

# The Songs of Degrees

The Church at Gun Hill

## Psalm 120

**As we stand on the bottom of the 15 steps that are the 15 Songs of Degrees, the key thought is the cry for deliverance. It is the cry of a believer to the Lord for help, a cry from a heart that wants to be closer to God.**

In the Song of Solomon we find a picture of the believer in the Shunamite woman. At the beginning of that book she is one who knows her Lord, the king, the one whom she loves, but she is conscious of her own neglect and the separation between her and her beloved. **"My own vineyard,"** she declares, **"have I not kept."** It is a story of neglect, but it is also a story of a yearning for the Lord.

The Song of Solomon traces her ascent, through various experiences, until she finally knows that full communion with her Lord. It is a going on and a going up to Him. She becomes as one who has hind's feet, as it says in [Habakkuk 3 v 19](#) - that is, she is able to walk in high places. Do we not yearn to be among those that have full communion with God and who are enabled to walk in heavenly places?

There was the awakening of a desire to know the Lord. This is the first step: that realisation of our need as believers for more of the Lord; to realise, perhaps, that we have neglected our own spiritual state. The beginning is that experience of a longing to be where the Lord is and to be in Him. In [Psalm 73 vv 24,25](#) there is a revelation of such a desire: **"Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."** Oh, that we might have such a longing in our hearts that cries out to our Lord Jesus and to none else.

Note when the Psalmist cried to the Lord. It was in his distress, a phrase which in Hebrew means "in a tight or narrow place." He discovered that things in life were closing in on him. Does the Lord allow things like that to happen? Yes, He does. In [Hebrews 12](#), it explains that the Lord uses such experiences that we might become partakers of His holiness. In our distress we cry out to Him.

The Lord had brought the Psalmist to a narrow place in his life where he found no way to move. All he could do was to cry out to the Lord in his distress. The Lord brings us to such places that we might at last look upward, get our foot, as it were, on the bottom rung of the ladder and start moving Godward.

As you read this Psalm you realise that the writer is tired with what people have been saying, the deceit and lies. He is tired of being attacked and criticised. He wants to be where the Lord is. Finally, He wants reality. Sometimes it takes a long time to see that in the world around us there is nothing but lies and deceit. The god of this age is a liar. Is that where we seek life? Maybe we think that friends in the world are better than our brothers and sisters in church. Beware! What seems to be friendship in the world is deceitfulness. Even news and current affairs reports in the media are fantasy more than truth. The trouble is that the world thinks it is truth. The only reality is Christ, and yet the world talks about Christ as if He is fantasy. Let us go on to know Him.

Isaiah saw the problem when He saw the Lord, high and lifted up, the Lord at the top and he at the bottom of the ladder. Then he realised how wrong everything down here is. **"I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips."** It is not so much a

matter of getting out of the world, but, rather, getting the world out of us. Certainly the Bible tells us that He has delivered us from this present evil world. Nevertheless, we are in the world; we are not to be of it. If we have allowed some of the world principles to get into our lives we might find them manifesting themselves in the things that we say. Jesus said that it is out of the heart that come all those things that defile, and the lips show what is in the heart. Gossip, backbiting, lying, telling half-truths - we need to examine what is in our hearts, for such things do not come from the Lord. We need to cry out to the Lord. In my distress, I cried out to the Lord.

In the end, the lying lips and the deceitful tongues of the world will reap what they sow. **"Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper"** is what they will receive. Lying, deceitful words are like arrows which, once released from the bow, cannot be recalled; they are like coals which burn on in the memory of the victim. However, one day the Word of the Lord will come as a sharp arrow and will pierce into those that have slandered and injured with the tongue. The coals of juniper portray that judgment which burns forever. Juniper was a plant which, when placed on the fire, burned for a long time. Let us want to be delivered and separate from all that worldly deceit and seek that full communion with our Lord Jesus Christ in heavenly places.

Further, we find that the Psalmist had been living in the wrong place, in Mesech, dwelling in the tents of Kedar. Meshech was descended from Japheth, not from the line of God's people, the line of promise through Shem. Kedar was descended from Shem but of the line of the flesh, for he came through Ishmael. In the Song of songs, the bride says that she is as black as the tents of Kedar. We do not want to be in the wrong place, out of line with God's promise, in a place of blackness and darkness. Mesech was to the North of Israel; the tents of Kedar were to be found to the South of Israel - anywhere but in the land of Promise. Are we dwelling, spiritually speaking, in the wrong places, anywhere but where God wants us to be. If so, let us cry out with all our being, "Deliver my soul, O Lord...You've saved me, but I've not been living the right life. I've not been living in the promises of God. Let me get my foot on that first step that leads upward."

Jesus said that we should abide in Him. That is our dwelling place, not in the things of the world. Look at the worldlings. They hate peace. When you get down to it, they do not want the same things that you want. The moment you speak in the Lord, you are for peace, but you will find very quickly, they are for war. They will attack you and be against you, for the world is against Jesus. In my distress I cried unto the Lord ..... AND HE HEARD ME.

## Psalm 121

This is the second of the fifteen steps or ascents to communion and fellowship with God. The theme of the first step ([Psalm 120](#)) was crying out to the Lord for deliverance. The second step, here in [Psalm 121](#), is looking up. We cry out and God hears us. We look up and we see His saving and keeping power that is able to bring us safe into His presence. It has often been said that, if you are feeling down, look up! In the New Testament, the Scriptures exhort us to look up, to lift up our heads for our redemption draws nigh.

In Psalm 120, we find the believer looking around and finding himself dwelling in the wrong places. He saw distress on all sides; when he spoke in peace, those around him wanted war. However, in Psalm 121 he looks up. It is there, and there alone, that he can find help. Do you have problems? Don't look around. Oh, the world may be ready to offer advice and counselling, but your only help is going to come from above, from the Lord. Look and live!

In [Isaiah 45 v 22](#), the Lord speaks to all, **"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else."** When we respond to God's word in faith,

that first response of looking is what the Lord wants. He wants our gaze to be directed solely to Him.

Of course, in the Song of Solomon, we have the same idea of moving upward, to know full communion with the Lord: [ch 2 v 8](#) ***"The voice of my Beloved! behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills"*** So where is the sight of the soul drawn to here? It is upward to the mountains and hills, to where our Beloved is. It was not very long before the bride heard the voice of her beloved (v10) saying ***"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."*** And so we climb up to the second step. When the Israelites sang these songs of old, perhaps on their pilgrimage journey to Jerusalem for one of the great feasts, were their eyes not directed upward, to keep always in view Mount Zion, their final destination? They were marching upward to Zion, the beautiful city of God. On their way to Jerusalem, the Israelites of old kept Mount Zion in view. They looked up. It encouraged and strengthened them on the journey. Let us look to the Lord as it instructs us in [Hebrews 12](#): ***"Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."***

The Psalmist said, ***"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills."*** In [Psalm 133](#) he says, ***"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."***

Looking up brings us to the place where the Lord has commanded the blessing.

Even on a Sunday morning we look to the hill of Calvary, Golgotha, where our Saviour shed his precious life blood to purchase our redemption and our eternal salvation. We might also look to the hill called the Mount of Olives from where Jesus ascended into heaven and to where he is returning. And now we look to heaven itself, for we have not come to mount Sinai but to the heavenly Mount Zion where there is blessing and joy for evermore. [Hebrews 12 v 22](#). That is where our help comes from.

As the Psalmist lifted his eyes to the hills, he then asked the question, ***"From whence comes my help?"*** The answer follows immediately, ***"My help comes from the Lord."*** We really ought to change the A.V. punctuation here. [Jeremiah 3 v 23](#) makes this quite clear: ***"Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel."*** Nevertheless, hills and mountains draw our attention upwards. There are such heights in our spiritual experience, which, as we ponder them and share them with one another, they draw our gaze upward, in expectancy, to the Lord Himself.

As we look to the hills our gaze is drawn to the Lord Himself, the one who is the great Creator of all things. The Lord delights to draw our attention to Himself. Indeed Jesus pointed out that no one could come to Him unless the Father draw Him. (John 6 v 44). In the Song of songs, the bride cries, ***"Draw me, we will run after Thee."*** God does the work but we must respond in faith. As He draws us we respond by climbing up those ascents which are the subject of these Psalms. It is possible to know God drawing us to Him and yet to resist and refuse to respond. However, God would have us to respond and to run after Him.

In [Hebrews 12](#) we also get encouragement to run after God: ***"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking (away) unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."*** As God draws us, we respond by laying aside everything that would hinder, and by running along that pathway set before us by the Lord, looking away and upward to Jesus. The analogy is clear. There are clothes which, though in the world they are quite acceptable, for running would be most unsuitable. Similarly, there are many things which,

whilst in the world they are quite normal, for the believer they are a definite hindrance to our spiritual progress. We can see that the sin which does so easily beset us must be put out, but so must those seemingly harmless things which get in the way.

Then, in I Corinthians 7 v 29, where Paul has been speaking about marriage, he gives us a valid point: **"But this I say brethren, the time is short...but I would have you free from carefulness"** (i.e. free from worry and anxiety). That is how we can be if we are looking upward. With the Psalmist we can say, **"My help is from the Lord."** As we receive the promise that there is the possibility of full communion with the Lord, let us not be daunted by the greatness of the possibility; let us not be beset by doubt and unbelief. Look to the Lord and be strong in faith. Then we shall take that next step up.

Our help is from the Lord who is our keeper. He is the Creator who made all things; He is able also to keep. From Psalm 120 to Psalm 121, the soul is encouraged to leave the places where it should not be (Mesech and the tents of Kedar) and to go on with God, for God is our help and keeper. We have the same exhortation in Hebrews 4 v 16 where it says, **"Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."** Surely the Lord will help us as we respond and step out.

Here, in Psalm 121, is the way in which He helps us. He will not suffer your foot to be moved. He will not allow it to slip. As you climb upwards in your spiritual experience, you may be tempted to think that you are going to slip. Be assured: the Lord will keep your steps. He will be there with you, for He wants you to get to the top.

In Psalm 18 v 33, the Psalmist says, **"He makes my feet like hinds' feet, and sets me upon my high places."** In other words, the Lord makes us to be sure-footed in our ascent to the heavenlies. Psalm 116 vv 7-9 is also interesting: **"Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with thee. For Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living."**

Now we find also that the Lord will be a shade or a defence to us on our right side. The right side has less protection than the left, for one holds the shield with the left arm and the sword with the right. However, the Lord is our sure defence. If we have left ourselves momentarily unguarded, the Lord is there to make sure that the enemy does not get the slightest advantage. Hallelujah!

Even in the heat of the day, when things seem to be getting unbearable, the Lord will be with you so that the sun does not weary you; neither will the moon affect you by night. The Lord will keep you from the terrors of the night. By day and night the Lord will keep you from ALL evil. The promise to the believer who moves on in the Lord, is that the Lord will keep from ALL evil. He will preserve your going out and your coming in. As you move out in faith, out of your current circumstances, the Lord will be there. It may be a big step of faith for you, but the Lord will keep you. Furthermore, He will bring you safe to the place where He wants you to be: He will preserve your coming in.

