

FAITH TAKES THE LONG VIEW

Studies from the Psalms: Psalm 121

THEME: “I don’t like where I am today, but I can’t wait to get where I’m headed” fits many a life-situation! It is a way to summarize this pilgrim song (a “Song of Ascents” that pilgrims used to sing on their way to Jerusalem) that has been preserved for us in Israel’s ancient songbook. It just might be a way of summarizing something you are facing right now.

ICE BREAKER

1. Think for a few minutes about the “I don’t like where I am today, but I can’t wait to get where I’m headed” motif. Can you expand the list of situations it might fit beyond the few that Rubel named in introducing this psalm in his sermon based on it?
2. Is there a situation in your spiritual history where you had to be very intentional to remind yourself or someone else about taking the long view of things? Looking well beyond the troublesome moment?
3. What do you think about the general spirit of our time? Do most people take the long view? Or have we become an instant-gratification culture?
4. Have someone lead the group in prayer as you begin to focus on reading and thinking through Psalm 121.

THINK

1. Many scholars think Psalm 121 may have been sung *antiphonally* as pilgrims traveled toward Jerusalem. It certainly isn’t hard to imagine a group of people singing the lines of the odd-numbered verses and then listening for the replies of the even-numbered verses. Begin your study by having the women read the odd-numbered verses, with the men reading the even-numbered lines.
2. Each of the fifteen psalms from 120 through 134 is (literally from Hebrew) a “Song of Going-Up.” They are simple, brief, and easily memorized.
3. Why was Jerusalem regarded as the “Hill of the Lord”? Is this a geographical reference? A spiritual affirmation?
4. Comment on this statement from Donald Williams about Psalm 121: “When we are anchored in eternity, we can deal with time. When we are united to the one who moves all things, we ourselves cannot be moved.”

EXAMINE

Use [Psalm 121](#) to address the following questions:

1. Why do you think so many of us play our radios, CDs, podcasts, or other music as we travel?
2. What effect do you think singing this song would have on a group of pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem?

3. What is the most important element you find in this poem?
4. Why do you think the metaphor of life as a *journey* occurs so frequently in the Bible?
5. What does the image of lifting up one's eyes to the hills mean in this poem? What does this suggest about the source of security for human beings?
6. The tendency of human beings is to try to fix our own problems and provide our own means to security? Why? How does this traveling song challenge that phenomenon?
7. Before leaving the "Song of Ascents" section, scan the other fifteen psalms in this section. Read one or two aloud to see how similar they are in form and content.

Read [Philippians 1:12-30](#) as background for the following questions:

1. Paul and other New Testament writers also thought a great deal about our security in the care of God. What is his "negative" counsel here? What is "positive"?
2. Suppose God's protection and care for his people meant we could never be inconvenienced, persecuted, or caused to suffer for his sake. *Would that be a good or a bad thing?* Explain your answer.
3. Comment on the meaning of Matthew 10:28 in relation to this text.
4. Now move to Matthew 10:29-31. How do these verses explain and reinforce what you read from v.28?
5. Are you confident of God's presence and care in your life? Explain.
6. Why is this understanding of God's presence with his people so critical in our present situation?

THIS WEEK: In the week ahead, you will have your own personal challenges to face in terms of keeping your focus on the long-term. But you likely know others whose struggle is even more acute than your own right now – someone who is bereaved, seriously ill, working through a tough family situation. Reach out. As a fellow-pilgrim, try to encourage him or her to continue trusting in the God who helps his people through their dark times.