

THEHEART Intern Spiritual Discipline Journal
30-Day Guided Prayer, Scripture, and Meditation
Spring 2019

GUIDANCE: Listening Prayer

“When you talk, you are repeating what you know, but when you listen, you learn something new.” - Dalai Lama

If you summarize the essence of the bible it would be listening to the voice of the Lord and obeying it. “God is not silent, has never been silent. It is the nature to God to speak” (Tozer). The journal is designed to add depth to your conversations with God. It is a tool that aims at being attentive to the voice of the Lord throughout the duration of the internship. If you feel like your interactions feel like a monologue. Do not fret because you are in good company. I assure you many of us have experienced or are experiencing that. If you are hungry for more intimacy with God and yearning to go deeper with him I hope this tool will serve you and others well.

The goal of growing in a relationship with God is difficult to fit into a tight schedule. Deep relationships do not happen overnight. If the stresses of life and the burden on impatience weighs heavily on you then this journal may very well be a waste of time.

So, ask yourself, “Do I want to hear the Lord’s voice enough to make it a priority in my life.” I advise just setting aside 30 minutes of your day, if you are new to this then I suggest building up to it. It takes practice to focus your mind on an extended period of time. It is intended for you to grow in your relationship with God, not answering every question.

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” - Jeremiah 29:13

Listening Prayer Process

- Tools: pen, journal, and the Bible
- When ready, quiet yourself and examine your heart. It is often good to begin by reading scripture. Ask the Lord to speak through you to it.
- Ask the Lord to protect you in the name of Jesus from deception
- Ask Him to speak clearly in a way that you can understand, and to confirm anything he shared with you in scripture
- Then write down your questions for prayer. Then pause. This is where you wait and listen. The Lord has much to say to you. He may direct you to another passage of scripture. He may share a tender word. Whatever you feel he may be saying to you, write it down. (In other words, I have no clue how he is going to “speak” to you. For Pete’s sake, He is God that man can do whatever he wants)

Listening is not a popular religion. “Be still and know that I am God,” and still He says it, as if He means to tell us that our strength lies not within noise but in silence (Tozer). The process of listening may feel awkward and possibly, presumptuous. It contains the potential for mistaking ordinary thoughts for the voice of God. Remember, you are posturing yourself to God so that he may have the opportunity to speak to you. If you are like most people you will find your mind straying to the things you need to do or whatever. But press on beyond your daily tasks to engage the Lord in the listening prayer.

Do not worry about missing God, it is a practice in “tuning in” to his small still voice. He is the Divine Whisperer, He is gentle and a good shepherd; trust him to speak to you. Quiet the fleshly activities and listen to the silent thunders of the Lord.

WEEK 1: Listening Prayer

Day 1

“I have called you friends.” (John 15:15)

Years ago there was an old German professor whose beautiful life was a wonder to his students. Some of them were determined to learn the secret of it, so one night they sent someone to hide in the study where the professor spent his evenings. It was quite late when the teacher finally came. He was very tired but sat down and spent one hour with his Bible. Then he bowed his head in silent prayer, and finally closing the Book of books, he said, “Well, Lord Jesus, we still have the same old relationship.” “To know Christ” (Phil. 3:10) is life’s greatest achievement. At all costs, every Christian should strive to “have the same old relationship” with Him. The reality of knowing Jesus comes as a result of hidden prayer, and personal Bible study that is devotional and consistent in nature. Christ becomes more real to those who persist in cultivating His presence. Speak unto Him for He hears you, And Spirit with spirit will meet! Nearer is He than breathing, Nearer than hands and feet - Maltbie D. Babcock

Scripture meditation

Psalm 1

John 10:3-4

Pray: “Lord show me what you want me to learn from this passage.” *Wait in silence as the Holy Spirit reveals truth to you*

Questions:

1. God, is my walk with you really personal? When has it been most personal?
2. Do I understand how to have a personal relationship? What makes a relationship with you personal?
3. Where am I submitting to you in my life?
4. Where am I resisting you in my life?
5. Where do I start? How do I begin to grow more in my walk with you?