II Peter 1 vv 3-11 reminds us that we have escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust - that is a moving out. There are exceeding great and precious promises given by which we are made partakers of the Divine nature. There is much that can be added to faith and if these things are in us and abound we shall not be barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, **"...you shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."** He will preserve your coming in.

We are being encouraged to go up. The pathway may not be smooth but what this Psalm teaches us is that the Lord is always there, in every circumstance. The more you want God, the more you want to be there at the top in full communion with God, the more difficulties you will encounter, the more temptations will seem to come your way, the more opportunities to go back to the world and the more enemy attacks there may be. It is taking up daily the cross to follow Jesus. However, no matter how difficult the way, the Lord keeps and preserves.

***"I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings."*** (Psalm 40 vv 1-2)

How long will it last? Can I fall from this? Listen to the Psalmist (121 v 8): ***"..from this time forth, and even for evermore."*** He is able to keep you from falling (Jude 24).

## Psalm 122

This is the third of the Songs of Ascents expressing the desire of the soul to go on to know full and constant communion with the Lord. First there was the cry for deliverance from one who had wandered away from the Lord. The Lord heard him. Second there was the upward look, for our help comes from the Lord. We are looking unto Jesus. Third, we come to Psalm 122.

Now the Psalmist is on the move. Jerusalem is in sight. The walls are visible, built compact together; the gates can be seen, so much so that believers can confidently assert that their feet will stand within those gates. The House of the Lord can be espied from afar. Progress is being made. It is not now just a question of the upward look alone, but there is actual movement towards the house of God.

However, movement is not the main theme of the Psalm. Certainly that is happening and, as a result, there is much gladness. ***"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."*** In Psalm 120, there was distress. How things change when we take those initial steps in the right direction back to God! Jerusalem is the city of peace, the city of righteousness. That is where we want to be, in the place where peace and righteousness rule.

I would say that the major theme of this Psalm is fellowship. One key word is "together". The idea of fellowship comes out very much in this Psalm. This seems to be the next step - the fellowship of saints. When we get away from God, we tend to persuade ourselves that first we must get right with God and afterwards we shall be ready to join the people of God again. God puts it the other way round. He brings us back to the place of fellowship that we might be restored to communion with Him. John speaks about ***"having fellowship with us"*** and that ***"our fellowship is with the Father."*** (1 John 1 v 3) That is where we left the track when we forsook fellowship with God's people. That is where the Lord returns us. "Just me and the Lord" fellowship is a pretence. Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. (Hebrews 10 v 25)

This Psalm introduces the idea of movement back to the place of blessing in the Lord. However, that move is in fellowship with the people of God. The Lord indeed is our help but He meets us in the fellowship of His people. ***"I was glad,"*** says the Psalmist, ***"when THEY said unto me, Let US go into the house of the Lord."*** In Psalm 120 and 121, he is very lonely but here he joyfully receives the invitation to join together in a fellowship. He cried out for help and the answer came through God's people. The invitation to go to Jerusalem, to

the house of God was the answer he needed. That was the beginning of moving back to fellowship with the Lord. Was he expecting a flash of lightning, a vision or an angelic visitation? He did not get them, but he got an answer through the people of God.

Paul points out the same principle at work in Ephesians 3 vv 20,21: ***"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages..."***

Do not neglect meeting together with the Lord's people. Meet as often as there is occasion, otherwise you will miss those opportunities to hear what the Lord is saying and to progress in communion with the Lord. Here, there is no place to glory about individual answers to prayer or about personal revelations, for in the Church the glory is to the Lord. There we are workers together with God. In the church, which is the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12) we are dependent on one another so that none can glory.

In the Song of Songs, where this same upward climb is traced, the Bride is seeking her Lord. She cries out in her despair to know where He is. The reply comes immediately: ***"If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock..."*** (Song of Songs 1 v 8). In other words, the instruction comes to us that we are to go where the people of God are, for where the flock is, there will the Shepherd be also.

We have seen so far in this Psalm that, if you have fallen out of fellowship with the Lord, then, by getting back in fellowship with the people of God, you will find that you are on the way back to communion with the Lord. Now in this Psalm, there was not only a going on together but also the anticipation of a standing together. ***"Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem."*** Isaiah calls the walls of Jerusalem, Salvation, and all her gates, Praise. (Isaiah 60 v 18). There is security there and worship. In Nehemiah, where the Lord's people built up the walls and gates that had once been broken down, we can discover that each gate is named and has a special significance, reflecting in type the complete work of our salvation. Within those gates, all is secure, complete and provided for. Every aspect, in each name and in all the names, is totally catered for. Outside those gates we shall surely fall; inside WE shall stand. There is stability.

Do you recall those words from Galatians 4 that instruct us that Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all? That is where we belong. That is home. That is where we experienced the new birth, where we have and can grow and where all the love and care we need is to be found. That is where we can stand. In Ephesians 6, Paul exhorts us to stand: ***"...that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil..."*** (v11) ***"...and having done all, to stand..."*** (v13) ***"Stand therefore..."*** (v14). We can stand nowhere else than in Christ Jesus, in heavenly places, together with all the people of God.

The gate was also the place of justice in those days. In Psalm 130 the question is asked, ***"If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"*** None could, of course. But in the gates justice is dispensed. Here we learn that through God's grace and the precious, shed blood of Jesus, another has borne the penalty. We can enter within salvation's walls. We can stand. We can praise. Standing together with God's people we may praise and exalt His Name in a way that we do not attain to on our own. If you move away from the place of "all saints", you move away from that praise. You cannot stand on your own. Together, there is a wonderful assurance of His grace and salvation. Let us go on together, to the house of the Lord. Let us stand together within those gates which are praise. The Lord has purposed it. He baptised us into one body that we might be strong in the Lord and that we might rejoice together.

Backsliding often starts with neglecting the fellowship of God's people. The idea may come that you can praise Him on your own, where you are. Gradually you will slip away. You could praise and worship Him but more and more you will not. Your reading of the word of God will slip away; your prayer time will get briefer and briefer until it is practically non-existent. Worldly things and values will take over.

The Bible actually tells us who those people are that will separate themselves from the assembly of God's people and stand by themselves, those who think they can go along on their own. Jude 17-19 says, **"Beloved, remember the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, not having the Spirit."** They think they need no one else; they are guided by their own bodily appetites (sensual) and are not the Lord's. The letter to the Romans makes it quite clear that if any have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. (Romans 8 v 9).

Jude, however, goes on to encourage: **"But you, beloved, building up yourselves (together) on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves (plural) in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."** Do not forsake that assembling of yourselves together with the Lord's people.

As the people of old looked towards Jerusalem, they saw the place where God wanted them to be. In it was an example, for the city was built compact together. That is what the Lord wants for us. The Hebrew word חָבַר (translated 'compact') really conveys the idea of 'joined' in 'fellowship'. The people of God are not thrown together in any old fashion; they are joined together. There is a wonderful order and provision, just as there is in the city of God. It is God's dwelling place, as it says in Psalm 48: **"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God,...Beautiful for situation, ..., the city of the great King."** In verse 12 it says: **"Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces..."** There is strength, security and wealth and that is for us too.

The purpose of this marvellous building, of 'being fitly framed together' is so that it may be told to the generation following (Psalm 48 v 13). We are that generation, the generation of those who are born again of the Spirit. We are being told something here. Ephesians explains it for us: **"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly framed together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth ...maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."** (ch4 vv 15,16) Here is the revealed purpose of fellowship - that He might supply every need. God has joined us together in fellowship in a perfect plan for supply and provision.

There is a place for you in this building. There is no need to compete for position and power; God is the Master Builder. Further, there are thrones of judgment. In this fellowship there is government and order. Where there is order there is peace. Let us also pray for the peace of the place where God's people are, then we shall see prosperity and blessing as we journey together on our heavenward way. Then shall the Lord be exalted and praised in the midst of His people.

## Psalm 123

***"When the road is rough and steep; fix your eyes upon Jesus, He alone has power to keep; fix your eyes upon Him"*** So we sing. In many ways that is the theme of this Psalm. Although Jesus is not explicitly mentioned nevertheless, we can, speak of Him (Luke 24). Our eyes are upon the Lord.

There is also the idea of discipline here, certainly the first steps of discipline. We need to know that in our walk along the Christian pathway if we are to press on the upward way, as the Psalmist is doing in these Songs of Ascents; if we seek to be in that place of full and constant communion with God. I am not talking about part-time, Sunday Christianity, but a moment-by-moment walk with the Lord. In Psalm 120 it is the cry for deliverance. Then in Psalm 121 there is the upward look to the Lord from whom comes our help. Restored fellowship is the theme of Psalm 122, going on in the company of others to the place where the Lord is. It is in the fellowship of the Lord's people that we can begin again if we have backslidden. We can return to fellowship with God and His people.

In this present Psalm there is a discipline to be learned. We learned it when we first came to the Lord. We learn it again when, after a period of backsliding, we return to Him. We have to know that we must trust the Lord completely and Him alone. Although we are in the company of God's people, it is the Lord who is our help. Our help is not in man, nor in the strength of man, but in God and God alone.

Here we find the Psalmist further along in his journey. In Psalm 120 he was far away from the land of promise. Then he looked up and soon was moving with others in the direction of the holy city. The walls and gates were in sight. In this Psalm, I believe he is actually in the Lord's house. There he realises that God is not actually encased in a building but He dwells in the heavens. So we find too that God is not limited to a building, or a denomination, or a group of people, but when we are among brothers and sisters, we are encouraged, as the Psalmist was, to lift up our eyes to the heavens. Hallelujah!

### **Just Inside the Door**

The Psalmist has entered the house of the Lord. Remember, in the time of David there was no temple in Jerusalem, just the tabernacle. The tabernacle was in three parts: the outer court, the holy place and the holy of holies, where God's presence was manifested above the mercy seat. As he entered the place, he stood just inside the court. Much further over was the holy place where only the priests could go, and beyond that the Holy of holies where only the high priest went once a year. The Psalmist is standing right on the fringe of it all, just inside the door, as it were. He begins to take it all in, but, because he is near the entrance, he can also hear what is going on outside.

Maybe this is your experience as a believer. You may be far away from God and you know you are far away from Him. You are missing the blessing of God, but you have begun to take that pathway back to fellowship with Him. You have now reached the stage where you are entering in, but you are only just inside the door. Far off you can see the glory of the presence of God as it is enjoyed by others, those who, in priestly ministry, are close to the Lord. Your eyes are now able to see it again but, at the same time, you are so close to the point where you came in that you are very conscious of the life that is going on outside.

In some ways it is like the prodigal son. He decided to go home. Imagine the scene. The father is excited as he sees him in the distance. He runs to meet him, throws his arms around him and so on. The son has been away from home for many years. He has returned home but he is a weary, empty man. He has got nothing; he has wasted



everything. Now he has come back to that place where he once knew such sweet fellowship. He is unsure of his welcome. You can imagine him reaching the gate. Father is with him. And as they step inside the gate the son stops, looks and, from a distance, begins to drink in again all those scenes of past blessings. He wants to soak it all in, to appreciate it fully before going any further. Child of God, as you draw near, look at the welcoming glory of the Father's house and be assured that He wants to draw you closer still.

