

*Four Prayers for the Journey – Week Three*

## ***A Prayer for the Next Season of Your Life***

***What to do when anxieties multiply – Psalm 121:1-8***

**Main idea:** This Psalm describes how pilgrims might feel as they begin their annual journey to Jerusalem. But the writer then applies this journey to any new season of our life that causes anxiety. When we face anxiety about the next season of our lives, we're invited to trust in God moment-by-moment and rely on his promises.

1. ***THE REALITY OF ANXIETY – When we face a new season of life, it's easy for anxieties to multiply. Psalm 121:1a***

- A. Historical context – The people of God were called to visit Jerusalem at least three times per year.
  - 1. They were commanded to journey for the various feasts: these were worship journeys.
  - 2. God calls us into new seasons of life, hopefully a worship journey. Rom. 12:1-2
- B. The natural response – In new seasons, it's easy to construct bad hypothetical scenarios. 121:1a
  - 1. Journeys are fraught with dangers. "I lift my eyes to the hills..." The dangerous place!
  - 2. The tense suggests this is happening over and over again, catastrophic thinking.

2. ***1<sup>ST</sup> DEFENSE – Engage in the discipline of self-soothing. Psalm 121:1b-2***

- A. Self-soothing is the discipline of speaking truth to ourselves in a kind way.
- B. First, we honestly confront the issue that causes anxiety, generally with a question. 121:1b
- C. Second, we express an accurate answer based on what we know about God (helper/creator). 121:2
  - 1. The psalmist self soothes based on what he knows of God's grace, as helper.
  - 2. The psalmist self soothes based on what he knows of God's power, as creator.

3. ***2<sup>ND</sup> DEFENSE – Depend on God moment-by-moment. Psalm 121:3-6***

- A. *1st prayer* – Pray that we will remain faithful in the anxiety. 121:3
  - 1. Poetically: This is a picture of falling in the road, but it is also an emblem for life.
  - 2. Point: When we're anxious, it's easy to trust in things other than God.
- B. *2nd prayer* – Pray that God will remain actively engaged, and then trust him. 121:4-6
  - 1. Trust him because of his good character: He is our watchman. 121:5
  - 2. Trust him for his infinite power: He is our protector. 121:6
  - 3. Therefore, persevere. "Not sleeping" is a figure for persevering in prayer. 121:4
- C. Question – What makes the difference between trusting w/ peace and trusting w/ more anxiety?

4. ***3<sup>RD</sup> DEFENSE – Rest in God's promises. Psalm 121:7-8***

- A. First promise – God will keep us from all evil. 121:7a

- B. Second promise – God will watch over our soul. 121:7b
- C. Third promise – God will keep us close to himself. 121:8a
- D. Fourth promise – God will keep us eternally secure. 121:8

## ***Psalm 121 – A Prayer for the Next Season of Your Life***

Confidence for the Journey

**Main Idea:** The journey to Jerusalem for the annual festival is like a symbol for the larger dangers and problems we face on life's journey.

### **1. The reality of anxiety: A dangerous journey begins. 121:1-2 Life is tough and anxieties multiply (In times of danger and when anxieties multiply God is our powerful helper.)**

- A. Song of ascents: The journey is a journey of worship. God had commanded his people to appear before him in the temple. Today we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. And God commands us to journey along the Christian life with purpose and in community. Show this from the Old Testament law.
- B. Lift up my eyes: The journey is dangerous. And the Psalmist lifts his eyes to the hills concerned for safety. The tense of the verb is imperfect, meaning he's continually doing this with fear and apprehension as if someone might rush out of the hills at any minute.
  - 1. There were several routes you could take to get up to Jerusalem.
  - 2. One of the routes was the path of blood. People were robbed and beaten.
  - 3. There were stories of great disaster.
  - 4. He looks up to the hills with fear and anxiety.
  - 5. The hills are places where people hide out. They are steep and they are slippery.
- C. The Psalmist asks his soul a question? Where does my help come from? Where will my future help come from? Will there be future grace for me?
  - 1. His immediate answer is that his help comes from the Lord. This word help is a word that's often used of God, as the one who can provide divine protection. He provides supernatural protection. This is not simple help for inconsequential things. This is massive divine help for things that otherwise would never happen.
  - 2. Then he mediates in his power. God who made heaven and earth (=everything) can provide aid for he and his family. Since God created the entire universe, he created the space into which you're going to go on your journey. The God who created the universe has unlimited power.
- D. So here's the deal. Just like the OT pilgrim faced a worship journey, all of our lives constitute a worship journey.
  - 1. We ought to be sensing a life mission a live vision that we're stretching toward.
  - 2. That life vision ought to be about advancing the kingdom of God somehow in our work and at home.
  - 3. That life vision ought to include the use of our spiritual gifts.
  - 4. That journey might involve risk discomfort and danger.