Day 2

I waited patiently for the Lord. (Psalm 40:1)

Waiting is much more difficult than walking, for waiting requires patience, and patience is a rare virtue. We enjoy knowing that God builds hedges around His people, when we look at the hedge from the aspect of protection. But when we see it growing higher and higher until we can no longer see over it, we wonder if we will ever get out of our little sphere of influence and service, where we feel trapped. Sometimes it is hard for us to understand why we do not have a larger area of service, and it becomes difficult for us to “brighten the corner” where we are. But God has a purpose in all of His delays. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Ps. 37:23 KJV). Next to this verse, in the margin of his Bible, George Mueller made this note: “And the stops too.” It is a sad mistake for someone to break through God’s hedges. It is a vital principle of the Lord’s guidance for a Christian never to move from the spot where he is sure God has placed him, until the “pillar of cloud” (Ex. 13:21) moves. From Sunday School times, once we learn to wait for the Lord’s leading in everything, we will know the strength that finds its highest point in an even and steady walk. Many of us are lacking the strength we so desire, but God gives complete power for every task He calls us to perform. Waiting—keeping yourself faithful to His leading—

this is the secret of strength. And anything that does not align with obedience to Him is a waste of time and energy. Watch and wait for His leading. Samuel Dickey Gordon - “Must life be considered a failure for someone compelled to stand still, forced into inaction and required to watch the great, roaring tides of life from shore? No—victory is then to be won by standing still and quietly waiting.” Yet this is a thousand times harder to do than in the past, when you rushed headlong into the busyness of life. It requires much more courage to stand and wait and still not lose heart or lose hope, to submit to the will of God, to give up opportunities for work and leave honors to others, and to be quiet, confident, and rejoicing while the busy multitude goes happily along their way. The greatest life is: “after you have done everything, to stand” (Eph. 6:13) - J. R. Miller.

“All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

Wait in Silence

1. Lord, have I failed to look to the Bible for guidance in my life?
2. Have I failed to keep an open mind about the ways you speak to me? When?
3. How have you chosen to speak to me in the past?
4. What can I do to better trust you in the future?
5. Is there anything you want to say to me?

Day 3

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy- think about such things” (Phil 4:8)

A good way to apply the Philippians 4 passage is to begin by listing some things that fit under each category. After you’ve done that, spend a minute meditation on each category. Scripture tells us that we do so, we’ll be conformed to Christ’s image.

Whatever is true

Whatever is noble

Whatever is right

Whatever is pure

Whatever is lovely

Whatever is admirable

Anything excellent or praiseworthy

Day 4

“So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.” (Genesis 32:24)

“Left alone!” What different emotions these words bring to mind for each of us! To some they mean loneliness and grief, but to others they may mean rest and quiet. To be left alone without God would be too horrible for words, while being left alone with Him is a taste of heaven! And if His followers spent more time alone with Him, we would have spiritual giants again. Our Master

set an example for us. Remember how often He went to be alone with God? And there was a powerful purpose behind His command, “When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray” (Matt. 6:6). The greatest miracles of Elijah and Elisha took place when they were alone with God. Jacob was alone with God when he became a prince (see Gen. 32:28). In the same way, we too may become royalty and people who are “wondered at” (Zech. 3:8 KJV). Joshua was alone when the Lord came to him (see Josh. 1:1). Gideon and Jephthah were by themselves when commissioned to save Israel (see Judg. 6:11; 11:29). Moses was by himself at the burning bush (see Ex. 3:1–5). Cornelius was praying by himself when the Angel of God came to him (see Acts 10:1–4). No one was with Peter on the housetop when he was instructed to go to the Gentiles (see Acts 10:9–28). John the Baptist was alone in the wilderness (see Luke 1:80), and John the Beloved was alone on the island of Patmos when he was the closest to God (see Rev. 1:9). Earnestly desire to get alone with God. If we neglect to do so, we not only rob ourselves of a blessing but rob others as well, since we will have no blessing to pass on to them. It may mean that we do less outward, visible work, but the work we do will have more depth and power. Another wonderful result will be that people will see “no one except Jesus” (Matt. 17:8) in our lives. The impact of being alone with God in prayer cannot be overemphasized.

If chosen men had never been alone,
In deepest silence open-doored to God,
No greatness would ever have been dreamed or done

Wait in Silence

1. What experiences of prayer and meditation have you had this week?
2. What temptations did you face this week?
3. What movements of the Holy Spirit did you experience this week?
4. What opportunities to serve others have you had this week?
5. In what ways have you encountered Christ in your study of the Bible this week?