As the prodigal returned home and, from a distance, observed the old familiar sights, he saw the fields where he laboured as a young man. Perhaps his elder brother was still there, hard at work. He would remember the joy and feasting at harvest time, the fulfilment of a year of profitable toil. Then he would compare it with the more recent years, years of profligacy and waste. Good times? In retrospect, the only harvest they had produced was one of misery and heartache. Over there were the gardens where, after a hard day's work, he would rest and relax in the cool of the evening among family and real friends. How marvellous it used to be! How he had lived life to the full then! How satisfied he had felt! But he had gone away, far away. Things had not been as he had imagined they would be. He thought he was going to have a fantastic time, but it had all been empty dreams. Now he was back. He could see all that he had missed and wondered whether he could ever get back to where he used to be. Would he be trusted? Would he be loved and looked up to?

He stood and looked. There was his father's house. It seemed so splendid and safe. There was food and enough to spare in his father's house. But it was still in the distance. Would he ever get close enough again to enjoy glorious fellowship, or would he have to be content with a place on the fringe? Father was with him but, as yet, he did not appreciate the fulness of his father's love for him. He stood and drank it all in, from a distance. Did he deserve any more?

The Psalmist was in the same situation. He was just on the inside, not daring to go any further, contemplating past blessings but not daring to hope for them again. It is hard coming back, when you have been away from the Lord. Why? The problem lies with us. It is the pride of the flesh, the pride of life. However, just as for the prodigal son and for the Psalmist, so also for us, the Lord wants to draw us back into full fellowship and abundance of life.

We say, ***"Lord, I am not worthy; I once knew fellowship but I've blown it. I went my own way. I am not worthy to be called your son."*** Yet, in spite of all that, God wants to draw us back into full communion with Him.

### **A Servant but Restored to the Family**

The Psalmist learned very quickly what he had to do. We too have to become obedient servants and, in so doing, learn that we are children of the living God. The Psalmist wanted to be a servant in his father's house but he found that in coming to a place of humility, of being willing to do what the father wanted, that he was restored to sonship. As you read this Psalm, that is the secret. Verse 2 declares: ***"Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters... so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that He have mercy upon us."*** Notice that the eyes of the servant are directed towards the master's hand. In those days the master would communicate with a signal, a wave, a gesture. The servant had to watch the master's hand, with all care and duty. The guests might notice nothing. There was no stream of revelation by words or conversation, but there was a close communion between master and servant whereby the slightest move of the hand would be instantly understood and obeyed. Have you moved back to that place where His will is your command?

We must learn to look to Jesus so that we may know, even though others may perceive nothing, exactly what the Lord would have us to do. Romans 6 v 22 instructs: **"But now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."** Paul's first realisation was not "What can I do for God?" but, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" The servant of those days would not dare to move on his own initiative but awaited the master's bidding. Learn to wait, looking, ready to obey. Paul was soon welcomed as "brother" by Ananias. You too will receive a family welcome.

David is looking at the hand of the Lord as a servant looks to the hand of his master. For us too the hand of the Lord is mighty in our lives. It is through the hand of the Lord that we have deliverance. To the Israelites of old God said, **"I brought you out of Egypt with a mighty hand."** In Isaiah, God asks, **"Is my hand shortened that it cannot save?"** There is deliverance by the hand of God.

There is also direction. **"If I ... dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me...."** (Psalm 139 vv 9,10) This is the leading, guiding hand of the Lord, showing us what to do.

Then the hand of the Lord is a defensive hand. Psalm 124 tells us how the Lord has defended us: **"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side.."** The hand of God is strong in our lives to defend and protect, as Psalm 63 v 8 puts it: **"...thy right hand upholds me."** Jesus Himself promised, in John 10, that you would be held secure in the hand of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, within the Father's hand.

Further, the hand provides discipline. The Psalmist cried, in Psalm 32, **"Your hand was heavy upon me."** In Hebrews 12, the apostle speaks of the Father's chastening every son whom He receives. Why? It is because He loves us and wants us to be partakers of His holiness. He has a firm hand.

However, it is also a hand which distributes. Marvellous! God's hand just gives and gives. It is an open hand. Therefore David prays for mercy and grace.

Finally it is a hand which demonstrates welcome. It is an outstretched hand. God called to Israel through Isaiah, **"I have stretched out my hand to you all the day long..."**

All that we need is there in the hand of God: deliverance, direction, defence, discipline, distribution of grace and mercy, and the demonstration of welcome. It is a mighty hand, a guiding hand, a strong hand, a firm hand, an open hand and an outstretched hand.

David, just inside the courtyard of the House of God, is looking to the hand of the Lord. He wants to see a welcome there. Do you remember the story of Esther? She went to see the king on a matter of urgency, but no one entered his presence uninvited. She took her life in her hand crossing the threshold into his presence and there, just inside, waiting, watching his hand to see whether it would angrily convey a signal to the guards to remove her or extend the royal sceptre in welcome. Of course, there was a glorious welcome, for the king loved her. God is just like that. He loves us. Maybe we come in fear, unsure of our welcome. We stand just inside the door wondering whether He is too angry with us. Look at His hands. Will He reject in anger? No, God's hands are stretched out in welcome. **"Him that comes to me,"** said Jesus, **"I will in no wise cast out."**

## The Tempting Sounds I Hear

However, where the Psalmist is standing, he can hear what is going on outside. It is essential that he pays no attention to these sounds and voices. He must obey the welcoming hand of the Lord and move in closer. In this Psalm, David is experiencing discipline. Will he go forward in trust, or will he turn round and go out again?

What else does he experience, just inside the door? Well, there are others who are content to be just there - in close contact with the world outside, but with just a touch of religion and respectability. They are at ease. These very people are filled with scorn. You may have met the attitude from such "churched" people. They are full of contempt and pride. They mock and laugh with words like, "You don't want to get fanatical. You don't want to go any further than that. That's enough... just one foot inside the door, once a week. Tuesday? Thursday? Come to the theatre with us. Come to our party." And so it goes on. They may seem to be religious people, but their hearts are in this world. In Amos 6 v 1 it warns, **"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion and trust in the mountain of Samaria."** They are looking at a false religious system and at what man can do. For them, putting in a token appearance is acceptable, but God requires 100 per cent.

Paul experienced much opposition which he referred to as buffetings - a thorn in the flesh. Three times he asked the Lord to take it away from him but God said, **"My grace is sufficient for you."** Unlike the Psalmist, Paul was not just inside the door. If you are crying to God to take away the scorn and the contempt that other people pour on you, listen to what He is saying: **"My grace is sufficient."** As you trust the Lord and His grace, the flesh will become less sensitive to the opposing voices. Through the Spirit you will be mortifying the flesh and its deeds. You will be moving closer to the Lord, until you get so close to Him that you will not hear those voices any more. They will still be there, but it will no longer be of any consequence to you. This is the discipline that the David was going through. All the mocking and jeering was going on around Him but he had to keep his eyes on the Lord. **"When the road is rough and steep, fix your eyes upon Jesus."**

## Conclusion

These are the disciplines to be learnt when we first came to the Lord. If we go away from Him then, when we return to Him, we have to go back through them again. In Hebrews 10 v 32 it points out: **"But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great fight of afflictions; partly whilst you were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions..."** They went through that too. It was hard for them at first but eventually they learned that it was a matter of "looking to Jesus" (Hebrews 12). There is no pill for post-illumination depression; just fix your eyes upon Jesus. Do not turn around and run the other way. Do not give up, but look steadfastly to Jesus. Remember, the Lord promises: draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you.

Maybe you have never gone astray, but all your Christian experience has been lived 'just inside the door.' Today God is calling you to a closer communion with Him. Come right into His presence. Keep your eyes on Him. You will not be a religious nutcase, but you will know fullness of life in Him.

**"I hear Thy welcome voice that calls me now to Thee."**

## Psalm 124

We now come to the fifth of the Songs of Ascents. If we look at this song of deliverance carefully, we will find that it is like a summary of progress so far. The tenth is also a sort of summary, the completion of the second stage, and, of course, the fifteenth is the final in the series. So, in the fifteen Songs of Degrees, there are three groups of five Psalms. Five, in the Scriptures, is the number of Grace, whereas three is the number of God. This is Divine grace being brought before us as we trace the ascent of the soul to the place of full communion with the Lord.

### Sweet Remembrances

In this Psalm, David remembers what the Lord has done for him, sweet remembrances of the keeping power of the Lord. You see, he is now in Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord. He is no longer far off and astray. He is abiding in the Lord. We too, in John 15, are exhorted to abide in the Lord, just as the branches abide in the vine. If we ever go astray, the Lord wants to bring us back to abide in Him. David is now abiding. It is not full or constant communion, but he is moving onward and upward in that direction.

Here the Lord reminds him of His grace and mercy along the way. As he meditates on this, his heart is filled with praise and adoration for the Lord. Today we come round the table of the Lord, a time of sweet remembrance of all that the Lord has done for us. We were once astray or, as Ephesians puts it, afar off, strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God. To use the picture that Jesus gave, we were like sheep lost on the mountain, in danger, far away from the safety of the fold. But Jesus came to find us and save us, to bring us to Himself to enjoy rich fellowship and communion. God always wants to draw us back.

As David thinks on these things, his heart is filled with praise to God. When we come round the table and think how the Lord rescued us from that pathway that was leading to destruction, how he gave His own life on the cross, shedding His blood to save us, how our hearts fill with praise and worship. It is good to pause and think back.

How sweet to think on what the Lord has done when we come round the table on Sunday! How it tunes our heart to praise! It does concern me sometimes, during our time of worship, to see people just gazing blankly around them, waiting for the end of the meeting. They seem unmoved, untouched and yet they take the bread and wine. How can it be? Do those emblems stir no precious memory of the Lord's grace? We come to worship the Lord and, if God's Word is really getting down into our heart, and we are being strengthened with might in the inner man, then our whole being should be taken up with Him. We would worship Him just as David worshipped Him, because he knew he was there only as a result of the grace of God. He had done nothing himself. But for the grace of God he would be lost.

By the grace of God and through what He has done for us, and because His Spirit has been poured out into us, we can love Him with our entire being. If you do not feel that love, if you do not feel that well of adoration springing up within, then there is something wrong. The New Testament challenges us: **"Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith!"** Now I do not want to put doubts into the minds of people who are saved, but there are people who put on a show of religion, who are not saved. You should experience a deep love for the Lord and a desire to worship Him.

David had reached this fifth step and he was saying, "Praise the Lord! Look what He's done for me! He's lifted me up out of the miry clay. He's set my feet upon a rock and established my goings. Hallelujah! If it had not been for the Lord on my side, I would have been lost."

But look, David is not alone. The saying is taken up by all the Lord's people. **"If it had not been the Lord on our side, now may Israel say..."** Everyone joins in together, because the experience of salvation is something we share as brothers and sisters in the Lord. We can all say the same thing. None can say we got this far by our own goodness and strength. No. The Lord helped us and lifted us up. So we rejoice together. We worship and adore Him together, not just with words but from the heart, in Spirit and in Truth.