2. **Our first defense against anxiety: On the journey God invites us to depend on him moment by moment. 121:3-8 (In time of danger we must aggressively cast our hope onto God.)**

A. First responsibility: Persistently pray for God's protecting power. 121:3-4

1. The form of these verses are Hebrew jussives. These are prayers.
2. The prayer for singleness of purpose. "May he not let your foot be moved." Foot is a synecdoche for the whole body. It's not just your physical walk; it's your whole purpose as a Christian.
3. The prayer for God's active engagement in your life. "May he who keeps you not slumber." It's a request for active engagement. Persistence in prayer: remember the Lucan parable about persistence. Knocking on the door at night.

B. Second responsibility: Actively trust in his sovereign power. 121:5-6

1. The Psalmist give us two figures of speech and a result.
2. God is our keeper. The word keeper means watchman. God is our watchman. We know that his sovereign grace oversees everything. Now at this point we need to distinguish between two attributes of God: his active protection and his general providence. God does both. Sometimes we don't distinguish these but I think we should.
3. God is the shade at our right hand. God's right hand is powerful. God's right hand shades us from the burning rays of the sun. This is the figure of a loving parent shading his children with his power.
4. The promise is two-fold: sun not strike by day and the moon by night. But what does this mean? The sun and moon are a merism referring to everything that happens under the sky. God sees what happens during the day. God sees what happens during the night. But there is something else going on here. Do you see that word strike? It means to hit. Now I suppose it's possible to say that rays of sun hit us, but the Psalmist is using this figure to refer to the people under the sun who could inflict damage. The moon is a figure of speech for crazy people. The sun is a figure of speech for evil people. He's saying that God's protection extends to all of life and to every kind of person...evil people who accost by day and crazy people who accost by night. God is totally able to provide complete protection.

C. Putting this together. So when we face this journey that we call life, what's going to happen? We're going to experience anxieties about all sorts of things. We're going to be in relationships with difficult people. We're going to face dangers. We're going to face uncertainties. What do we do? We actively trust in the sovereign power of God. That means an aggressive life of prayer. But we don't stop there. I know people who pray, but they don't then take the time to trust in the active goodness of God as their Father. Jack Frost quote from Slavery to Sonship.

3. **Our second defense against anxiety: All along the journey we trust in the amazing promises of God. 121:7-8**

A. Now as I read the remaining verses, I want you to bear in mind the number of times God has used the word keep, both here and in the other sections of this Psalm. We have to ask how we are to understand these verses. The Hebrew form could be a prayer or a promise. It could be both. I think they are promises here because he switches tenses from the present to the

future. Notice too that the keeping ministry of God is a watching ministry. In other words, we know that if painful things happen, they are happening under the watchful care of God's sovereignty and they fit into his plan.

B. First promise: God keeps us from all evil. 121:7

1. Notice that he says all evil...not some...not most...but all. This is a fantastic promise.
2. But that raises a huge question. Evil things sometimes happen to good people. Children get neuroblastomas. Parents get cancer. Good friends suffer auto accidents. If this promise is true then how do we interpret this promise.
3. The answer is that God's watchful care sees every event that takes place and we know that if God allows a measure of pain and suffering to take place, this pain has passed through the grid of his sovereignty.
4. Let me show you one obvious example: death is a great evil humanly speaking. And all of us die. Is our death filtered through the grid of God's sovereignty? Of course it is!
5. Many times God will supernaturally protect us from devastating events. I can remember one time we were on LBJ freeway in Dallas with all four kids. The traffic came to a total standstill. In my rearview mirror a semi is barreling toward us. He can't stop. I brace for impact and pray. At the last moment, he swerves with inches to spare. But sometimes God allows devastating events. What do we know for sure? God has filtered everything through the grid of his sovereignty and wisdom and love.