Day 5

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations...” (Psalm 46:10)

Spend some time in prayer. Close the door and, either literally or metaphorically, get down on your hands and knees to create an environment of complete focus. Sing or listen to a worship song or read a psalm or hymn of praise aloud to God.

1. Ask God to free you mind of all other thoughts and concerns for this time of conversation with him. Commit to him that you want to give this time to him and him alone. Ask him to help you focus your mind on him
2. Is there anything you want to say to me now?
3. Are there any questions you would have me ask you?

Write down any impressions you feel he’s giving you.

Ask him the questions he gives you.

Day 6

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves” (Matthew 10:16)

“They said to Moses, ‘You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.’” (Exodus 20:19)

We don't consciously and deliberately disobey God— we simply don't listen to Him. God has given His commands to us, but we pay no attention to them— not because of willful disobedience, but because we do not truly love and respect Him. "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Once we realize we have constantly been showing disrespect to God, we will be filled with shame and humiliation for ignoring Him.

"You speak with us...but let not God speak with us...." We show how little love we have for God by preferring to listen to His servants rather than to Him. We like to listen to personal testimonies, but we don't want God Himself to speak to us. Why are we so terrified for God to speak to us? It is because we know that when God speaks we must either do what He asks or tell Him we will not obey. But if it is simply one of God's servants speaking to us, we feel obedience is optional, not imperative. We respond by saying, "Well, that's only your own idea, even though I don't deny that what you said is probably God's truth."

Am I constantly humiliating God by ignoring Him, while He lovingly continues to treat me as His child? Once I finally do hear Him, the humiliation I have heaped on Him returns to me. My response then becomes, "Lord, why was I so insensitive and obstinate?" This is always the result once we hear God. But our real delight in finally hearing Him is tempered with the shame we feel for having taken so long to do so.

Pray: "Jesus, I thank you that your method has always been to send your disciples out. And I confess that too often I get in a comfort zone. You have called me a sheep and called yourself a shepherd. You tell us there are enemies. Please show me what this means for me today. I pray that your truth would find its way to my heart today."

Wait in Silence

1. Is there a practical way that I can practice what I'm learning in ministry?
2. Is there a particular person or place where you want me to minister today?
3. Are you asking me to reach out to others through some kind of ministry?
4. Where and when should I go?
5. Is there anyone who can help me grow in this area of ministering? Who?

Day 7

Psalms of Lament

Read Psalm 12 and 86

1. Do you have any enemies?
2. How do you feel about the people on your enemy list?
3. Lord, what do you want me to do to each one?

These psalms give us permission to express our anger to God. And we know that Jesus, who became a human and living among us, sympathizes with our weaknesses and frustrations. We can pour out our hearts to him.

Write out a prayer, asking God to work through the person's heart to receive your love the way you intended. You never know an enemy like Saul can turn into an apostle like Paul.

WEEK 2: Listening Prayer

Day 8

Lord's Prayer:

This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”

- Father, what will it look like for you to receive glory in my life, my church, and in the world?
- Lord, what would the advancement of the kingdom mean in your own circumstances?
- What are the obstacles that I face in my spiritual development?
- How can I change my prayer life?

Day 9

The revelation that God is a wonderfully loving Father is one of the most powerful and essential truths we can know. In the New Testament, God is referred to as Father 245 times! Because much of our view on God stems from our personal experience with our own father, which may be negative or inadequate, we need to renew our minds with how God truly reveals himself.

Ask and journal

1 Jo. 3:1
John 17:26
Mt. 3:16-17
John 3:16
Lu. 15:20-24
Rom. 8:38-39
Gal. 4:6-7
Mt. 7:11

Write out a few verses that grabbed your attention. Often this is a way in which God begins to speak to us about something specifically on his heart.

- What from these verses do You want me to show me about You, my identity, or anything else?
- Heavenly Father, would you show me any ways which my relationship with my earthly father has colored my perception of you?
- Is there anything I need to change to relate to you more as my Father? What is it?
- Father, in the light what you have revealed to me, how can I respond in living in obedience?

Day 10

All throughout Scripture, we see a God in pursuing his people. He is calling us into a communion with Him. He yearns for his people to love him with their whole heart. The Israelites responded by structuring their lives around him. They abided by his laws, they set aside time to worship him. In the New Testament, ministry and discipleship were integral in the daily lives like eating and drinking. It is an example of undiluted devotion God yearns from us.