### **If it had not been the Lord who was on our side...**

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side... The wonderful thing that comes out in this Psalm is that, if we are on the Lord's side, He is on our side. Or, as Romans 8 puts it, **"If God be for us, who can be against us."** Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. What blessed assurance! What security!

Now David did not always feel like this. There were times when he felt like giving up, or when he questioned whether God was with him. He may have wondered why the Lord was allowing such circumstances. That may happen to you too. However, David is now in a position to look back and review his situation. He can see those places where the going was tough, but now, having gone through the experience, he can see the purpose of it and how the Lord was there all the time. He can see that prayers were answered. How foolish to have worried!

The Psalm also reveals who it is that stands against us. As a Christian you are not only loved but you are also hated. The world hates you: **"...the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."** John 17v14. In the Song of songs, where the bride is in search of her beloved, the watchmen treat her roughly and try to hinder her search. As we go on, seeking to be closer to the Lord and leaving the things of the world, the world will manifest its hate. The world system is governed by Satan, whom the Bible calls 'the god of this world.' By the world system, the devil holds millions in blindness and bondage. It is a huge network that ensnares people. It consists of political and economic systems which determine its direction and which glory in the name of civilisation. It boasts of the Arts and Sciences, the repository of all human ability and knowledge, the culture that is essential for 'life' today. Its social, philosophical and religious framework is a selfish, twisted imitation of 'Love God and love your neighbour...' These systems rule where God should rule. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side... they would have swallowed us up.

On earth today, there is a one world order emerging. It is happening day by day. Politicians have spoken openly about a new world order. People will go along with it because it is an interlinking network, an organised system. Be part of it and everything will go smoothly; break away from it and there will be problems. Everyone will be against you. The world will hate you.

We have been delivered. By ourselves we could not have escaped, but He has translated us from Satan's kingdom, the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of His dear Son. It is a work of His grace. David had experienced this too. He speaks of all those that were against him; the moment he moved out, he found that there was opposition. Nevertheless, he could say that he was where he was because the Lord had helped him.

### **Escaping the World System**

To escape the force of gravity you need a rocket. An aeroplane will not do. Like religion it can not get you away from the pull of the world. But a rocket breaks free. For a while you would have to endure the discomfort of multiple G-force as the world tries to hold on to you,

but eventually you escape. So too, as the Lord lifts us to the heavenlies, for a while we may experience discomfort, but when the Son makes us free, we are free indeed. 1 Peter 4 v 1 puts it like this: ***"Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin; that he should no longer live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."***

The way in which the Satanic world order manifests itself is revealed in this Psalm. One way is beastlike. No matter how 'nice' people may seem, the ungodly will ultimately show their beastlike nature. In the garden of Eden, Satan appeared as a serpent; in the book of Revelation he is the dragon. These are they, says David, who would swallow us alive (A.V. = "quick") Yes, the world would love to squeeze the life out of us. You are free.

The world order under the influence of Satan will manifest itself in many ways, all intended to lead us astray. Often it is beastlike, seeking to swallow us up alive. From the serpent in Eden, and the roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, to the fierce dragon in Revelation, the devil and his agents are continually seeking a prey. Yes, the nice, refined, cultured world around us would try to squeeze the very life out of us.

At times the sheer volume of adverse circumstances threatens to overwhelm us, like rising floodwaters or a raging torrent. The proud waters seem to rise over our soul. When floods come rushing in, they sweep everything away. Sometimes people get too close to the sea, maybe, for instance, climbing down onto those rocks at Land's End. Suddenly, without warning, a huge breaker sweeps them from the rock and carries them out to sea. They thought they were safe, that there was no danger, but, in a moment, they were gone. That is how the world would like to attack us. It is better not to stand too close to the danger, but, when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall raise up a standard against him. (Isaiah 59) The Lord is on our side.

The world system seems to be full of traps for the believer, like the snares set to catch birds. Now, no snare looks dangerous or repulsive; they would never work. Snares are deceptive. They are baited with something attractive. There may even be a decoy - something that looks alive but is only an imitation of the real thing. Oh, how the enemy uses the world system to lure unsuspecting Christians and then get them trapped! Praise God, there is a deliverer who breaks the snare and sets us free.

Let us learn from our experience. Let us look to the Lord at all times. Do not let us be deceived again! Let us keep going up and up to full communion and fellowship with Him. Our help is in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

## Psalm 125

Having been brought back to the place where it should be, we now find the soul abiding in the Lord and beginning to see and understand spiritual truths - things concerning the Lord. It is not just a matter of abiding in Christ but, as it says in John 15, of Christ abiding in us. It is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We have no other hope and no other strength but Christ. In reality we know the one who said, ***"I am the Resurrection and the Life; He that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die."*** This is the One who abides in us.

In Psalm 125, we see the heart of one who has been delivered from the clutches of the world; one who has been set free. In the previous Psalm, the world was revealed in various forms: as a beast, as a flood and as an enticing snare set to entangle us. But Christ has set us free. The one who was once ensnared will have a heart of love, a grateful heart and, more than that, a heart that will trust the Lord who has delivered him.

## Trust

The theme of this present Psalm is trust. If we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His delivering power, if we know that He has set us free and has kept us, then we will trust Him more and more. This theme of trust develops into one of complete consecration. This is something which should be manifest in our lives. At every stage, as we look forward, there are fresh implications, some of which we may never have dreamed of. The Lord never forces us against our will but he opens to us the implications. There will be the expectation of a response of consecration. Do you want to go on with the Lord, further and higher?

Romans 12 vv 1,2 explain the matter of consecration in terms of presenting our bodies in reasonable service. As you do so, the Lord will give you revelation concerning His will. As you trust Him and commit your life to Him, the way ahead will become clearer.

The Psalmist here is receiving revelation from God about those that trust in Him, about the future and about security in Him. Trust is a key word here. As we give our lives to the Lord, we must trust Him. We have to stop trying to arrange things for ourselves. We have to stop manipulating situations and influencing other people, even though we may think that we are doing it for the Lord. God wants us to trust Him. Unfortunately, the way that we are brought up in evangelical circles is to arrange things, but we must not.

The problem is that we are tempted to set things up according to our logic. We do not have to find special meetings for evangelism for someone that needs to be saved, or healing for someone who needs healing, or for worship when we feel in need of a 'pep up'. Now it sounds as if I am saying that we should not go to other meetings. No, what I am saying is that you must not get the idea that you can arrange circumstances in order to get the desired result. Listen to the Word of God. It is possible that you might feel rebellious as you read these words. No one likes to be told that they are going about things in the wrong way. God wants us to take our hands, the hands of flesh, off His work. Paul said, **"In my flesh dwells no good thing."** If we let fleshly principles arrange things, it will be an abomination in the sight of God. If you want people to be saved, do it God's way. Tell them the gospel. Share your testimony. **"Be ready always to give an answer to everyone that asks you a reason of the hope that is within you with meekness and fear."** (1 Peter 3v15) Trust the Lord! Tell them! God gave YOU the opportunity. Use it! If people need to be healed, be obedient to the word of God. **"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord."** (James 5v14). There is no authority to drag to the other side of the country, following some famous name. If you want to worship the Lord, gather together with the Lord's people, in the place where you are, and worship Him there. Obey the Lord! In the end it comes down to trust.

According to this Psalm, those that trust the Lord are wonderfully blessed. Trying to make God's promises happen by arranging circumstances is not trust. It may be 'good' psychology; it may be salesmanship; it is not trust. Trust is believing that God will do the work. Trust is being committed to God and His word. It is believing still, even when things do NOT seem to be working out. We walk by faith, NOT by sight. You are happy to arrange things because you can SEE something happening, but that is not faith. Take your hands off God's work.

## Living in the Heavens

It may seem to you that nothing ever happens, but listen to God's word. They that trust will be secure; they will be safe; they will be kept. If you say, "Nothing happens," you are contradicting God and His word. If you say, "Nothing ever happens," you are accusing God of not being true to His promise. Here, it assures us that they that trust will be kept. **"They**

***shall be as mount Zion which cannot be moved and abides forever.*** Zion is the royal, the Divine dwelling place. This is the place which, according to the Psalms, God has chosen for His dwelling place. In Jerusalem will be His tabernacle, but in Zion will He dwell.

Zion speaks of where God dwells; it speaks of the heavenly place of God's sovereign rule. Is your heart God's dwelling place? Is Zion where you also dwell? For the one who trusts the Lord will be as mount Zion, having the character of mount Zion - God's dwelling place, immovable, eternal. In Ephesians, it tells us that God has raised us up to be seated together with Christ in heavenly places. That is where we are today if we are born again. We have been raised to sit with Christ in the heavenlies where God reigns.

***"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*** We are dwelling in the place where God's will is always done and our prayer is that His will may be done on earth - as it will eventually in the millennial kingdom. We are dwelling in the heavenly places where God reigns supreme. There, God's will is being done; it can never be overthrown. Mount Zion cannot be removed but it abides forever. It is eternal. In the Lord we are in the same position. We are in a place of eternal security. If you like, our roots, like the upward-reaching, aerial roots of the vine - are there, in the heavenly places. We can never be removed. At the end of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul exhorts us: ***"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is NOT in vain in the Lord."***

### **Steadfast and Unmovable**

How can we be steadfast and unmovable? Well, Paul said "therefore". The "therefore" points to what he said previously. He had just been talking about the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and His victory over death. Therefore, because Jesus is the mighty Victor over every enemy, you can be steadfast and unmovable, just like mount Zion. We are abiding in Him and He in us.

Now, we have not come to a system of rules and regulations. We have not come to the law. In Hebrews 12 v22 it says we have not come to mount Sinai but to mount Zion... unmovable, eternal... ***"and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling..."*** We sing the hymn "We're marching to Zion..." but Hebrews 12 tells us that we have already arrived.

Those that trust the Lord will be like mount Zion. Nothing shall overthrow them. Nothing will bring them down to utter and permanent defeat. If God be for us, who can be against us? Hallelujah!

### **Kept by His Mighty Power**

This Psalm gives us wonderful promises of the Lord's keeping power. It tells us that as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is about His people, from henceforth even forever. Jerusalem, speaks of the earthly testimony or manifestation of the kingdom of God. Zion speaks of the heavenly, Jerusalem the earthly. Jerusalem is the city of peace. On earth, we may know the peace of God. We may manifest that peace in our lives here and now. We have the protection of the Lord all around us.

At the end of Psalms 124, David said that our help is in the name of the Lord. That word 'help', in Hebrew, עֲזָרָה, comes from a root that means 'surround'. Our help is from the Lord;



He surrounds us. From far off the city is hidden from view, because it is surrounded. We are in this world, but not of it. The Lord surrounds us with His protecting and guiding care. The people who trust the Lord are like mount Zion that shall never be removed, but they are also like Jerusalem, surrounded by God's keeping power. They are secure. In Colossians 3, it assures us that our lives are hid with Christ in God. We are kept by Him. Does that mean we are now incapable of sinning? No, it does not, but it does mean that God protects us from the evil and wickedness that would seek to destroy us, to swallow us up alive. The Lord keeps us. In v.3 it speaks of the rod or sceptre of wickedness. The sceptre represents rule, power and authority. They that trust the Lord are kept. Although that rod of wickedness may come against us, nevertheless, we have an eternal salvation. We are kept securely. Although the flesh may lust against the spirit (Galatians) and sometimes it may seem as though we cannot live as we should (Romans 7), yet, there is a place of victory. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from the law of sin and death. Although there may be battles, within and without, to withstand evil and wickedness, we have a wonderful victory in the Lord. That sceptre of wickedness shall not prevail. Sin shall not have dominion over you.

