

## Psalm 124: A Song of Help

**Theme:** As we ascend to the house of the Lord, we remember that God is on our side.

### Psalm 124

1 If the Lord had not been on our side—let Israel say—  
2 if the Lord had not been on our side when people attacked us,  
3 then they would have swallowed us alive in their burning anger against us.  
4 Then the water would have engulfed us; the torrent would have swept over us;  
5 the raging water would have swept over us.  
6 Blessed be the Lord, who has not let us be ripped apart by their teeth.  
7 We have escaped like a bird from the hunter's net; the net is torn, and we have escaped.  
8 Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

**Icebreaker:** Have each member of the group answer the following questions. These questions allow the conversation to start off in safety and fun.

- Who was one of your childhood best friends?
- What type of things did you do together?
- Did they keep you from trouble, or help you get into trouble?

### Opening Prayer:

*Heavenly Father, maker of heaven and earth, help us to understand this week's psalm. Not simple to understand it in our head, but to feel in our heart and to live in in our lives. May it reframe our story and reshape our perspective as we walk with you and ascend to your house. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*

### Opening Meditation: Listening Prayer

At the start of the session, you will read through Psalm 124 three times. You can use the version above (Christian Standard Bible), another version, or three different versions.

Have your group sit and listen. Invite them to listen for a theme in this Psalm. Listen for repeated phrases that are echoed in this psalm. Listen for words or ideas that resonate with them. Listen for God to speak to you through this psalm.

### Discuss:

- What was something that you heard, felt, or experienced while listening to this psalm?
- Were there any word or phrase that resonated with you in this Psalm?
- What do you think is the central theme or message from this psalm?
- Did you sense any connection between this psalm and other scripture?
- What questions about this psalm came to mind as you listened?

### Sermon Discussion:

This past Sunday we explored Psalm 124 in worship. Take some time to review the sermon, discussing the themes, application, and questions.

- What were some of lessons of Psalm 124 that were discussed during the sermon?

- How did these lessons connect with you and your spiritual life?
- How were you encouraged to apply the lessons from this psalm to your life?
- Share any questions or concerns that came to you from this week's sermon?
- How can the lessons from this Psalm help you on your spiritual journey?

**Quote:** "This song is so vigorous, so confident, so bursting with what we can only be called reality that it fundamentally changes our approach and our questions period." Eugene Peterson, pages 66-67

**God is on our side:**

Psalm 124 begins with the shout, "If the Lord had not been on our side" and ends with the proclamation that "Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." Within the remaining verses the psalmist comes to the conclusion that yes, God is on our side!

**Discuss:**

- On a typical day, do you feel that you can say with confidence, that God is on our side? Why or why not?

**From *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction***

The first lines of the psalm twice describe God as "for us." The last line is "GOD's strong name is our help, the same GOD who made heaven and earth." God is for us. God is our help.

For some people, statements like that are red flags. They provoke challenges. I, confident and assured in the pulpit, can announce, "The Lord is for us... God's strong name is our help." But no sooner am I out of the pulpit than someone is saying to me, "Look, I wish you would be a little more careful about your pronouns. How do you get this our? The Lord might be for you, he might be your help. But he is not mine. Listen to this..." Through the week I get case histories of family tragedy and career disappointment, along with pessimistic recounting of world events. The concluding line is a variation on the theme: "How do you explain that, you who are so sure that God is for me?"

I am put on the spot of being God's defender. I am expected to explain God to his disappointed clients. I am thrust into the role of a clerk in the complaints department of humanity, asked to trace down bad service, listen sympathetically to aggrieved patrons, try to put right any mistakes I can and apologize for the rudeness of the management.

But if I accept any of these assignments I misunderstand my proper work, for God doesn't need me to defend him. He doesn't need me for a press secretary, explaining to the world that he didn't really say what everyone thought they heard in that interview with Job, or that the quotation of his word by St. Paul was taken out of context and needs to be understood against the background paper that Isaiah wrote.

