

Psalms of Ascents Series: “Songs for the Road” Meeting Guide

Date: July 21st and 22nd

Pray

Apart from God, we can do nothing. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion. Throughout your time together, continue asking God for help.

Discuss

Read Scripture

Read Psalm 126 and 127 together. (Recommend choosing 1 of these Psalms for your CG discussion)

Bible Study

The bulk of your time will be spent discussing God’s Word together.

Remember:

- Walk through the Bible study together using the HEAR method and talk about what stuck out most to you in the passage.
- Make sure you move discussion to the application section of your study.
- Affections, beliefs, and practices: Make sure to apply the passage to all of your life.

Pray

- Take time to pray for one another and ask for His grace to apply His Word to our daily lives as pilgrims traveling to our true home.

Psalm 126 (ESV)

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

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter,

and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then they said among the nations,

“The LORD has done great things for them.”

³ The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O LORD,

like streams in the Negeb!

⁵ Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!

*⁶ He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.*

Open:

- What brings you joy on a consistent basis and why?

Study:

Background Information: It is believed that this psalm coincides with the period of Israel's history after a period of exile. As the psalm opens, the Jewish people return to their homeland, against all odds. But they are faced with the monumental task of rebuilding Jerusalem. This period of Israel's history is recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

- 1) In verses 1-3, according to the psalmist, who did the work of bringing Israel back from exile? How does the psalmist describe the feelings and reaction of the people? Why do you think they were so stunned by this experience? What were the comments by the nations around Israel?
- 2) What was it like for you when the Lord opened your heart and eyes to the revelation that Jesus had died for your sins and had delivered you from the bondage of sin and death? How did you respond when you first realized that you were no longer destined for the wrath of God, but now a child of His eternal inheritance? What was your song of grateful praise to God? What was or has been the reaction of those who knew you?
- 3) The second half of the psalm looks to the future. What things does the psalmist expect the future to bring? Are they all good things? How would you describe the tone of this section (optimistic or pessimistic)? Why?
- 4) According to the psalmist, what role will God play in Israel's future prosperity? What is the role, or the contribution, of the people of God?
- 5) In verses 5 & 6 the psalmist uses farming imagery (see *sow and reaping*). What is he attempting to show us through this imagery? What would happen if the farmer didn't sow the seed? What are the connections, if any, between obedience to God and blessing from God?
- 6) In this psalm, what is the relationship between joy and sorrow? Take time mention each occurrence of the word *joy* in this psalm. In each case, what has brought about joy? What part does God play in each case?

Apply:

The Negev, mentioned in verse 4, was a network of shallow ditches that were dry for most of the year. Sudden rains would turn them into gushing streams and bring a burst of color as flowers sprang up.

- 7) What does this image convey about what sometimes happens in our spiritual lives? Have you had a sudden experience of God's blessing in the middle of a dry time in your life? If so, what happened?

- 8) In the opening verses of the psalm, the people were amazed at what God had done for them because it had come so suddenly after a very long period of waiting. Perhaps their reaction of inexpressible joy came after they had lost hope that God would act and move in their lives. What things can cause you to lose hope in God or to lower your expectations of what God can or will do?
- 9) How can recalling what God has done in the past for you (and others) give you a greater sense of joy and confidence as you face the future? Are there examples where you experienced God's provision or answers to prayer in a special way? If so, how are those times an encouragement to you as you face new challenges? Are there ways that we can help care for you as you "wait" or *sow in tears*?

PRAY:

- Ask God for help to remember our reasons for joy beyond any of our circumstances.
- Ask God for power to look back on His deliverance of you through the gospel daily.
- Take time to give thanks to God for never changing in His power, wisdom, and love.

Psalm 127 (ESV)

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

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

²*It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.*

³*Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.*

⁴*Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth.*

⁵*Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.*

Open:

- What projects do you like to do at home and why? What does the completion of the project illicit in you and why?

Study:

Background Information: Scholars have varied opinions on the original setting for this Psalm. Eugene Peterson imagines a group of pilgrims arriving at Jerusalem and boasting about how much work they went through to arrive at the Temple. Perhaps they were looking for bragging rights: "I got here faster!" "I brought more friends with me!" or "I came the farthest!" Then, in the midst of this prideful competition, somebody would start signing this psalm with "Unless the Lord builds the house..."

Other scholars and commentators consider this a perfect psalm for singing and praying at the birth of a child or the dedication of a new building. The prayer in this case would be not only for guidance and building but also for continued protection and blessing.

- 1) Have you ever felt like all the hard work you do in this life is in vain? Explain.
- 2) Summarize verses 1-2 in your own words. What is the key idea of these two verses? What is Solomon's view of work? What truth does the end of verse 2 reveal for us?
- 3) What motivates you to work? Is it about accumulating wealth, possessions, knowledge, or stature/power?

Consider the sin of the Tower of Babel as an example of working apart from the Lord. The attitude of the builders in Genesis 11:1-9 did not need God's approval or guidance, but were fixated on creating a name for themselves. The result was the Lord causing them to be cast apart in confusion and turmoil.

- 4) One response to the sin of Babel has been to cease working hard altogether; adopting an attitude that says, "If God is taking care of it, why should I even bother working?" Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:11-13. What kind of work does Paul say we should be engaged in? Why is this a correct response for those who have believed the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- 5) The psalmist moves on from work and blessing to consider children and the family (see verses 3-5). Children are not born by human effort, but by the miracle of growth and development in the womb. What is the key idea of verses 3-5? In what ways is dependency on God shown here? How would you describe how children are like arrows and how does that relate to verse 5?

Apply:

- 6) What areas of your life and worship do you try to do in your own strength and power? How is it working out for you? What is the fruit?
- 7) Read John 15:1-5 and Philippians 4:13 together. If Christ lives in you and through you, how can you experience a better life? In what practical ways can you allow His strength and power to guide and empower you to work (vocationally, serving others, or parenting children)? How can we pray for you?

PRAY:

- Ask God for clarity to work in ways that come alongside of Him rather than attempting to do your own thing (even good things).
- If you are a parent ask God for help to see that your labor and work on their behalf is not in vain.
- Ask God to help you work in ways that are obedient to Him and reliant upon His grace.