The victorious promise for every believer is that sin shall not have dominion over us. We are not its slaves any longer. So the rod of wickedness shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous. This word 'lot' means the portion or destiny of the righteous. Do you see what that means? - as you trust the Lord, you will be kept eternally by Him. Like mount Zion, you will not be moved. You are surrounded by the mountains of God's protection and care and even though wickedness may be working in the outward manifestation of the kingdom of God, even though there may be enticements to sin, you have an assurance from the word of God, you have a victory in our Lord Jesus Christ, that sin will not rule over you. The rule of sin is broken. You will never lose your salvation for that sceptre of wickedness will not rest upon the final portion or lot of the righteous. You are in victory. You will never lose it. Jesus has broken Satan's power. In Hebrews 2 it says that Jesus destroyed death and him that had the power of death, that is the devil.

## **Conclusion**

Look at these three things again in summary. They that trust in the Lord will be like mount Zion: they will never be moved. They will always be the dwelling place of God. They are like Jerusalem, protected and guarded in this world by the Lord. Even though they may be subjected to temptations, occasionally making the odd mistake, yet, if they sin, they have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, so that the sceptre of wickedness will never mar the inheritance. You will not lose your salvation. You are secure in Jesus.

So the Psalmist concludes: But peace shall be upon Israel. Those that trust the Lord are so secure in Him that they know nothing but God's peace in their lives all the time. God will also fill our hearts with His love, His joy and that peace that passes all understanding. We are forgiven and secure in Him. Peace shall be upon all the people of God, for being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Psalm 126**

Psalm 125 was about trust. That prepares us for going on, for going higher, for drawing closer to the Lord, for knowing a deeper and richer communion with Him. Going on is also the way of the cross. That is the way home. If we are going to tread the way of the cross then we will need to have complete trust. We must be secure in our hearts that the Lord knows what He is doing with our lives. There is no need for us to be reduced to a state of panic, squealing out because we did not think that the Lord would let this or that thing

happen to us. We will not have to wonder whether everything has gone wrong. No, for Psalm 125 shows us that this stage is a time for trusting, and they that trust the Lord shall be as Mount Zion which cannot be removed but abides forever.

### **Returning to the Lord with Joy**

Now let us remember that the soul has been climbing upward through these songs of ascents. It has been astray but is now returning and is like Zion, where God dwells. This is the Lord's doing for in Psalm 126 v 1 it declares that the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion or, rather, the 'returning' of Zion. The marvellous thing is that as the soul has returned, so the Lord also has turned. It is the story of the Prodigal son all over again. As the son returned, so the father turned and was there already, waiting to receive him with open arms. That too is the theme of this Psalm. It is also our testimony, as many who have returned to the Lord after distant, wasted months or years. The Lord welcomes us back.

But it is more than that. The Lord draws us back to Himself. In James there is the instruction ***"Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you."*** He draws us with the cords of love. In the Song of Solomon, the bride is drawn higher as she hears the voice of her beloved as he comes leaping on the mountains - up in the heavenlies, ***"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."*** (Song 2 v 10) She cannot find him whom her soul loves because she has been content to remain at the same level. The Lord calls and draws her higher, as He also draws us, into a fuller communion and fellowship with Himself.

As we draw near to God and He draws near to us, then our mouth is filled with laughter and our tongue with singing. Some can laugh artificially but that real laughter, which the Lord gives, comes spontaneously, bubbling to the surface. It is more than speech. It communicates in a powerful way because it is the outworking of a fulness of joy, a joy that is there because of what the Lord has done.

The tongue is filled with singing. If you sing out loud while you are in the company of others, they will ask you what you are so happy about. Again, singing is an expression of joy. The saints of God sing. They sing a new song and we shall sing that song through eternity as we express the fulness of joy of being in the presence of God.

The laughter and singing here are a manifestation of a close communion with the Lord. So much was that joy evident that the heathen unbelievers round about sat up and took note. They said, ***"The Lord has done great things for them."*** They had a testimony to the nations who lived around them, so that others could say, "Their God is real."

### **Let Your Light Shine**

In Nehemiah 6 v 16, when the Jews had finished building the wall and gates of Jerusalem, ***"all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God."***

Jesus said, ***"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*** (Matt 5 v 16) Let us show the fellowship and communion that we have with the Lord. You see, here was a people that adored the Lord, so much so that the unsaved saw and took note. Some, as the enemies of truth in Nehemiah's time, are downcast, defeated; some stand in awe; others begin to ask and want to share this great experience. When God's people are seen to be praising Him in reality and power, it will have an effect.

The adoration of God from a returning, accepted people has an effect upon those whose lives are still far from Him. The disciples who were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost spoke, in other tongues, of all the wonderful works of God. Crowds were attracted and Peter had the opportunity of preaching the gospel. Three thousand souls were saved that day. Initially they were drawn by a praising people. The crowd could see the work of God. They could say, **"The Lord has done great things for them."**

Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi but at midnight they sang praises to God and the prisoners heard them, prisoners who could say, "The Lord has done great things for them." Does your life of praise draw such a comment?

Now the people of God were quick to reply, **"The Lord has done great things for us whereof we are glad."** If we are glad then we should be overflowing. **"My heart overflows with a goodly theme."** Let the joy come bubbling out and people will observe for themselves just as they did in this Psalm. You can be part of such a praising people, those who can praise God because they know what it is to have been astray but to be returning to the Lord, finding acceptance in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Way of the Cross**

The third part of the Psalm is more agonising. We are accepted and we are joyfully adoring, but there are some hard times ahead. The way of the cross lies before us and, if we will go further and higher into fuller communion with the Lord, we must tread it. It is for our benefit. In Hebrews 12 we are reminded that no chastening, for the present, is pleasant but is necessary. Afterwards we receive the peaceable fruit of righteousness. We become partakers of His holiness without which no one will see the Lord. The Psalmist cries out, **"Turn again our captivity."** In one sense the Lord already has. We are saved. But other things hold us captive, the things which are not fitting. As we follow the way of the cross the Lord will remove them from our lives, so that we may be free indeed.

**"Turn again our captivity,"** cried the Psalmist. His testimony was that the Lord had already turned again the captivity of Zion. However, though the people of God were saved, there was need of further deliverance. After the Lord had saved Israel out of Egypt, He had to get Egypt out of Israel. He has saved us out of this world; He has turned again our captivity, but so often He has to get the world out of us. Paul gloried in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, **"by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."** (Galatians 6 v 14). The enemy would seek to get us ensnared and fettered again; he would try to use the things of the flesh and of the old nature to hold us back. We need daily deliverance; moment by moment deliverance, taking up the cross daily to follow Him. And the Lord will deliver us. Remember, deliverance also includes saving and keeping you from falling. Paul could say with confidence, in II Corinthians 1 v 10, that God has delivered us from death and does deliver and will yet deliver us... past, present and future.

Now the Psalmist qualifies his prayer. Turn again our captivity as the streams in the south. In Hebrew, that word south has become quite familiar to us. It is the word "Negev". Today we know the Negev as the desert area to the south of Israel. In fact, "Negev" means "parched place", "dry ground". In the dry, hot period of the year, those streams in the desert dry up. There are the channels designed to take water, but there is no water. Sometimes we can get like that. We are designed to be channels to take living water, but under the heat and burden of the day, if we are not trusting the Lord, we can dry up. We should be full of the Holy Spirit, overflowing. O for that renewed filling and anointing, just like the streams in the desert when the rainy season comes, flooding, overflowing and bringing life to the surrounding areas. We need that refreshing every day. Are you thirsty? Jesus invites you to come to Him and drink, and out of your belly shall flow rivers of living water (John 7). Jesus is speaking of the Holy Spirit.

Hosea 10 v 12: ***"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you."***

## **Principles of Sowing**

Finally we come to the principles of sowing. The sower goes forth bearing precious seed. It is precious seed for as well as providing food for the immediate future, some of it will produce seed to be sown the following year. If it has been a hard year and there have been drought conditions, if there is not much food around, the farmer may look at his seed basket and be tempted to take that to feed his family there and then. However, if he does not sow that seed, there will be nothing at all next year. He could say, "What's the point? The ground is hard and dry; probably nothing will grow anyway." But he must be obedient to the way God has shown and sow that seed. Before he does so he must break up the fallow ground so that the seed can fall down into the earth. He will be trusting God to bring rain that the seed might grow and produce fruit.

So the sower goes out in tears, weeping. Hard labour is involved. Maybe the cold wind is biting into his face bringing tears to the eyes. Maybe he is thinking of his family at home who really need this food which he is throwing into the ground, but it is in the hope that, having died, it will bring forth fruit. There may be many arguments that we offer to God for why we are not doing what He wants us to do. The present needs that we have prevent us. What is the point anyway? It is so hard. Nothing is ever achieved. People are not really interested in the gospel. Nobody takes any notice. Listen to the promise of God's word: ***"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."***

Going forth in this way is like treading the way of the cross. There is death involved. We have to give out that precious seed continually. But as we go forth, we do so in trust, looking for the showers of rain, the mighty power of the Holy Spirit to bring life and fruitfulness, as we obey His word. It may mean hardship; difficulties may have to be faced; there may be weeping and tears; but there is a "doubtless" there in the word. It is a promise of coming again with rejoicing; a coming again with sheaves of plenty. Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning.

## **Psalm 127**

### **The Foundation and the Building**

As we are engaged upon the business of building on a sure foundation, we must be clear that we have a revelation from God. Moses had the revelation of a Divine pattern for the tabernacle; Solomon had a Divine pattern for the building of the temple; we must have a Divine pattern. What better place can we find that revelation from God than in His word? As we meditate on His word, we will receive clear guidance from Him. We shall be steered away from our own efforts and our own abilities. We do not want to build in our ideas, attractions, entertainments to appeal to the worldly desires of those around us. We want His word to be held forth that people might be saved.

The foundation that we are building on is not one of good works or of human efforts, nor of entertainments or attractions, but the sure foundation, a tried and tested foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ. So the Scriptures teach us that one foundation has been laid; no other can be laid or added to it. Upon Him we build. ***"Upon this Rock, I will build my church."*** That Rock is Jesus Christ and the revelation of Him as the Son of the living God.

The materials that we are building with, likewise, must be Divinely approved, not human effort and ability. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul instructs how we should be building on the foundation. He speaks of gold, silver and precious stones and then of wood, hay and stubble. Eventually every man's works are going to be tried by fire. All that we can do in our own strength will not stand the test of fire. Only the Divine work, gold, silver and precious stones, will stand the test of fire. How are we building on the foundation? In every aspect of our lives it is Christ that should be being manifested, the foundation and also the visible superstructure of our lives. To change the metaphor for a moment, it is like the fruit of the Spirit. Christ is the root and stem; we are the branches, but the fruit we bear should be Christlike.

