

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

Date: June 16th & 17th

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 121 and 122 together.

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 to live as pilgrims rather than settlers in this world.

Psalm 121 (ESV) *The LORD is Our Keeper (God’s Providence).*

¹*I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?*

²*My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*

³*He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.*

⁴*Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*

⁵*The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand.*

⁶*The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.*

⁷*The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.*

⁸*The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”*

Open:

- Has anyone gone on a trip or vacation where there are mountains? If so, can you describe for us what it was like the first time you saw the mountains? Has anyone been on a long, difficult, or unsafe journey before? If so, what was it like?

Study:

- 1) Take time to examine the poetry and craftsmanship of this psalm. This psalm follows a popular psalm-writing pattern – that is, “A, what’s more, B.” For example, in verse

3: “He will not let you stumble and fall; (what’s more), the one who watches over you will not sleep.” Take some time to point out or write down the other examples you find following this patten. What affect does this pattern have on the “reader/singer” of this song of ascent?

- 2) The song opens with a question, “*where does my help come from?*” Consider how an unbeliever might answer that question when they encounter difficult or hard times? Where do you look for guidance and protection when the pilgrimage of your life is hard and difficult?
- 3) Notice in verses 3-8, the psalmist moves from “me” to “you” or “your” pronouns. In the Hebrew, “you” or “your” indicates and inward meditation or dialogue. Rather than addressing some group of pilgrims, the psalmist is actually talking to his own soul. What is it that is causing the psalmist to “talking to themselves” like this? Is this something that you do as well? If so, when?
- 4) How does it make you feel to know that God, who watches over you, never sleeps? What if God took naps – would you feel safe in dangerous situations? Why or why not?
- 5) Read through verses 5-8 again and replace the sun and moon with current or past obstacles and dangers in your own life, whether they be spiritual or physical. Take time to share them with the group. What kinds of things are you in need of protection from today?

God’s Providence: This psalm highlights what is known as God’s “providence,” that is, that the God who created the universe is involved in our everyday lives to keep us and watch over us— not by preventing us from experiencing trouble, but by equipping us with what we need to withstand it and grow through it. As Christians, we can know that involvement even more than those who originally sung these songs of ascent more intimately through Jesus Christ.

- 6) In verse 7 the psalmist writes, “The LORD will keep you from all evil...”. Eugene Peterson wrote, “The Promise of the psalm—and both Hebrews and Christians have always read it this way—is not that we shall never stub our toes but that no injury, no illness, no accident, no distress will have evil power over us, that is, will be able to separate us from God’s purposes in us.” Where Scripture would never suggest that our faith exempts us from difficulties, it always promises God keeping us from the ultimate evil in them. How is this both hard and comforting at the same time?

Apply:

- 7) How does your relationship with Jesus affect the way you read and sing this psalm? Why? (Don’t assume the gospel, as Christians are assured that God’s interest in keeping us never waxes or wanes in response to our spiritual temperature.)

- 8) Where are you today on your pilgrimage? Are you currently crying out for protection, resting in safety, or maybe catching a glimpse of Jerusalem?
- 9) What are the overall implications of this psalm when it comes to your assurance of God keeping you? Where might you be tempted to doubt His keeping power for you (or others)?
- 10) Consider the following verses on God's providence. How do these texts help you further understand God's provision for your life?

- Genesis 45:5-8
- 1 Samuel 2:6-9
- Psalm 91:4
- Matthew 6:28
- Matthew 10:29-31
- Luke 21:32-36
- Acts 17:26-28

PRAY:

- Ask God for help to believe that regardless of what the circumstances surrounding our pilgrimage may be, He is keeping us.
- Ask His help to keep us faithful as He keeps us.

Psalm 122 (ESV) *Let Us Go to the House of the LORD*

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

¹*I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'*

²*Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!*

³*Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together,*

⁴*to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD.*

⁵*There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David.*

⁶*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! 'May they be secure who love you!*

⁷*Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!'*

⁸*For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, 'Peace be within you!'*

⁹*For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good."*

Background: In Psalm 120 the pilgrims are in a foreign land, beginning to turn their faces toward God's city. In Psalm 121, the city is in sight and they are very near to the end of their journey. In Psalm 122, the travelers are filled with joy as they step foot in the holy city (Jerusalem). The title to this song of ascent, tells us that it was written by David. Here, David paints a picture of corporate worship reminding us that there is something to look forward to when God's people come together to worship Him. It also assures us that praising God together will transform our community.

Open:

- Why do Sunday mornings seem to be the most hectic morning of the week?

Study:

- 1) While church membership is declining in America, surprisingly attending church is still one of the most popular weekend activities in our country. What do you think are some of the reasons people decide to go to worship with a church? Why do you go (or not go)?
- 2) What aspects of corporate worship does David focus on in this psalm? What stands out to you and why?
- 3) In the first two verses of this psalm, David expresses delight at the thoughts of going to the Temple to worship God. What do you think he was so excited about?
- 4) How would you describe the attitude of the worshiper in Psalm 122? Why have you reached that conclusion?
- 5) When you come to church on Sunday mornings, what distracts you from entering into worship with the same attitude of the psalmist? What can you do to prepare your heart for worship before you come?

Considering verse 3, Eugene Peterson notes:

“The King James Version translates this sentence, ‘Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together.’ Earlier, Coverdale had translated the latter phrase as ‘that is at unity with itself.’ The city itself was a kind of architectural metaphor for what worship is: All the pieces of masonry fit compactly, all the building stones fit harmoniously. There were no loose stones, no leftover pieces, no awkward gaps in the walls or towers. It was well built, compactly built, skillfully built, ‘at unity with itself.’”

- 6) How do you think this metaphor relates to the experience of corporate worship?
- 7) Verse 4 describes the anticipation of joining the entire nation to worship God together. What are the benefits of a community having a common time and place of worship? (especially in light of our experience with COVID-19)

The second half of the psalm, beginning at verse 6, is a call for peace in the city and among the people of Jerusalem. Eugene Peterson writes:

“*Shalom*, peace, is one of the richest words in the Bible...It gathers all aspects of wholeness that result from God’s will being completed in us. It is the work of God that when complete, releases streams of living water in us and pulsates with eternal life.”

- 8) Why is the desire for this kind of peace a natural outcome of true worship?

Apply:

- 9) Where David’s heart for worship led him to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, what are specific prayers that you can pray for the peace of our worshiping community at SGC? (Consider what common things may distract us from experiencing peace together.)
- 10) David closes this song by reminding us that worship of God together must spill out into our everyday life. What are some things that God is calling you to do to carry Sunday’s experience of worship into the rest of the week? How can others help you in this?

PRAY:

- Take time to pray expressing how thankful you are for your church.
- Ask Him for help to faithfully prepare for Sunday corporate worship.