

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

WEEK ONE

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

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ADULT SMALL GROUP SESSION

Psalm 131 is a journey, a spiritual pilgrimage, that lead us to surrender our arrogance and put our hope in the Lord. This week we will explore the context for where we find Psalm 131, as a Psalm of Ascent, and how that shapes our journey.

ICEBREAKER: *Each discussion begins with question that allows the group to share from their own personal experiences and opinions.*

- What is your favorite movie soundtrack?
- How does a soundtrack set the mood for the film?
- How does it enhance your experience in the film?

WELCOME TO “CALM. QUIET. HOPE. TRUST.”

“Psalm 131 is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn.” – Charles Spurgeon¹

We are about to embark on a six-week journey through Psalm 131. It is a journey of self-discovery, where we come to terms with who we are: prideful, arrogant, and self-absorbed. Yet, it is also a song of grace and acceptance: we discover how to humble ourselves and be invited daily into the journey of surrender, as we calm our hearts, quiet our souls, hope in the Lord, and trust now and always.

OPENING PRAYER: *Each time we will start and end with Psalm 131 as our prayer for calm, quiet, hope, and trust.*

Psalm 131 (CSB)

Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I do not get involved with things too great or too wondrous for me. Instead, I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like a weaned child. Put your hope in the Lord, both now and forever. Amen

THE PSALMS

The Psalms are the worship hymnal for the people of Israel. It contains 150 songs written by a variety of authors including David, Moses, Solomon, Asaph, Herman and more. *"The psalms, which were meant to be sung, are a timeless resource for the people of God in their worship."*³

QUOTE: Melissa Cousins

*The Psalms invite us into an experience of conversing with God, and with one another about God, and it is from this conversational experience that theology is shaped.*³

- What is your favorite Psalm?
- What makes this Psalm significant to you?
- How have the Psalms shaped your spiritual journey?

QUOTE: Melissa Cousins

*Psalms are not intended to be merely read, recited or sung. They are to be performed, or perhaps better enacted there to be embodied. Those who participate in their use thereby have their understanding of the world in which they live reframed or reshaped.*⁴

- What is the difference between “read, recited, sung” and “performed, enacted, embodied?”
- How would experiencing the psalm “performed, enacted, embodied” reshape or reframe your faith?

THE PSALMS OF ASCENT:

The Psalms of Ascent are a special collection of fifteen Psalms, 120-134, also known as Pilgrim Psalms. They were used as a soundtrack for the Jewish people going on spiritual pilgrimage. Families would travel to Jerusalem for the three Jewish festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, and sing these songs on their journey. These songs were used as a preparation for worship as Jewish Pilgrims made their way to the temple during these festivals.

This collection is also called Songs of the Steps because there are 15 “steps” heading into the temple. The priest and pilgrim worshipers would sing a song at each step, so of these fifteen psalms would be sung as they ascended to the temple.

- For many, it would take days, even weeks, to travel from their hometown to Jerusalem. Why would this be a significant journey for individuals, families, and even villages?
- How would that experience strengthen their faith and their community?
- Imagine you were a part of the journey, how do you think being a part of that experience would enhance your faith in God and your relationships with your people?
- Have you ever had a similar type of spiritual experience? Share your story and how it brought life to your faith?

QUOTE: Eugene Peterson

The ascent was not only literal, it was a metaphor: the trip to Jerusalem acted out a life lived up toward God, an existence that advanced from one level to another of developing maturity.⁵

SERMON DISCUSSION:

This Sunday, we explored Psalm 130, the song of waiting. I wait for the LORD; I wait and put my hope in his word.

- What were some of lessons from Psalm 130 that were discussed during this sermons?
- How did these lessons connect with you and your spiritual life?
- How were you encouraged to apply the lessons from these psalm to your life?
- Share any questions or concerns that came to you as we explored Psalm 130.
- How can the lessons from this psalm help you on your spiritual journey?

PILGRIMAGE:

The Israelites used their trip to the temple, their pilgrimage to prepare their hearts for worship and reflect on what God has done in their lives and their community. As Eugene Peterson writes, “*the trip to Jerusalem acted out a life lived up toward God, an existence that advanced from one level to another of developing maturity.*”

- What is the purpose of a pilgrimage?
- How is it different from a vacation or business trip?
- How does a pilgrimage develop maturity?

QUOTE: David Baker

We must learn to recognize and honor the pilgrimage. We must talk about departure, the anxiety of the journey and the joy of the arrival.

- Which is more important, the journey or the destination? Why?
- How does the experience of the journey shape the joy of the arrival?

READ PSALM 128:1-2 (from the Message)

All you who fear God, how blessed you are! How happily you walk on his smooth straight road! You worked hard and deserve all you've got coming. Enjoy the blessing! Revel in the goodness!

- What happiness and blessings occurs when you pilgrimage with God?
- How can we revel in the goodness of a like walked with God?

QUOTE: David Baker

The Christian faith is a pilgrimage. It is a journey from earth to heaven, from curse to blessing, from judgement to salvation, from the earthly city to the city of God.

- Have you ever considered the Christian faith as a spiritual pilgrimage?

- How might embracing this imagery help you navigate your life and faith?

QUOTE: Melissa Cousins

Pilgrims are on a journey, but it is not a simple or linear path. Along the way there is a broad range of possibilities and a full range of experiences of life and relationships, resulting in emotional highs and lows. There is, moreover, a sense of forward motion even throughout the ups and downs of life. Being a pilgrim means seeking rather than being comfortable, continually looking to and for something more. It also means having a destination in mind, anticipating that there is something yet to come and to be.

- Why is it important to know that the journey is not simple or linear?
- How do the highs and lows make the journey meaningful?
- What is the downside of being comfortable rather than seeking and continually looking?
- Why is it important to remember that we have not reached our final destination? How should that knowledge shape how we journey through life?

Over the next six weeks we will be going on a journey of faith. Psalm 131 is a journey of discovering who we are, who God is calling us to be, and how to live out our faith. It invites us into the daily journey of surrender as we calm our hearts, quiet our souls, hope in the lord, and trust now and always.

Psalm 131 (CSB)

Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I do not get involved with things too great or too wondrous for me. Instead, I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like a weaned child. Put your hope in the Lord, both now and forever

CLOSING THOUGHT: Eugene Peterson

"The road we travel in the well-traveled road of discipleship. It is not a way of boredom or despair or confusion. It is not a miserable groping but a way of blessing."

CLOSING PRAYER: Psalm 131

Lord, my heart is proud and my eyes are haughty. I get involved with things greater than myself. I surrender control to you. Guide my spirit toward peace. Help me discover the calm and quiet of a weaned child. Lead me into maturity. I put my hope in you, for there is faithful love and redemption in abundance. I am trusting you to guide me both now and forever. Amen.