Ex. 20:3: “You shall have no other gods before me.”

Mt. 22:37: Jesus restates: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart...”

In Deuteronomy, we are encouraged at least 10 times to love him with all our hearts...”

The Psalms portray a Divine Being wooing our hearts. And of people responding:

Ps. 119:58: “I have sought you with all my heart.”

Ps. 51:17: “A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise”

Ps. 86:11: “Give me an undivided heart.”

Pr. 23:26: “My son, give me your heart.”

Jer. 29:13: “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

Ez. 11:19: “I will give you them an undivided heart.”

Joel 2:12: “Return to me with all your heart.”

Mt 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart.”

2 Tim. 2:2: “Call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

Take some time to write a love letter to God.

- Have you expressed to him the deepest yearnings of your heart lately?
- Have you thanked him for all he has given you?

After you have written for a while, pause and wait. In the silence, God may want to share something of his own heart for you.

Day 11

The person and work of the Holy Spirit: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” - Acts 1:8

As Christians, we believe in the true and living God who exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person is equal in deity, power, and glory. Sadly, its to our own dismay that we often neglect the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Rooting ourselves in Biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit is not only clarifies the confusion about the Holy Spirit, but it will also stir our faith to embrace the essential ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Mt. 28:18-20

Acts 10:38

John 14:16-17

Lu. 11:13

We can define the presence of the Holy Spirit’s ministry as the active presence of God working in the world and especially the church. The Holy Spirit, who is God, is also referred as the helper, the comforter, Spirit of truth, Spirit of the Son, Spirit of adoption, Spirit of wisdom. In addition, Jesus promised after his ascension to heaven, he would send the Holy Spirit to indwell God’s people and to baptize them with the power to be the witnesses of the earth.

To Bring Life

Rom. 8:11

To Empower

Mt. 3:11

Acts 1:8

Rom.12:6-8

Eph.4:11

1 Co. 12:4-11

To Purify

1 Co. 6:11

Rom. 8:13

Gal. 5:22-23

To Reveal

Rom. 5:5

Rom. 8:16

John 14:26

Questions to ask and to wait in silence:

- Do I seek your Spirit's counsel before I make decisions, or do I make them on my own?
- How do I control my own life and shut you out?
- What areas do you want me to yield control to you?
- Am I failing to trust you in any way?
- How, specifically, can I grow in this area?

Day 12

"Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation... " 2 Cor. 7:10

Conviction of sin is best described in the words: "My sins, my sins, my Savior, How sad on Thee they fall." Conviction of sin is one of the most uncommon things that ever happens to a person. It is the beginning of an understanding of God. Jesus Christ said that when the Holy Spirit came He would convict people of sin (see John 16:8). And when the Holy Spirit stirs a person's conscience and brings him into the presence of God, it is not that person's relationship with others that bothers him but his relationship with God— "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight..." (Ps. 51:4). The wonders of conviction of sin, forgiveness, and holiness are so interwoven that it is only the forgiven person who is truly holy. He proves he is forgiven by being the opposite of what he was previously, by the grace of God. Repentance always brings a person to the point of saying, "I have sinned." The surest sign that God is at work in his life is when he says that and means it. Anything less is simply sorrow for having made foolish mistakes — a reflex action caused by self-disgust. The entrance into the kingdom of God is through the sharp, sudden pains of repentance colliding with man's respectable "goodness." Then the Holy Spirit, who produces these struggles, begins the formation of the Son of God in the person's life (see Gal. 4:19). This new life will reveal itself in conscious repentance followed by unconscious holiness, never the other way around. The foundation of Christianity is repentance. Strictly speaking, a person cannot repent when he chooses— repentance is a gift of God. The old Puritans used to pray for "the gift of tears." If you ever cease to understand the value of repentance, you allow yourself to remain in sin. Examine yourself to see if you have forgotten how to be truly repentant.