C. Second promise: God keeps our life. 121:8a

1. God watches over our lives. The Hebrew word for life here is nephesh and it means soul. So this is not just the idea of keeping your alive, but watching over your whole person. The totality of your being and the health of your inner life.
2. Again, that raises huge questions. What if something hard happens to us? In what sense is God watching over our lives? I can tell you as a pastoral counselor that people rarely learn from their successes. They rarely learn from their victories. Successes and victories can provide some learning, but mostly they reinforce existing attitudes. If you're already narcissistic, you're going to remain that way. If you're already somewhat selfish (and who isn't) you're going to remain that way. But when hard things happen, we're driven to the end of ourselves. When hard things happen we do some painful soul searching.
3. The promise is that God is always watching over our soul. His one main objective is not that simply that we would be happy but that we be holy...so that we develop a different kind of happiness.

D. Third promise: God keeps us in relationship. 121:8b

1. And the third promise is that the keeping helping watching ministry of God keeps us in a daily loving fellowship with him.
2. Notice the next figure of speech: your going out and your coming in. When do you go out? As you begin your day. When do you go in? When you complete your day. This figure of speech addresses the totality of our day.
3. God has the power to keep us existentially close to him moment by moment each and every day. This is something that we need. Because we might ask, "Might there be something that could crush us and make God seem far away?" God has the ability to keep us near him. He loves us unconditionally.

- E. Fourth promise: God keeps us in relationship forever. In this fourth promise, it's clear that we have the perspective that God loves us on into eternity. If there was something we could do to invalidate God's love, God would love us conditionally. If there was something we could do to make him reject us, then we might struggle with insecurity, but the Psalmist promises that he'll keep us forever.

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For this message do the following:

- Have chicken stock roasting in the kitchen.
- Have bread makers in the auditorium making bread for communion.

## ***Psalm 122 – A Prayer for Corporate Worship***

**Intro:** This

### **1. Preparing for corporate worship: There should be joy at the prospect of corporate worship. 122:1-2**

A. Some historical background.

1. This is a Psalm of David so this tells us something about David and his interest in corporate worship. He's a man after God's own heart. He's a man whose life has been transformed through trials and difficulties.
2. The house of the Lord that he's speaking about here is the tabernacle, the portable worship tent that was also called the tent of meeting or the sanctuary. It was the place where God dwelled.
3. David is writing this Psalm as if he's a common ordinary guy in Israel, a farmer, who is about to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
4. David would have composed this when the tabernacle had been moved to Jerusalem and had been placed on the threshing mount of Arjunah but before the temple of Solomon was built. So this would make this song a great one to sing as people came to Jerusalem in the years after.

B. The occasion. The harvest is done. The grain is stored. The work is over. Someone yells across the fence. "Let's go up to the house of the Lord together...our family and your family. Let's be pilgrims together. Road trip!" It might be a two to three day journey. But they're all fired up about the trip.

C. People typically went three times per year: Passover, 1<sup>st</sup> fruits, and booths.

D. When he says house of the Lord, they're anticipating something.

1. They're anticipating getting into the actual presence of God. It would be nice if we knew exactly how the glory cloud manifested itself during the time of David, but we know how it did later during the time of Solomon. The cloud came into the temple when the temple was dedicated. You could see the presence of God. There was some mystery about it. Swirling curling vaporous trails lifting up to the heavens. Those vaporous trails were

mixing and mingling with the daily sacrifices. It was wonderful and mysterious. Moreover, they knew that some really cool things were stored in the Ark of the Covenant: the tablets of the ten commandments, the golden jar of manna, and Aaron's walking stick that miraculously budded with almond blossoms. These three things recall God's work in space time history. Moreover, these three things depicted things about the character of God as a triune God. So the people anticipate coming in the miraculous powerful presence of God.

