

## Week 6- Psalm 121: Praying our Journey

### **1: CONTEXT**

**A quick look back:** Spend a few minutes reviewing the big picture of Psalms from Week One. What kind of literature is the book of Psalms? Who is one of the primary authors? What is the book's main purpose? Where are we in the large story of Scripture? Share some of the main themes or learnings from the past weeks (lament, trust, sin, frustration).

**Today's Passage:** This is one of the psalms of ascent, the psalms that were sung as pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem for the festivals. Just as soldiers sing to keep in cadence, or you may have a sing-a-long on a road trip, the psalms of ascent were a way to keep people going and to keep them focused on the purpose of the journey. As you read Psalm 121, think of reading or singing it while traveling.

### **2: CONTENT**

**Read Psalm 121 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, C, or D) to help your group engage with this passage** (side note: this is a short enough psalm that it may be a good week to try *Lectio Divina* if you are interested)

**Option A. Notice/Wonder:** Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text?

What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group and share your observations, writing them on a board or a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

**Option B. Creative Engagement:** Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together and spend time sharing with each other what you drew and why.

**Option C. Lectio Divina:** Scripture is read four times, pausing after each reading:

1: HEAR the passage.

2: MEDITATE on the passage in the silence that follows.

3: IDENTIFY a word or phrase that stands out to you from the reading (leader may ask group to speak this out loud after the 3rd reading, or to share it as a group after the 4th reading)

4: REST in the presence of God.

Take time to share your reflections with each other as a group.

**Option D. Guided Bible Study Questions:**

1. Share a word or image that particularly stands out to you in this psalm.
2. The opening lines of this psalm declare that God is our helper. There is only one action described of the one who is seeking this help (verse 1). What is it? Discuss that action and what it teaches us about seeking the God of help.
3. What phrase does the psalmist use to describe God in verse 2? Why might this particular characteristic of God be important to the one who is seeking His help?

4. What are all the ways that the psalmist describes God's help? What does his help look like? (for example, vs 2: God won't let your foot slip, vs 4: God doesn't slumber or sleep, etc..)
5. The phrase "watch over" is repeated five times in this short psalm. Why might this phrase have been important given the context of this psalm? How is "watch over" perhaps different from other phrases the writer could have chosen?
6. This week is called "Praying our Journey." How do verses 7-8 help us understand God's presence in the journey of life?

### **3: APPLICATION**

***No matter what method you used for content, spend some time talking about what this passage might mean to us now. Here are some questions to help guide this discussion. Feel free to use several or to just focus on one or two.***

- The psalmist opens this song by lifting his eyes. What he finds is a God of help, of love, of guidance. One who watches over him. It sounds simple, but sometimes just the lifting of our eyes is really challenging.
  - Are there things in your life or in your history of faith that make it hard to lift your eyes towards God?
  - Do you find yourself "lifting" your eyes to other people/things/places more frequently when you need help? What/who are they?
- This passage tells us that God lives out His "help" in our lives in many ways. He doesn't let our foot slip (vs 3), doesn't slumber or sleep (vs 4), is shade at our right hand (vs 5), keeps us from all harm (vs 7), and watches over the coming and going of our life (vs 8). Which of these feel most meaningful to you? Are any hard to understand or to believe?
- We know that God keeping us from all harm doesn't mean that we don't experience deep hardship and pain and grief. If keeping us from harm doesn't mean shielding us from all of that, what might it mean?
- A friend's father was dying and the pastor read this psalm. For the first time, the last phrase of the psalm caught their attention: "the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." God's "watching over" of this friend and his father doesn't end—ever. God doesn't watch over us *until* we die. God watches over us *through* our death and into the next life. How does that truth help you today?

### **4: PRAYER**

***Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below***

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your "wonderings" from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer:

*O God who watches over us,*

*Thank you for your vigilance; for all the times you keep us from harm, keep us from slipping, keep our lives. Our help comes from you.*

*Continue to watch over us as we live and learn and love this day.*

*Bless our coming and our going, throughout the whole journey of our lives, both now and forevermore. Amen.*