The proper work for the Christian is witness, not apology, and Psalm 124 is an excellent model. It does not argue God's help; it does not explain God's help; it is a testimony of God's help in the form of a song. The song is so vigorous, so confident, so bursting with what can only be called reality that it fundamentally changes our approach and our questions. No longer does it seem of the highest priority to ask, "Why did this happen to me? Why do I feel left in the lurch?" Instead we ask, "How does it happen that there are people who sing with such confidence, 'God's strong name is our help?'" The psalm is data that must be accounted for, and the data are

so solid, so vital, have so much more substance and are so much more interesting than the other things we hear through the day that it must be dealt with before we can go back to the whimpering complaints.

The witness is vivid and contagious. One person announces the theme, everyone joins in. God's help is not a private experience; it is a corporate reality-not an exception that occurs among isolated strangers, but the norm among the people of God.

#### **Discuss:**

- Do you ever feel like you need to defend God against non-believers? What was the outcome?
- Peterson suggests, "The proper work for the Christian is witness, not apology." How does our experience provide a stronger witness for God than our argument?
- What are some of the ways that continually remind you that God is on our side?
- What are some of the things that cause you to doubt that God is on our side?
- Why is this truth, that God is on our side, a struggle for so many of us to accept?
- What do you think it means that God is on our side?

#### **Quote by Eugene Peterson**

"The psalmist is not a person talking about the good life, how God has kept him out of all difficulty. The person has gone through the worst. And find himself intact. He was not abandoned but helped." The final strength is in God. Who didn't go off and leave us."

#### **Read through verses 2-7.**

- What are some of the obstacles that the psalmist lists that might have people thinking that God is not on their side?
- Remember, these are poems, and the psalmist is using metaphorical language. What might be some of the struggles that the Psalmist, or the people of Israel, face?
- Do any of these obstacles or struggles resonate with you? Which ones, and why?
- How does the Psalmist view these same examples as reasons to know God is on our side?
- In the midst of hardship, this psalm discovers God's hand of help. Share examples from this psalm. Share examples from your own life.
- How do these examples help us know that God is at work, helping us?

Through all these examples, we see that God has rescued the psalmist, and us, in ways that could only be truly declared as miraculous, not drowned or ripped apart, escaping the hunters net. If we reflect on our lives we may also be able to see how God has rescued us from uncertain danger.

Quote: "Psalm 124 is a magnification of the items of life that are thought to be unpleasant, best kept undercover, best surrounded with silence, lest they clutter our lives with unpleasantness. They are a very real part of life and they constitute a dominating, fearful background for many... Psalm 124 is an instance of a person who digs deeply into the trouble and finds there the presence of God who is on our side. In the details of the conflict, in the minuteness of a personal history, the majestic greatness of God becomes revealed. Faith develops out of the most difficult aspects of our existence, not the easiest." – Eugene Peterson

#### **Discuss:**

- How has God's working in your life, through the minuteness of your personal history, helped develop your faith?
- How can reflecting on Psalm 124 give you confidence in God, as you continue to go through the struggles of life.

**Optional Musical Interlude:** Listen to Psalm 124 by Poor Bishop Hooper, reflecting on the words and music, allowing God to speak through this psalm into your heart.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=kn-qWoRdmu4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kn-qWoRdmu4)

**Final Thoughts:** From Timothy Keller's *The Songs of Jesus* (page 330)

**Covenant.** Four times God is called the Lord, the God who enters into a covenant with us by Grace. This unfamiliar word means his love is "locked on to us" in unending commitment. Thus he is always for us. But the psalmist could not see what we see. God is ever on our side, because in Christ our sins can't bring us into condemnation. So not "trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword... will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35, 39) Since the Maker of Heaven and Earth is our help, we will not fear. What could be against us?

**Application:** This week, take some time to reflect on how God has been on your side, protecting you from being attacked, swallowed, or swept away. Share your story with someone else.

Reflect:

- What is something you discovered today during our study of Psalm 124?
- How will this psalm help you through life's journey this week and beyond?
- How can you apply this psalm to your life this week?
- How can you support the people in your group as they journey through Psalm 124?

**Closing Prayer:** Invite the group to share any prayer requests for the week ahead. Then have one person close in prayer or invite the group to pray for each other.