2. Moreover, they're anticipating a particular kind of worship. They're anticipating participative worship. Let me explain.
    - The kind of worship that most churches encounter is spectator worship. There is a band on a stage. There is a pulpit up front. And there are chairs down below. You come, you sit and you listen. Now look, that's not all bad, like some critics of the church would make us think. When you look back on the history of the church, there is a spectator element to corporate worship. Johann Sebastian Bach made use of this. George Friedrich Handel made use of this. This isn't all bad. The spectator nature of corporate worship has been the occasion of some of the greatest art and artists the world has ever known, and most critics of the church, sadly, lack the intellectual horsepower to understand or appreciate this. It's not all bad.
    - But participative worship is much better. The people coming to Jerusalem would experience this. They'd come and bring a lamb or a bull or a bird, and the animal would be sacrificed on the altar. It was multisensory. That's why we have breadmakers in the auditorium today making bread. That's why we have chicken stock cooking in the kitchen. We wanted you to get a feel for the multisensory worship that took place in the tabernacle.
    - Over the past four years, we have evolved a more highly participative worship time based on this paradigm. We do the following: candles, communion, healing prayer, sand, and clay, etc.
  3. So worship was supernatural presence, it was participative and it was authentic. Do you remember Jesus in the sermon on the mount when he said if you're at worship and you sense your brother has something against you? Worship back then wasn't designed to be rote and formulaic. It was designed to be highly authentic.
- E. Back to the story. So the pilgrims head to Jerusalem And when they get there, they're hugely fired up. Notice what they say in verse two. *"Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem."* I wonder if you can identify with this? Do you have a ball team that you love? Don't you also associate good things with that stadium? What if you love the Baltimore Orioles, and you land at BWI airport ready for a game. You hit downtown Baltimore, the inner harbor. You reach Camden Yards, don't you feel just that sense of excitement? You're actually standing in the great stadium. Or what if you love art and music. Sometimes I get off the train at Charing Cross London and cross over to Trafalgar Square and I have this anticipation of entering the National Gallery of Art. I know I'm kind of weird. But you tend to associate great things about the city in which your favorite place is located. That's how they felt going to Jerusalem. Why? Because it was such a cool city...well no...not really. They felt anticipation because this was the place where they felt this amazingly warm and close connection with God.

- F. So let me read this again in paraphrase: “A was hugely fired up when my friends came to me after harvest time and said, “Hey why don’t we families go up to Jerusalem and worship in the tabernacle. Then we went and we couldn’t believe it when we actually stepped foot into the city. It was so cool we were anticipating authentic, supernatural, heartfelt worship in community with our friends.” All that is contained in verses one and two. Now we come to part two of our Psalm on corporate worship.

2. **Experiencing corporate worship: When we are worshipping we should experience four dynamics that increase our love for God.**  
**122:3-5**

A. **Context: Art** – Awe is enhanced through some form of art.

1. We see this in verse three: “O Jerusalem, you’re built as a city that is firmly bound together. The Psalmist address the city of Jerusalem – especially that area that adjoins the temple mount – and they Psalmist addresses Jerusalem as if it’s a person. And the Psalmist praises the city? So what’s going on here? The Hebrew wording implies that Jerusalem is stacked up on top of each other in a complex way, but in a way that is also beautiful and mysterious and attractive. Yes...even architecturally attractive! One of my favorite things to do in Cuba is to walk the old city. It’s densely packed together, with narrow streets and all sorts of interesting shops. There are mosaics, fountains, tiles and statues. It is a very interesting city because of its simultaneous complexity and simplicity. That city is built in the 17<sup>th</sup> Latin American century baroque style and it’s amazing.
2. The pilgrims say the same thing about Jerusalem. But here’s what’s different.
3. Jerusalem is where God chose to reveal himself. Jerusalem is the architectural context in which the dwelling place of God sits. What the city was to the tabernacle is what the medieval cathedral was to medieval worship. It was the artistic context in which worship took place.
4. What does this tell us about worship? Art and the arts are very good. It started with Moses and the tabernacle in the wilderness. That tabernacle was cutting edge art set within the context of the ancient world. Art has always been important. Art was important in the Roman catacombs. Art was important in the medieval period when giant cathedrals were built. Art was important when the great renaissance artist like Michelangelo and Raphael and Fra Filippo Lippi were painting.
5. Art turns our eyes and our hearts to God.
6. So what we try to do on a Sunday is this...

B. **Concept: We are already owned and redeemed by God** – Awe is also enhanced by our sense of having been redeemed by God and living in the midst of God’s big story. The Psalmist says, “[Jerusalem is the place] 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.”

