

Psalm 134: A Song of Praise

Thesis: Because the Lord has blessed us, we are invited to bless others.

Psalm 134:

¹ Now bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD
who stand in the LORD's house at night!

² Lift up your hands in the holy place and bless the LORD!

³ May the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.

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

Remember a time you went on a road trip.

- Where did you go and who did you go with?
- How did it feel when you finally reached your intended location?

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.

Reflect: We have reached the end of our journey through the psalms of ascent, though our pilgrimage is far from over. We started this journey in November with Psalm 120 with several starts and stops. We have traveled through Advent and Lent and come out the other side to singing a song of praise, "Lift up your hands in the holy place and bless the Lord!"

- How have the pilgrimage through the psalms of ascent impacted your spiritual journey?
- Was there a specific psalm that you found moving or inspirational?

Meditation: Listening Prayer

At the start of the session, you will read through Psalm 134 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 134 in worship. Take some time to review the sermon, discussing the themes, application, and questions.

- What were some of lessons of Psalm 134 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 of concerns that came to you from this week's sermon?
- How can the lessons from this Psalm help you on your spiritual journey?

Bless: Psalm 134 repeats the word bless three times, twice commanding the people of God to bless the Lord, and once asking God to bless them. As a group, write a definition for the word bless (don't look at the definitions below).

Compare the group definition to that from the dictionary.

Bless (verb)

1. to consecrate or sanctify by a religious rite; make or pronounce holy.
2. to request of God the bestowal of divine favor on
3. to bestow good of any kind upon
4. to extol as holy; glorify
5. to protect or guard from evil (usually used as an interjection)

Quote: from A Long Obedience in the Same Direction (Eugene Peterson)

There are two words which are translated "blessed" in our Bibles. One is *'ashre*, which describes the having-it-all-together sense of well-being that comes when we are living in tune with creation and redemption. It is what we experience when God blesses us. The word in Hebrew is used only of men, never of God.

The other word is *berakah*. It describes what God does to us and among us: he enters into covenant with us, he pours out his own life for us, he shares the goodness of his Spirit, the vitality of his creation, the joys of his redemption.

Discuss:

- What is *'ashre*? What is *berakah*? How are they similar? How are they different?
- What is the difference between us blessing God and God blessing us?
- How does the understanding of these two types of bless help us understand the intention of this psalm?

Quote: from A Long Obedience in the Same Direction (Eugene Peterson)

God gets down on his knees among us, gets on our level and shares himself with us. He does not reside afar off and send us diplomatic messages; he kneels among us. That posture is characteristic of God. God enters into our need, he anticipates our goals, he gets into our skin and understands us better than we do ourselves.

Because God blesses us, we bless God. We respond with that which we have received. We participate in the process that God has initiated and continues. We who are blessed, bless. The people who learn what it is like to receive the blessing, persons who travel the way of faith experiencing the ways of grace in all kinds of weather and over every kind of terrain, become good at blessing.

continued..

There is no better summarizing and concluding word in all of Scripture than blessing. It describes what we most prize in God's dealing with us and what is most attractive when we evaluate our way of living.

"Bless God" is an invitation; it is also a command. You are here because God blessed you. Now you bless God. Do that for which you were created and redeemed; lift your voices in gratitude; enter into the community of praise and prayer that anticipates the final consummation of faith in heaven. Bless God.

Discuss:

- Peterson suggests that God's character is a posture of blessing. What does that mean, and how does that help us understand God better?
- How have you seen God's blessing in your life?
- Peterson then suggests that our response to being blessed by God is to bless others. How does our blessing connect with our blessing others?
- How have your blessings from God lead you to bless the lives of others?
- Why is it important to understand that the psalmist challenge to bless God is both an invitation and a command?
- Peterson says we were created and redeemed to bless God.
 - Why is it significant that we were created to bless God?
 - How does knowing we were redeemed to bless God make us aware of our own sinfulness?
 - How does it remind us of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross?
- How does having a proper understanding of blessing, God's and our, help us on our pilgrimage of faith?

Quote: from A Long Obedience in the Same Direction (Eugene Peterson)

Blessing is at the end of the road. And that which is at the end of the road influences everything that takes place along the road. Having arrived at the place of worship, will we now sit around and tell stories about the trip? Having gotten to the big city, will we spend our time here as tourists, visiting the bazaars, window shopping and trading? Having gotten Jerusalem checked off our list of things to do, will we immediately begin looking for another challenge, another holy place to visit? Will the temple be a place to socialize, receive congratulations from others on our achievement, a place to share gossip and trade stories, a place to make business contacts that will improve our prospects back home? But that is not why you made the trip: bless God. Our stories may be interesting, but they are not the point. Our achievements may be marvelous, but they are not germane. Our curiosity may be understandable, but it is not relevant. You are here because God blessed you, now you bless God. Bless the Lord.

Discuss:

- As you reflect on our journey through the Psalms of Ascent, what have been some of the highs and lows over the past few months?
- How have interacting with these psalms, hearing sermons on them, studying them in small group, listening to them in song, and discovering a deeper understanding of God been a blessing to you? What stories will you have to share with others about this pilgrimage?

Optional Musical Interlude: Listen to Psalm 134 by Poor Bishop Hooper, reflecting on the words and music, allowing God to speak through this psalm into your heart.

<https://youtu.be/7b5jYPQNS3I>

Final Thoughts: From Timothy Keller's *The Songs of Jesus* (pg 341)

Worship. The pilgrims finally arrive in Jerusalem and come into the temple. They see the priests and Levitical singers who work the night shift. They were working in relative obscurity, yet God blessed them, as he does everyone who is faithful to their calling. The greatest thing is to live in his presence always singing thankfully in our hearts to the Lord, remembering we can only do so "from Zion," where Jesus' blood was poured out for all God's people.

Application: "You are here because God blessed you, now you bless God."

- How might you apply God's blessing for you into the lives of others?
- How can your small group bless God this week?
- How can our church bless God this year? What are some practical steps we can take to be a blessing to others in our community?

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.