Questions to ask and to wait in silence

- Is there anything that has put distance between us?
- Have I treated you or some else less than a friend?
- My own prayer of repentance:

Day 13

“There remains, then, a Sabbath - rest for people of God” - Hebrews 4:9

“That rest includes victory: “The Lord gave them rest on every side....The Lord handed all their enemies over to them” (Josh. 21:44). “Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57). A prominent believer once told of his mother, who was a very anxious and troubled Christian. He would often talk with her for hours, trying to convince her of the sinfulness of worrying, but to no avail. She was like the elderly woman who once said that she had suffered a great deal, especially from the troubles that never came. Then one morning his mother came to breakfast with a smile adorning her face. He asked her what had happened, and she began describing a dream she had in the night. In her dream, she was walking along a highway with a large crowd of people, all of whom seemed very tired and burdened. The people were all carrying little black bundles, and she noticed that more bundles were being dropped along the way by numerous repulsive-looking creatures that seemed quite demonic in nature. As the bundles were dropped, the people stooped down to pick them up and carry them. Like everyone else in her dream, she also carried her needless load, being weighed down with the Devil’s bundles. After a while, she looked up and saw a Man whose face was loving and bright as He moved through the crowd, comforting the people. Finally He came to her, and she realized it was her Savior. She looked at Him, telling Him how tired she was, and He smiled sadly and said, “My dear child, these bundles you carry are not from me, and you have no need of them. They are the Devil’s burdens, and they are wearing out your life. You need to drop them and simply refuse to touch them with even one of your fingers. Then you will find your path easy, and you will feel as if ‘I carried you on eagles’ wings’ [Ex. 19:4].” The Savior touched her hand, and peace and joy quickly filled her soul. As she saw herself in her dream casting her burdens to the ground and ready to throw herself at His feet in joyful thanksgiving, she suddenly awoke, finding that all her worries were gone. From that day forward to the end of her life, she was the most cheerful and happy member of her family. And the night will be filled with music, And the cares that besiege the day, will fold their tents like the Arabs, and will silently steal away.” - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

- Father, what does rest look like in my life?
- How can I find rest in you?
- Is there anything that I need to take out of my life?
- Is there anything you would like to tell me?

Day 14

“He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot- come, let us rejoice in him.” Psalm 66:6

“It is a profound statement that “through the waters,” the very place where we might have expected nothing but trembling, terror, anguish, and dismay, the children of Israel stopped to “rejoice in him”! How many of us can relate to this experience? Who of us, right in the midst of our time of distress and sadness, have been able to triumph and rejoice, as the Israelites did? How close God is to us through His promises, and how brightly those promises shine! Yet during times of prosperity, we lose sight of their brilliance. In the way the sun at noon hides the stars from sight, His promises become indiscernible. But when night falls—the deep, dark night of sorrow—a host of stars begin to shine, bringing forth God’s blessed constellations of hope, and promises of comfort from His Word. Just as Jacob experienced at Jabbok, it is only once the sun sets that the Angel of the Lord comes, wrestles with us, and we can overcome. It was at night, “at twilight” (Ex.30:8), that Aaron lit the sanctuary lamps. And it is often during nights of trouble that the brightest lamps of believers are set ablaze. It was during a dark time of loneliness and exile that John had the glorious vision of his Redeemer. Many of us today have our “Isle of

Patmos,”which produces the brightest memories of God’s enduring presence, uplifting grace, and love in spite of solitude and sadness. How many travelers today,still passing through their Red Seas and Jordan Rivers of earthly affliction, will be able to look back from eternity, filled with memories of God’s great goodness,and say,“We ‘passed through the waters on foot.’ And yet,even in these dark experiences,with waves surging all around,we stopped and said,‘Let us rejoice in him’!” - J. R. Macduff

“There I will give her back her vineyards,and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing.” - Hos. 2:15

- Father, remind me when I have been filled with complete joy.
- When are times I should respond in rejoicing?
- How can I show joy in you today?
- Is there anyone you would like to share a word of encouragement today?
- Is there any questions you would like me to ask you?

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GUIDANCE: Lexio Divina

Do one reading a day, considering the guidance below. The exercise we are attempting together is called lexio divina. It is a meditative spiritual discipline combining prayer, scripture, and meditation.

Lexio Divina (from Duluth Catholic Medical Association)

A reflective reading of Scripture in which we listen more deeply to God. It is spiritual reading at the service of prayer. Union with God is its goal.