All the building is fitly framed together in Him. He is not only the foundation, but the chief cornerstone which holds the whole building together. This is what Abraham was looking forward to, four thousand years ago - the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. We are seeing the realisation of it.

We are workers together with God. At the end of Mark 16 we read that the apostles went out and preached the gospel, the Lord working with them, confirming the word with signs following. It was evident that the work was of God. When Paul came to the Corinthians he made it clear that he was not coming with the words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that their faith might stand in God. Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.

Not long after the flood, men took it into their minds to build something that would reach up so that its top was in the heavens. God was not in it. It was a work of their own effort and imagination. Therefore, God destroyed it. Those things that are of high esteem in the eyes of man, are an abomination to God. Let God reveal His will to us; let God establish His work; let God provide and enable us; let God guide and direct us. Let us work with God and see that the Lord is building the house.

This is the eighth of the fifteen "Songs of Ascents", and those who are good at Maths will realise that that makes it the middle or central one of those Psalms.

In the Scripture, the number eight has to do with resurrection, for Jesus rose on the eighth day (the first day of the new week). It is to do with eternity, because eternity's day is, as it were, the eighth day, which will dawn after the millennial seventh "day" of rest. Eight is also the number of Jesus. Seven is completion, perfection. Eight is plu-perfection. It is the fulness of the perfection of Jesus.

This song of degrees, the eighth one, is central. It is no surprise, therefore, to find much that relates to Jesus. It is like the keystone of the whole structure. If you have an arch, the keystone is the central one which holds the whole thing together. We know from the Scripture itself that Jesus Christ is like the keystone, in whom the whole building is fitly framed together. In this Psalm we do find that the Lord is the keystone, the one who gives sense to it all. Unless the Lord build the house, those that build it labour in vain. This is the central theme.

Human effort or strength, which we might be able to put into the work of the Lord, is worthless. All human strength and effort is empty and worth nothing in God's reckoning. Unless the Lord is in it, it is useless.

Not only are we the building, for Peter says in his epistle that we are built together as living stones, but we are also the builders. In 1 Corinthians 3, we are described as building on a sure foundation. Then, as the basis of it all, Jesus tells us that He is the builder: ***"Upon this***

**Rock, I will build my church...**" So really, He is the Master builder, and we are workers together with Him. Unless He is doing the building work, in our lives and in the assembly, we are wasting our time.

## The Watchman

Then the Psalmist takes us a step further: **"Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain."** The watchman is looking out for any signs of trouble or danger. There are those who watch over the people of God, but it is the Lord who keeps. No pastor, leader, teacher or prophet can keep you from falling or from going into sin. They can only teach, warn, guide, reprove, but in the end the power of keeping the saints is the Lord's work. **"He is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."** (Jude 24)

Over the centuries there has been the temptation among those who have had the care of God's people, to impose their own wills, to enforce rules and regulations so that people are kept under a burdensome law. Sadly, rules do not deliver you from sin; they do not keep you nor present you faultless in the end. The Lord, by His Spirit and His own mighty power, is able to keep you. The watchman has a function, to alert to approaching danger, but the people, if they respond properly, will look not to the watchman for deliverance but to the Lord. If the people do not turn to the Lord, then the watchman can watch and shout all he wants, but he will do so in vain. The Lord is thy Keeper. (Psalm 121 v 5)

Now if the people are not listening to the voice of the watchman, he can shout all he wants but it will have no effect. The Lord must be our Keeper but we must listen to the voice of His servants who watch and bring us the Word of God.

If there are dangers coming from outside, there are also dangers within. The watchman would be on the lookout, not only for the danger of enemies from without but also for dangers occurring within the city, such as fire or burglary. God made Ezekiel see the wickedness and evil ways of His people. He was to warn them so that the people might be aware of the danger within, turn from their ways and cry out to God for deliverance.

Further, the watchman also keeps his eye on the times. He shouts out during the night at regular intervals. In Isaiah comes the question, **"Watchman, what of the night?" "The morning comes,"** the answer returns.

The watchman was aware of the times too. If the people of God are listening to the words of the Lord's watchmen, and are listening to the Lord who keeps them, they will also be informed about the times. They will be looking for that glorious morning of our Lord's return.

## Our Role in the Work of the Lord

There is a work of building going on; the Lord is the Master builder. There is a watchfulness; the Lord is our Keeper. There is a time limit; Jesus is coming again.

When we understand that the Lord is at the centre of this work, then it helps us to get our position in the right perspective. We can work ourselves out, eating, as the Psalm says, the bread of sorrows, constantly burdening ourselves with the idea that we must do something for the Lord. We can neglect sleep and food to throw all our energies into OUR work for the Lord, but is the Lord building? Is the Lord keeping? Is this the will of God or is it some imaginative scheme of our own mind, crafted in the style of worldly success? Jesus invited those who laboured and were heavy laden to come to Him and He would give them rest. The Lord does not want us to burn ourselves out for Him. Paul's question of Jesus was,

**"What do you want me to do, Lord?"** In all that you are doing for the Lord, is it what He has directed you to do?

When we get guidance from the Lord, we also get the enabling to do what the Lord wants us to do. The life that we are called to live may not be easy. Paul's record of his travels and experiences is not one to desire lightly. He was, however, doing what God wanted him to do, in the power of the Lord. People did not like him, argued against him, threw him out, persecuted him, stoned him, but he had no nervous breakdowns, because he was doing what God wanted him to do.

In the church today, it is so possible to imitate the method and the organisation, the management skills and such like, that you find in the world and which are suitable for human organisations. Associated with all those ways and means are all the disorders and conditions that we find in the modern world, of nervous tension, of stress and strain, breakdowns, stomach ulcers and so on. It is all brought on by worry and anxiety. The word says here that it is vain for you to get up early, to go to bed late, to pack your day full of the energy of the flesh. It is useless. The Lord must be in it. If the Lord is doing the work, where is the need for worrying. He gives His beloved sleep. Be careful for nothing! In other words, do not worry about anything! It is God's work.

Now the Psalmist is not encouraging us to be lazy. No. This is, in fact, a song of degrees for Solomon. It is the only one that is for him. Solomon had much to say, in the book of Proverbs, about lazy people. We have to respond in faith and thus be about the work of the Lord. There is no excuse for laziness. This is working together with the Lord and He with us. It does not depend on your strength, as it says in Zechariah, **"It is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord."**

### **Blessing and Reward**

Finally there are the blessing and the reward of the Lord, which take up the last three verses of the Psalm. Over half the Psalm is to do with the blessing of the Lord. The first part of the Psalm emphasises that unless the Lord is in the work everything is worthless and vain. In the end of the Psalm, however, we discover that when the Lord is in the work, then there is much fruit and blessedness.

The last three verses of the Psalm speak about children. The reason for this is that the Lord wants us to realise that there is fruitfulness when the Lord is in the work. When you are involved in the Lord's work, it is not a matter of burdens, worry and anxiety, but of fruitfulness and blessing.

Children are a heritage from the Lord and the fruit of the womb is His reward. They are like arrows. The man who has his quiver full of them is a happy man. Spiritually speaking this is true too, for when we see others coming to that new birth as they put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, born again of the Spirit, becoming children of God, then we rejoice. It is wonderful to see. It is a great blessing. Such children are a heritage. What you inherit, you have not worked for. It was not earned. Those who have become part of the family of God did nothing to deserve it. When we see God's grace being manifested as people are born again, as they become children of God, it is wonderful. It is an inheritance from the Lord.

However, it says also that they are the fruit of the womb; they are a reward from the Lord. The fruit of the womb points us back to the time before birth occurred. Birth does not occur unexpectedly. A period of growth, which began at conception, has been taking place. Similarly, there is such a period leading up to the new birth. The seed of the Word is sown in the heart. There is a time of growth; there is a time of struggle and labour; then there is the

birth. After the labour, the birth of the child is a joyous time of reward. In this, we, as workers together with God, see this glorious fruit of the new birth as a fantastic reward. This is not a reward of a pat on the back or anything that would elevate self and pride, but the reward of seeing the fruit of our labour in the Lord. Does the Word of God not assure us that our labour in the Lord is not in vain? (I Corinthians 15 v 58)

## **Conclusion**

The Psalm begins by telling us that if we build and work without the Lord, then it is in vain. But here, at the end of the Psalm, where we discover the blessing and reward of God, we learn that when we abound in the work of the Lord always, such work is never in vain. Hallelujah! Children are like arrows in the quiver. Arrows are special. Each one is carefully shaped so that it will fly true. Its shaft must be straight, its flights well balanced and its head sharp, otherwise it will not fly accurately or strike its target. When we see people being born again, entering the kingdom as children of God, we do not want to leave them as mere babes. We are working together in the process of building up each other, of building up the people of God, of warning and directing. We want to see these new converts being made into true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they may be useful in the Lord's work, that they too may go out and reach others for Him.

There are three weapons in the Scripture which remind us of the work of God. There is the sword which is used in close combat; then there is the spear which can be thrown a fair distance; finally there is the arrow which can be shot over a very long distance, so that the word of God can reach to the ends of the earth. Do we not desire to see people going out, full of the Holy Spirit, to serve God? Do parents not feel proud when their children grow up and it is evident that they have been brought up well? They are straight and true. They know where they are going. Is it not the case also spiritually? We are not content just to see people being born again. We want to see them being formed for the Lord's use. Ready like arrows to fly out into enemy territory to effect God's work.

The Psalm, of course, refers to their being like arrows in the hand of a mighty man. Well, of course, that mighty man is our Lord and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Happy is the man that has his quiver full of them. My desire, and I am sure that it is your desire too, is to see our assembly full of "arrows" - those who have been formed and disciplined, straight and true, fully conformed to the will of the Lord and who are now ready to speed on any and every mission that the Lord gives them to do. Such people will not be ashamed. Paul exhorted Timothy to study to show himself approved, a workman that needs not to be ashamed. They will speak with the enemies in the gate, ensuring that God's standards are applied within (for the gate was the place of justice) and that no enemy could gain entrance from without.

## **Psalm 128**

In I Corinthians 15 v 58, Paul exhorts us to be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Psalm 127 teaches us to lean on, to trust in the Lord and to realise the folly of working without the Lord. We must work for the Lord and with the Lord. Trying to worship without Him is vain. We need to move in the Holy Spirit.



## God's Providence

In Psalm 128 we come to a work that is fruitful and that brings blessing. Your labour is not in vain in the Lord. At the end of Psalm 127 the soul was at battle stations, as it were. The children were like arrows in a quiver but here in Psalm 128 the children are like olive plants around the table. There is peace that brings true happiness and blessedness. This blessedness is for everyone. It is for the "**whosoever**". It is to be found in the fulness of God's provision. This is, by the way, the ninth Song of Degrees. Nine, so often, is associated with God's complete provision. In Matthew 5 there are nine "Blessed" statements and these are available for all. In the last of the beatitudes, however, the matter is made personal. It is not "Blessed are they," but "Blessed are you."