1. David is going back to the Old Testament law and he’s remembering the commands that God gave the nation to regularly go to the place where the tabernacle was with intent to worship. But when they go to this worship place, they’re actually going into the presence of the infinite personal God. It’s not like they’re going to church or they’re going to someplace else. They’re actually going into the presence of the living God.
2. Now I want you to notice how they go...their attitude. These are described as “The tribes of the Lord.” The tribes of the Lord of course consists of the twelve tribes of Israel. These

twelve tribes came from the twelve children of Jacob. They are called the tribes of the Lord, meaning they belong to him. And it's not like they belong to him in the sense that they are object and God owns the objects. They belong to him in the sense that he redeemed them in the Exodus. When the people killed the lambs and sloshed the blood over the doors and lintels, God redeemed his nation spiritually. He bought them. They are now his. There is an organic spiritual connection. God has had them in this amazing story, this drama of redemption. When you worship, you ought to sense the same thing. I don't own myself. I am not the captain of my soul and the master of my fate. I have been purchased by God, by the blood of his son. I am now living in the midst of his big story. And we have a history together. I wonder, are you conscious of the history you and God are making. I get concerned that our hyped-up narcissistic culture uses God. We think God has to fit into our story...yeah, like we're the masters of the universe. No...God calls us to fit into his story, because he's the master of the universe. And since we belong to him we're living in a story that's going to be celebrated for all eternity.

3. Now comes the access part.

C. **There is a sense of unity:** note the tribes going up. Diversity but unity.

D. **We have open and confident access to God.** “[Jerusalem is the place] 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.”

1. Worship was decreed in the Old Testament. In the Law you have three parts: civil, ceremonial and moral. They had whole ways that you could come to God in the Old Testament that were amazing. The most amazing was the sacrificial system. That sacrificial system anticipated all that Jesus would do on the cross. In fact, the tabernacle and the temple are physical representations of what the geography of heaven. The Ark of the Covenant is God's throne. The altar represents the death of Christ. The table of bread represents fellowship with God.
2. The point is that the twelve tribes had access to God and so do we. Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says about access to God. “we have access to the throne of grace.”
3. I wonder, do you ever take time to revel in that access? The God of the universe doesn't bid you to come to a throne of shame, or a throne of guilt, or a throne of rage, or a throne of manipulation, or a throne of abuse. This is a throne of grace. Some of you have never felt the sheer unconditional love of God, because you've never experienced that love at home, or with friends or anywhere. Corporate worship is an invitation open your heart to a kind of love that is generous, healing and abundant.

E. **We have hope for justice** – David says, “There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David.”

1. One of the things that David did in Jerusalem is this: he set up a court system so that people could get the practical help they needed. Worship led to a sense that if I had practical needs they could be served. Now they lived in a theocratic form of government. But we live in a completely different setup.
2. The church of Jesus Christ is commanded repeatedly over and over to perform good deeds. The book of Titus is a great example. We're to be equipped...even zealous for good deeds. Our worship is never to be divorced from practical life. Our worship is to set the context so that we can get out in the world and make things better.

F. So let's think about what we have here in worship:

- Art increases awe.
- The realization that we belong to God increases awe.
- The notion that we have access to God increases awe.
- And the idea that we can go forth from worship and do good deeds in his name means that we can immediately be used by him.
- Worship is an incredible privilege.
- And now we come to the third thing we need to understand about worship.

### 3. **After corporate worship: We need to pray for unity among the believers...the worshipping community. 122:6-9**

A. The command: We're to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. 122:6-7

1. Back then it meant that they should pray that the people in the Jerusalem, the twelve tribes experience unity and shalom as they worship as a community.
2. Jerusalem is a symbol of the people of God who are gathered in Jerusalem. Remember the twelve brothers weren't very unified. And the twelve tribes often weren't very unified. So this could be a very dicey thing.
3. Unity in the body of Christ is a problem as well. The body of Christ was designed by God to be very diverse: rich-poor, young-old, mature-immature, socioeconomically lowbrow and highbrow, etc. It's a problem.
4. But we need to pray because God is glorified when we are unified.

B. First aspect of prayer: When there is unity among the diverse body of Christ, there is blessing for the people of God. 122:8

1. For my brothers and companions' sake.
2. This is an other centered prayer. I'm concerned about my friends. I want things to be good for them. This David has a shepherd's heart.

C. Second aspect of prayer: When there is unity it is good for the glory of God around the world. 122:9

1. House of the Lord is the place where God dwells.
2. Where does God dwell today? He dwells in each believer. He dwells in informal gatherings of believers. And He dwells in the context of each local church.
3. When believers experience shalom it is good for the kingdom of God.

Applications:

Let me remind you what we are seeking here at grace.

- High participation worship.
- Worship that has spaces where you can talk personally with God.
- Freedom of expression in worship.
- Art in worship.

Let me give you some ideas.

- I tunes lists will help you learn the songs.
- Pray before you arrive.