Four Attitudes of Lexio Divina

1. Reverence in reading
2. Focus: letting our minds rest attentively with the text
3. Compunction: a sincere love for God and sorrow for our sins
4. Openness to doing God’s will

Four Steps of Lexio Divina

Lexio: Quiet repeated reading of the text

Meditatio: Reflecting on what has been read

Oratio: Praying in response to it

Contemplatio: Meditating and resting in God

PSALMS OF ASCENT

The Psalms of Ascent are a group of 15 songs that were likely sung on the way to Jerusalem in celebration of the three pilgrimage feasts set up by the Sinaitic covenant (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles). These pilgrim songs prepared Israelites in route to Jerusalem, as they came from all over the Near East to the mountain of the Lord. We, as pilgrims of faith, can sing, pray, and meditate on these songs in our own journey toward God.

WEEK 3: Lexio Divina

Day 15

Psalm 120

Distance // Meshech and Kedar were far from Jerusalem. Meshech was far north toward the Black Sea. Kedar was in Arabia. Alienation from God is the start place of the pilgrimage toward him. For us to want to grow nearer to him, we must realize our distance.

Shalom // The Hebrew for peace, “shalom” doesn’t quite come off as rich in English. We often think of peace as the absence of conflict. However, this word is deeper, more like “wholeness”. It isn’t enough to advocate for peace and quite, we want more. We want wholeness.

- In what ways do you feel distant from God?
- Search your heart - In what ways are you “for peace”? In what ways are you “for war”?
- Are you oriented toward wholeness in them? Pray for aim at relational wholeness.

Day 16

Psalm 121

Our Keeper // This beloved Psalms' theme is made clear by repetition. The root "shamar" is repeated 6 times in just 8 verses. It means "watch, keep, guard". It is the same promise of the Aaronic blessing, "May the Lord bless and keep you". This statement of faith in God's protection begins with the rhetorical question; indeed it is not the hills and high places of Canaanite religion ruled by confined, localized, and petty gods to which the Ascender looks. Baal, one of these mountain storm gods of Canaan, even explicitly falls asleep every year during the drought season, according to Canaanite religious literature. Clearly, our God never abandons his post.

Our Help // By the way, "ezer", here translated as "help" is the same term used of Eve in relation to Adam. The notion that help is somehow "less than" would create theological dilemmas for the singer of this song. Yahweh himself is our help. This is a title of high value, not of secondary support.

- Where do you look for hope?
- Do you trust that God will protect you?
- Pray for trust and protection in God.

Day 17

Psalm 122

Peace // This prayer is for the peace of Jerusalem. Whereas Psalm 120 prays for peace in a hostile context, Psalm 122 prays for peace among the people of God. Wholeness, welfare, completeness. These should characterize the body of Christ. Yet we do not live up to it as a community at all times. If we all pray for the wholeness of our church body, what might that do among us?

- How do I hinder the wholeness of our church?
- How do I advocate for the wholeness of our church?
- Pray for wholeness in the body.

Day 18

Psalm 123

Servant // What is our relationship with God? This humble prayer gives us one way of understanding our posture: servanthood. Servants look up. That's our posture: humility, trust, expectancy. Servants do not find security or pride in themselves. They must learn trust in the humility of dependency. May we join in this prayer and see God, ourselves, and the world around us through humility.

- Does your relationship with God reflect the posture of a servant?
- Do you honestly expect mercy? Pray to expect mercy.
- Pray for the prideful in your life - that you may not be damaged by them, that they may turn.

Day 19

Psalm 124

Collective // This song is an invocation and reminder to Israel to sing of past deliverance. We need that don't we? Anytime hardship comes up, it is not always our first impulse to remember God's past faithfulness. We learn from this song that this indeed should be our response. David leads us in this. Sometimes it takes another voice in our lives, encouraging us on to remember. "Let Israel say..." Let us say, as well.

David // One only need to read some of 1 Samuel (especially 1 Sam 19, 1 Sam 23:26-29) to see that David had a lot of close calls. "Like a sparrow flown to safety" is vivid. God doesn't always let us avoid the hardship (see Job). But we must believe he has the power to rescue us. Even if it isn't from certain things we really would love to avoid, his rescue is beyond circumstance - it is eternal. May we rejoice with David in remembering the unlikely rescue we get to experience together.

- How do you corporately remember God's story? Do you do this with your fellowman enough?
- What has God rescued you from recently?
- Share with a fellow Christian in reminding each other of your redemption today.

