude for us to adopt, and why? (eg Psalm 139:6 and Romans 11:33-36.)

Question 2: in verse 2, David goes on to declare his full trust in the Lord, likening it to the behaviour of a weaned child. Why is it important to receive salvation as a little child? (eg Mark 10:15; Matt 18:3-4)

Question 3: in verse 3 we see David exhort and encourage the nation to forever embrace his own personal realisation, the culmination of his ruminations, that there is no hope but in God and that He shall never fail us. How does this realisation impact on our behaviour, on our relationships with others and on our attitudes towards difficult questions and situations that we undoubtedly find ourselves facing in this life? (eg Hebrews 10:23; Hebrews 10:36; Isaiah 40:31; Jeremiah 29:11; Philippians 1:6; Psalm 33:18; etc....)

Study 5

Psalm 133

<https://youtu.be/5cC4qHQ-4I8>

Pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem would expect to meet worshippers from other areas, who might have different cultural norms or expectations. Travelers from the north might even fear being shunned by the more “elite” city-dwellers of Jerusalem (e.g., Nathanael’s comment in John 1:46 “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”). So this psalm, another of the “Songs of Ascent” sung by people going up to the temple to worship, may perhaps have served as a reminder to worshippers to put their differences behind them when they come into God’s house, as it celebrates the joy and blessing of unity amongst God’s people.

It is just as relevant to us today as part of a global church which spans a whole variety of cultures and denominations. We will always have differences of opinion about how things should be done or how we interpret Scripture, but we are all part of one body, the Body of Christ. It is interesting that the New Living Translation uses the word “harmony” rather than “unity”, which gives an image, not of voices all singing the same note in unison, but of different parts joining together to make a beautiful symphony of praise to God! It is OK to enjoy and celebrate our differences, but not OK if we allow our differences to divide us! Disunity may be due to disagreements or just a failure to connect with people who are different from us.

In answering the following questions, you may find it helpful also to refer to Ephesians 4: 1-16, 1 Cor 12:12-14 and John 17: 20-23.

Question 1: What qualities of Christian character will help us build unity or find harmony with those with whom we disagree?

Question 2: Where do you see Christian unity working well and what can we learn from these examples?

Question 3: Why is unity in the Church so important? Think about this in the context of our own church, our local area and worldwide.

Rachel Parrott

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