Now we also get this idea with the ninth of the Songs of Ascents. In the eighth (Psalm 127) it declares, "**Happy is the man....**" 'Happy' is exactly the same word in Hebrew as the word 'Blessed' in verse 1 of Psalm 128. But in verse 5 of this Psalm, it declares, "**the Lord shall bless thee....thou shalt see the good....thou shalt see thy children's children.**" Suddenly the blessing comes near and is personal. Perhaps we are not always sure whether God's promises to 'them' include us. Here, there is no doubt. God's promises of blessing are for you...Yes, you!

In I Corinthians 12 there are nine gifts of the Holy Spirit arranged in order. There is a fulness of provision. In Galatians 5, we read of the nine-fold fruit of the Holy Spirit. God wants us to be completely fruitful. That is what is revealed also in this Psalm. How do we enter into this fruitfulness? The answer is here. They are blessed that fear the Lord and walk in His way. This is the reverence and honour that comes from hearts.

This is a song of blessing and of the fulness of God's provision; it is for those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways. In Proverbs it declares that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This is the way of real happiness. The end of all other ways is death. The world does not see it that way; the world boast is, "When I fear no one and when I can do exactly what I want to do, then I will be happy." Do not believe it, for the happiness of the world is very short-lived. Happiness is found only in surrendering your will to the Lord and in walking in His ways.

Possibly we may not like what the word of God says, and certainly the flesh rebels against the will of God. Many claim to love the Lord but do not obey His word. Jesus said to people of His day, "**Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things that I say?**" People want to be part of the bouncy, happy throng that seem to be enjoying themselves, but when God reveals what His will is, that certain things must be cleared out of believers' lives, that there are things that people should be doing, ideas that do not fit in with their fleshly plans, then rebellion manifests itself. There will never be happiness until we are doing what the Lord says. There must be submission to His will and to each other.

The book of Psalms begins in this way of happiness and blessing; it begins in the way of submission to the Word and will of God. "**Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night.**" (Psalm 1 vv 1,2) "Lord, what would you have me to do?" is the constant prayer of a saint of God.

## The Fear of the Lord

Did you know that Jesus also delighted to know the fear of the Lord? In Isaiah 11 vv 2,3 there is a prophecy about Jesus. It says that the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the

Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. The marginal reference explains that quick understanding as a smell or fragrance, that is, something to delight in. Let us also delight to fear the Lord.

According to Romans chapter 8, those who are led by the Spirit are the sons of God. If we are the sons of God, we will fear Him and walk in His ways, for it is not by might, nor by power but by the Spirit of the Lord. Read Romans 8 thoroughly. It is the way of blessing, the way of no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

In this Psalm, we find the grace of God revealed in blessing. To fear the Lord and walk in His ways, is not to earn salvation, but it is to receive the reward of God's grace who enables us to do those things. What the Lord provides, we do not deserve, but as we walk in His ways, we find there the provisions of His grace. The whole thing is marked by the number of grace - five. There is a fivefold blessing brought before us; here is how the Lord will bless those that walk in His ways. Verse 4 even draws attention to it. **"Behold!"** Take note! **"You shall eat of the labour of your hands."** The Lord provides nourishment. **"Happy shalt thou be."** In other words, there will be the true blessing which satisfies. **"It shall be well with thee."** There is no disappointment in the Lord. He cares for us and watches over us. **"Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table."** There is that which is edifying, satisfying, secure and fruitful, in fearing the Lord and walking in His ways.

In John 4 vv 32-34, the disciples had left Jesus tired and hungry but on their return, they found Him looking refreshed. Jesus said to them, **"I have food to eat that you know not of."** Therefore the disciples replied, **"Has anyone brought Him anything to eat."** Jesus said to them, **"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish it."** What was food to Jesus will be food also to us. When we do God's will, we are satisfied and blessed, well fed and healthy spiritually. In the Old Testament there were three things that were evidence of the blessing of God: plenty of corn, plenty of wine, and plenty of oil. Jesus and His Word are the corn on which we feed. The wine reminds us of the love of God and the gladness of the heart of the blessed man. The oil directs us to the soothing and powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit. All three are in this Psalm.

## **The Family**

Now this Psalm which speaks of the blessings of God, promises us fruitfulness, but it is a fruitfulness that is produced together with others. Suddenly, in these verses, the family appears. There is a wife and children. It is a principle in nature around us that fruitfulness is not achieved alone. In terms of human experience, the family is the manifestation of fruitfulness. In terms of our walk with God, the Lord has made us part of His family that we might be spiritually fruitful.

If the Psalm speaks of a wife's being like a fruitful vine, then, in the area of New Testament teaching, we need to know that Jesus declared Himself to be the True Vine. We are the branches. We must abide in Him and He in us if we are to become fruit producers. If we abide in Him, then we shall bring forth much fruit, fruit that will remain. Galatians 5 tells us about the Fruit of the Spirit. As you examine that ninefold fruit of the Spirit, you will discover that there is a threefold division - three groups of three. The love, joy and peace reveals what I enjoy of the fruit; longsuffering, kindness and goodness are the fruit of my Christlike behaviour towards others; finally, meekness, faithfulness and self under control is the fruit of my attitude and behaviour towards God.

This fruitfulness is precious and the result of a close relationship with the Lord. The branches are part of the True Vine. The branches are also the vine. In the Psalm, the vine growing by the sides or the flanks of the house is in the secret, private place, protected from wind and storm, kept in warmth and nourishment. The fruit that is expected and manifested is for the Lord to delight in. In the Song of Songs 4 vv 9-16, there is a picture of the Lord enjoying the fruits of His people. He says, ***"How much better is thy love than wine and the smell of thine ointments than all spices... a garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, camphire and spikenard... a fountain of gardens... Let my beloved come into His garden and eat His pleasant fruits."*** The fruitfulness is for the Lord to delight in and for the people of God to be blessed by. Let us stay close to Him and seek to be pleasing to Him in all things.

Next in this Psalm our attention is directed to the children who are around the table. They are like olive plants. The olive plants were important for they produced oil which itself is a type of the Holy Spirit. The children themselves are fruit which is the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit. As we are God's family, and as we are fruitful, producing the fruit of the Spirit, seeing the kingdom of God increase as others are brought to the Lord, we become witnesses of a manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit. What is produced must be by the Spirit. It cannot be an imitation; it must be real. We delight to see others coming to know the Lord and believers growing in Christ, manifesting that work of the Spirit of God in their hearts and lives.

Moreover, there is a unity to be seen here, for the table is the place where the family unite, maybe after a day's work, to relax and share together. One of the evidences, in modern times, of the breakdown in family life is the demise of the meal table. There seems to be no time for the family to gather round the table. T.V. dinners from plates balanced on laps abound; micro-waved dinners at different times of the day have all played their part to show how fragmented families are nowadays. God wants us to know the reality of the unity, the "oneness", which we have as the family of God. On Sunday mornings it should be a joy to gather round the table as we share communion.

## **Conclusion**

Note carefully that this is how the man is blessed that fears the Lord. He is fruitful. That is the power of the Lord being manifested. This blessing is out of Zion. It comes from the Lord, where the King reigns supreme. Such a man will see the good of Jerusalem all the days of his life. That speaks of the building up of God's work on earth. This fruitfulness goes on and on. The blessed man will see his children's children and so on. So we may expect to see those that we lead to the Lord, themselves becoming fruitful. In Philippians 4 v 17 Paul expressed the desire for those whom he had led to the Lord that there might be fruit that would abound to their account. Today the Lord desires fruit that may abound to your account. That we might see the next generation leading others to the Lord and that there might be peace upon the people of God.

## **Psalm 129**

We have now arrived at the tenth step in the Songs of Ascents. It was pointed out before that every fifth one of these Psalms appears to be a summary of what has happened so far. This second group of five Psalms speaks to us about revelation, about learning spiritual truth and about going on in the Lord, forsaking our own ways. This summary brings these points out and the experiences we have gone through to learn that. Then there is a looking forward to the next five songs which concentrate on our full and constant communion with the Lord.

## Review

Psalm 125 was a Psalm of trusting: ***"They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion."*** Trusting means ceasing from one's own works and letting the Lord have His way. Those that so trust will be raised up, like Mount Zion, to dwell with Him, safe, secure, immovable.

The next Psalm, 126, was the song of the soul set free. Those that go the way of the cross realise that the Lord has given them everything, even though they deserve nothing. Once we were captives but now have been set free. In turning to the Lord, we have found acceptance in the Beloved. Our mouth is filled with laughter and our tongue with singing - full of praise for God. However, at this stage, we found that there may still be those things in our lives that are not fitting and which must be dealt with. There might be tears and weeping but these things must be endured if we are to come again rejoicing bearing precious fruit.

Then Psalm 127 took us into the experience of learning to lean on the Lord, letting Him do the work as we are workers together with Him. Here we found that key phrase, ***"Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it."*** Unless the Lord is doing the work, it is useless. In this song the principle applies to building, being kept and working for the Lord.

Then progress is made in Psalm 128 to reveal the blessing of the Lord that comes from fearing Him and walking in His ways. And the blessing goes on to future generations - to children's children.

As we read Psalm 129, we shall find that the processes that have been involved in all this are the object of our meditation.

## The Way of Jacob

A testimony of Israel is recited at the beginning of this Psalm. It is a testimony of continually being afflicted. Israel was Jacob; Jacob was Israel. In his life he knew many afflictions. His name, Jacob, means "supplanter", that is one who gets hold of the sole of the foot of another in order to trip up. He was one who wrestled with the Lord. He planned, plotted, struggled and schemed. That was Jacob throughout his life, but throughout his life the Lord had been dealing with him, in much the same way as these Psalms explain the Lord's dealings with us.

Remember that Jacob actually wanted spiritual things: he wanted the birthright which Esau despised. Esau is described as "that profane person." Outwardly he was honest, reasonable, nice, but he had no time for the things of the Lord. However, Jacob tried to get those spiritual blessings through the energies of the flesh. So the Lord would speak to us through His word. You want spiritual blessings but you will not get them through your methods and own ability. Jacob went through his life wrestling with people, with situations, with problems and even with the Lord. At each stage apparent successes turn into defeats. He tricked Esau; he deceived his father, Isaac; he dealt craftily with his uncle Laban. He seemed to get what he wanted but what afflictions ensued! He ran scared of his brother Esau, leaving parents and home for many, many years, probably never seeing his mother again; he himself was cheated by his uncle and parted company from him on bad terms.

The so-called victories of the flesh came to nothing. But then the Lord wrestled with him. God does not force His will upon us. That is why the Lord did not prevail until Jacob yielded his will to the Lord. In the end Jacob, in acknowledging the character of his name, confessed his failure to God. God touched him in the flesh. From that moment on he could no longer rely on the flesh. Physically he limped and leaned on a staff - an outward sign of

what had happened in his life. No more wrestling and struggling. When Jacob gave in to God, the Lord said to him, **"You have prevailed."** And God gave him a new name - Israel, a prince with God. Many are the afflictions until that place of submission is reached.