Day 20

Psalm 125

Surrounded // The psalmist is inspired by the topography of the city of Jerusalem. The mountains that ring the city are more hills than mountains, for Appalachian or Rockies standards. However, these provided protection. The city was formerly occupied by the Jebusites, who retained control of it until David's reign (2 Sam 5), hundreds of years after Joshua's conquest! It was apparently a tough city to take. The image of God's surrounding of his people is a potent reminder of his presence, intent, and power.

- What shakes you? How do you cope with that which shakes you?
- Pray in reflection of your trust of God.
- If you have the time today, surround yourself with mountains. Engage the imagery. Pray.

Day 21

Psalm 126

Restoration // The Hebrew in "restored our fortunes" is fascinating. The verb "shuv" means to turn or return. In some contexts, it is even the word repent. Here, what is turning, is fortunes. This song, surely sung in the days of Nehemiah and the rebuilders, invites us into the tension of the already and not yet. They were celebrating God's restoration. Yet just a few lines later they plea for it afresh: "Return, Yahweh, our restoration." They were renewed, freed from the land of captivity. But sitting in the incomplete walls of their city, they looked for further restoration. Whatever they had hoped for wasn't quite complete. So they sang a song celebrating restoration while anticipating even more restorative activity from God. This is the kind of plea we Christians make. God has restored us! He has brought us into relationship with himself. We are new creations. Yet we aren't finished yet. Nor is he. One day his restoration will come in full. Until then, we sing this song, anchored in hope. What God has done before in part, he will do soon in full. Active hope is the song of the redeemed.

- How have you already experienced God's redemption?
- In what ways are you awaiting a further redemption?
- Pray in the tension of the already and not yet - assurance and hope.

WEEK 4: Lexio Divina

Day 22

Psalm 127

Building // There seems to be a play on words here. House is both term for a dwelling place and a family. The psalmist here ties these together. It is God that builds things that last. Regardless of what the structure is, it is in vain without his founding activity. Structure, family, all the things we build - we should build them on God.

- What are you building with your life?
- Is it founded on God? Is he the builder? Or are you building something on your own?
- Pray for God to build up your family - this family of believers.

Day 23

Psalm 128

Family // Another psalm that builds up the imagery of family, the psalmist here meditates on it being a place where the blessing of God plays out. God's blessing seems focus on playing out in the context of family growth (Gen 1:28). For today's audience this may seem oddly preoccupied with population growth and family planning. If we join the ancient readers in the joy of seeing the tangible multiplication of God's image-bearers, we see things in a new (old) light. God has a big family. He is growing it through adoption in Christ. We Christians should want a big family (not necessarily literally...). The family of believers you are in is the place where God's blessing plays out.

- How has your family (nuclear or faith or both) been a place of God's blessing?
- Biblical narrative is littered with dysfunctional families - how has family been a challenge?
- Pray for God's blessing to play out in your family.

Day 24

Psalm 129

Pain // One of the things that sojourners to Jerusalem would bear in mind on their way is the plight of their city. Jerusalem was plagued by Philistia, Aram, Assyria, before being leveled by Babylon. It may be hard to understand the pain of this song, but a cry for justice is a godly desire. The key thing to remember is that this is a prayer, a song. This is not a summons to arm, for Israel to seek their own revenge. They sing through the pain and pray to God to right the wrongs. It is there that we can join in this song, a plea for God to set right the world. We can learn with Israel how to sing with the hope that whatever oppresses us is weaker than the God who can "cut up ropes of wicked ones."

- What is a source of oppression in your life?
- Do you trust God with justice or do you attempt to carry it out yourself?
- Pray for those who persecute you.

Day 25

Psalm 130

Waiting // This song is sung from the depths, a dark place, in waiting for a dawn. Faith in Yahweh must be a patient one. This is a song in the vein of Good Friday, when hope seems all but lost. But as watchmen stare at the horizon, knowing with certainty, that no matter the dark, the sun will rise. As dark as it gets around and within, we know with the same kind of certainty that a dawn is coming. Why would we fear the light? It is for the reason of forgiveness, not condemnation, that Yahweh should be revered. Who else can cleanse within and right the world order? None but the Living and Merciful God. May we stare at the horizon with repentance and hope in anticipation of the dawn.

- What depths are you praying from now?
- Think about the inevitability of sunrise - God is that reliable.
- Meditate on the patience of the watchman, waiting for dawn - patience is a part of faith.

Day 26

Psalm 131

Weaned // The imagery of this psalm is simple but evocative. Have you ever been around a child going through weaning? Babies are fussy. When in need, they cry and claw their way for provision, only satisfied in nursing at times. However, a child weaned can be at peace - trusting their mother without begging for provision. They are content in the arms of their parent.

- How can you calm and quiet yourself, as the psalmist does?
- Are you content in God's arms?
- Be still and let your needs, questions, and frustrations go for a moment: trust.

Day 27

Psalm 132

Dwelling // Psalm 132 celebrates the history behind the temple's inception. David desired to build a house for God. God made a covenant to build a house (dynasty) for David (2 Sam 7). David's restless concern for God's centrality in his and his nation's life is admirable. Moreso, the psalmist

recalls this to highlight and hope for God's faithfulness. *He said he would stay here, right?* The turbulent history of Israel challenges faith. *Can he really dwell here if this place is so inundated with trouble?* We may ask the same, as God's new dwelling place is in the people, in the church, in us.

- Are you restless for God's indwelling?
- What can you reflect on that stirs your confidence in God?
- Pray for faith in God's faithfulness.

Day 28

Psalm 133

Oil // This psalm combines so much imagery. It is short and rich with movement. The repeated verb, "yarad", is in the particle form, which communicates continuous movement. It can be rendered "going down". First as oil on a beard, then picturing that as high priest Aaron's beard, then down on his clothes. Then it is dew flowing from Israel's snow-capped highest peak, Hebrew, somehow flowing to Jerusalem's mountains, though geologically far apart. The imagery is evocative and symbolic. There's a special recipe for anointing oil in Exodus 30. It was used to consecrate the temple and the priests. Anointing symbolized God's blessing, his setting apart of priests and later, kings, for representing him. His special presence is indicated by the flowing of oil. And here the same special presence is given to family unity.

Unity // It is a poem capturing the richness of unity. As these pilgrims drew closer to Jerusalem, they would be drawing closer together. That is the movement of the spiritual life. When we have a common destination, Christ, we find ourselves closer. This is against the grain of humanity. Remember, the first brothers did not dwell as one. But here, we celebrate togetherness with images of anointing and refreshment. Where are we divided in our lives? Church stuff, family stuff, marriage stuff? Regardless of the distance between us, may we seek reconciliation that is only found in Christ. May we see the beautiful, active flow of blessing in the place of unity and join in the pilgrimage to that place. Unity is that precious. It is truly good and beautiful to be together in Christ.

- Draw to mind and be grateful for unity you have experienced in church-life.
- Where do you least experience unity?
- What are the barriers you bring against unity?

LAST COUPLE DAYS: Lexio Divina & Listening Prayer

Day 29

Psalm 134

Blessing // The final song of Ascent. We have reached our destination: the presence of God. In Israel's practice this would have been the temple mount, Jerusalem, or metaphorically, Zion. 5 times the Lord's name is sung. 3 times his worshippers are exhorted to bless him. One of the fascinating things about this song is that God's people are invited to "bless" him. This is the same verb (barak) that we see God doing in the beginning, the same verb the song closes with "May Yahweh bless you", echoing the Aaronic blessing. It is beautiful and confounding that we can somehow "bless" God.

- How can you bless God?
- How does God bless you?
- Meditate on the reciprocity of blessing between God and humanity.

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Day 30

Outside of our relationship with God, the relationships we have with our parents, spouses, and children are some of the most important ones we have. Sadly, for many people, some of the greatest wounds experienced in life come from the relationships that were supposed to provide love, safety, and security. In addition, our current secular culture often portrays as a completely different picture of what a healthy family should look like. Thankfully, in God's Word, He gives us a clear standard for how we can experience life-giving family relationships.

Joshua 24:15
Genesis 2:18
Genesis 2:24
Matthew 19:6
Ephesians 5:22-25
Ephesians 5:32
Psalm 127:3
Ephesians 20:12
Exodus 20:12
Joshua 24:15

What verses grab your attention?

Lord, what do you want to reveal to me from these verses?

How do you want me to respond to what you revealed to me?

Written by EP & EH