### **The Afflictions of Youth**

The Life of the nation of Israel was just like that of Jacob: it was full of afflictions because they went about things in the power of their own ability. In Egypt they were under bondage and much affliction, but, through it, God was teaching them. Eventually He brought them out with a strong and mighty hand. However, they did not continue to trust the Lord. They would not go into the land of promise. Having looked at their own ability, they said, "No, we cannot do it." When, at last, they did enter the land, there were continual afflictions which we read about in the book of Judges. As they trusted the Lord, things were fine, but when they relied on their own ideas, they went away from the Lord and things went wrong. The same principles applied during the times of the kings of Israel and Judah. Thus could they truly say, **"Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth."**

In Romans 9, Paul brings out the spiritual truth that it was on this point that Israel had failed. They had the right aim of righteousness, but went about getting it their own way. Verse 27 onwards declares: **"Isaiah also cries concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved... What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law... For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God."**

Now these afflictions are called the afflictions of youth. This is the time of learning to lean and rely on the Lord. Then we learn to yield to the Lord. The lesson of Ecclesiastes 12 is **"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth when the evil days come not."** It is the time of learning, before hearts become hardened and stubborn. Youth typifies the time of the strength of the flesh. In Isaiah 40 vv 30,31: **"Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength..."** As we grow in the Lord, learning to wait and rely on Him, we get stronger and stronger.

Through the afflictions endured and experienced in younger years, there has been a learning process in operation - a learning to yield to the Lord and not to rely on the flesh. This is part of that progress to full and constant communion with God, for the flesh can have no fellowship with God. The flesh rebels against God, but He strips that all away, that we might trust Him completely and know the blessings and joy of fellowship with Him.

### **The Work of the Cross**

Psalm 129 also speaks of the "plowers" who "plowed upon my back", making long their furrows. This is a description of the work of the cross. Jesus Himself experienced that suffering as He endured the cruel Roman scourging, and He brings us through such experiences that the flesh may be thoroughly dealt with. The work of the cross lays us bare that it might be seen that everything is wholly for God, with no hidden motives. But notice that the analogy is one of ploughing. When a farmer ploughs his field and breaks up the ground, it is for a purpose. Seed will be planted in the ground that is now able to receive it; it will grow and produce fruit for the harvest. Fruitfulness results. So it will be for us too. In

Leviticus, we read of the burnt offering that was flayed and cut open for all to see. Why? So that everyone might see that the offering was suitable, without blemish and wholly for the Lord. Hebrews 12 gives us an appropriate commentary upon this: ***"Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."*** Fruitfulness is the result.

## Conclusion

The last five verses of this Psalm show us the folly of trusting the way of the flesh. The righteous Lord has broken the cords of the wicked and released us, just as Paul showed, at the end of Romans 7, that the Lord cuts us free from the body of death that threatens to drag us under. However, those that hate Zion, that is God's sovereign rule, and hold to the works of the flesh will be confounded and turned away. The works of the flesh will be seen for what they are: without root, like grass on the housetops, useless and rejected in harvest. There is no fruitfulness in the works of the flesh, neither is there any fellowship for no blessing is received and none is given in return. We want the blessing of the Lord that makes rich and He adds no sorrow after.

## Psalm 130

***"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord."*** The soul, in these Psalms, continues to move onwards and upwards. In this third section we move on to the knowledge of full and sweet communion with the Lord. For there to be full and constant communion, there can be nothing of self, no confidence at all in the flesh. Pride and arrogance have no place. The Lord would lead us all on to know that fellowship where there is nothing to mar or to get in the way.

### Out of the Depths

Here at the outset of this Psalm, the Psalmist, having gone through all those learning experiences of spiritual things, is very suddenly aware of iniquity and sin. From the depths his voice ascends in earnest to God. All that desire full communion come to that awareness of their own unworthiness. The closer we get, the more we shall realise how vile the flesh is. Isaiah, in the temple, a man that was set apart and holy in his service for the Lord, when he saw the Lord in a vision in the temple, high and lifted up in all His majesty and glory, he cried out, ***"Woe is me, for I am undone, (cut off), for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."*** How the very presence of God brings home to us how vile we really are. But for the grace of God all would be lost. In the case of Isaiah, but also for us, God provides the perfect cleansing. On that cleansing we must rely and rely utterly.

If we want to go further with God, we must realise that He is not just there as a convenience for us, for when it suits us. We must come to the realisation that He is everything and we are nothing. It is a process which sometimes takes a long while. Think of Job, a righteous man who, throughout his trials, maintained his integrity. Yet at the end, before God he must confess, ***"I am vile."*** So often, even in spiritual exercises and service for God, self can raise its ugly head when we talk about MY ministry, MY revelation, and the doctrine that I believe.

God opens our eyes that we might see at the last, that when we have done all, we are but unprofitable servants, but servants nevertheless that yearn for communion with God. All we can do, despite all our experience, is cry out to Him from the depths.

## The Darkness of Separation

Why is it that the Lord allows us to go through those dark experiences? How is it that we cry to God out of the depths? It is so that we might cling closely to the Lord as He raises us up and that we might desire Him with all our heart. It is so that we might hate sin and self with all its pride, as God also hates it. Jesus Himself said, **"I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished."** As He came to the cross and was crucified, there was darkness over all the land for three hours. The cry went up from the cross, **"My God, my God, Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"** Jesus went through that experience too, for you and me. He bore our sin and went through that experience of being forsaken. Out of the depths He cried unto God. Jesus had to go through that experience to deal once and for all with our sins. We too must go through that experience if we want full and rich communion with God, for all aspects of self and reliance on self must be banished forever.

In Genesis 15, when God was about to appear to confirm His covenant with Abraham, Abraham was going to enter into a very close communion with God. The sacrifice was prepared and laid out. All that had to be done, had been done. Then Abraham waited and waited. When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham, and a horror of great darkness fell upon him. At that vital moment, Abraham experienced the darkness of separation. Why was that? It was to ensure that what happened would be entirely of God; there would be nothing of Abraham, even though it was all for him.

In the Song of Songs 5 vv 5,6 we see the bride, a type of the soul moving on to full communion with the Lord: **"I rose up to open to my Beloved; my hands dropped with myrrh, my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh."** All was wonderful; there was adoration in the heart for the Lord, but there were still things of self there. There had previously been a reluctance to move, so that when, eventually, she did go to open the door, her Beloved had withdrawn Himself and was gone. She sought Him but could not find Him; she called Him but He gave her no answer. She seemed to be forsaken. Why? The Lord had withdrawn to make her seek Him more, with her whole heart. The end that the Lord had for her and also has for us, is to draw us to Him to know full communion.

## That I May Know Him

Do we want this fellowship, this full communion with God? Paul cries out in Philippians 3 v 10, **"... that I may know Him."** This is the great apostle Paul speaking. Ah... but there is a price to pay. You have to say good-bye to all that is of self. It is like going through that dark time that we have been considering, the darkness of realising how vile and sinful the flesh is. **"That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death."** That is the dark experience, but that fellowship and that death are so necessary if we are to leave behind all that hinders full communion with the Lord. It has all been done, but we have got to move into the experience of it.

We have been crucified with Christ: it is done. The old nature is dead: it is done. We are new creations in Christ Jesus; old things are passed away. It is done; but we have got to move by faith in the experience of it. Stop clinging to and relying on fleshly ways and trust Him completely. **"This one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."** Paul knew that he had to press on the upward way. If I know Him fully today, I want to know Him more fully tomorrow.

The Psalmist cried out of the depths. He seemed to be forsaken. Having pressed on the upward way himself he comes to an awful realisation of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the vileness of the flesh. From that dark experience he cries out to the Lord, **"Lord, hear my voice: let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."** The Lord to whom he calls, he knows to be a pardoning God, not one who marks iniquities, otherwise who would be able to stand? Forgiveness is with the Lord. Here we are talking about practical experience of the grace of God. So much of what we know about mercy and forgiveness could just be theory, but the Psalmist is entering into a real experience of the mercy and grace of God. Such experience causes us to rejoice in mercy and to shun all the ways of the flesh. We too have to come to that place where we realise it is all of Him or nothing.

### **A Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit**

In Psalm 19 v 9 it says: **"The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."** The fear of the Lord is clean, because it leads us to trust Him and not wanting to offend Him in any way. It leads us to hate evil and sin as He hates evil and sin. It leads us to abhor self, pride and boasting in the flesh. Forgiveness comes from God, and from God alone, that we might fear Him.

Jonah had his own way of serving God. He did not actually forsake God, but he ran away from the will of God; he wanted to do his own will. Later, in the belly of the great fish, he cried to God. Out of lowest depths, the very belly of death itself, he cried to the Lord. Did God hear him? Most certainly: **"I cried by reason of my affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell (Sheol) cried I, and Thou heardest my voice."** Jonah 2 v 2. How did Jonah get into the depths? Well, he declares that the Lord had cast him there. And what was the reason? It was so that Jonah might learn to trust and obey the Lord, to do His will, and to have no confidence in the flesh or the will of the flesh. When Jonah cried out to the Lord, the Lord heard, forgave and delivered. The whole point of the story of Jonah is that God is so forgiving that He is concerned about an enemy people, the Ninevites, even the welfare of their cattle, as well as for a disobedient and unworthy individual. Praise the Lord!

Whether it is our fault, as it was in the case of Jonah or in the case of David when he sinned in the matter of Bathsheba, or whether it is not through any fault of our own but because of what others have done or are doing, as when David was running away from Saul, we must look up and seek the Lord alone. When we are in that situation of being in the depths, in the place where it seems momentarily we are forsaken, we learn to be broken and contrite. We learn to call out to the Lord for help and salvation. In Psalm 51, which David wrote after his sin with Bathsheba, he explains: **"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."** Then in Psalm 34, written when David was running away from Saul, it says, **"The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."**

In Proverbs it says that pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. God would bring us down to the depths that we should not trust in those things but always look upward to Him. If we will allow God to deal with us, then we will know full communion with Him and there will be no possibility of relying on our own strength any more.

In 1 Peter 4, Peter passes on his experience that he had learned: **"Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind, for he that has suffered in the flesh, has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."** If we let God deal with us, He will bring us through to that place. Later on Peter gives a word of



encouragement: ***"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy... Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing as unto a faithful Creator."***

## **Waiting on the Lord**

What has the Psalmist been saying here in 130? He says, ***"I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope."*** You see, he is waiting on the Lord to keep him. In the darkest hour, he trusts in the Lord. Those things that are not fitting and suitable in my life, God is dealing with.. I do not have to struggle with them. They have been dealt with, and I am learning to see that they have been dealt with. Self will not wait; but God, through these experiences, teaches us to wait and trust. Even concerning spiritual blessings, self wants to fight, argue and get things now its own way. Self wants to be vindicated all the time and to be seen to be right. But we have need of patience, that after we have done the will of God, we might receive the promise.

Remember, it is those that wait upon the Lord that shall renew their strength, that shall mount up with wings as eagles, that shall run and not be weary, that shall walk and not faint.

In waiting on the promises of God, there is no room for impatience. Impatience comes from the old nature; it is of the flesh. Thus, we must wait on the Lord. When Christians wait on the Lord, it is not an aimless waiting, but a waiting in hope. And this hope is not a vague hope, but a certain hope, as verses 5 and 6 reveal: ***"I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope. My soul waits for the Lord."*** In other words we are not waiting for something which will never arrive, but for something which God has promised. God has promised that we should enjoy a rich and full communion with Him. At the moment He just wants to deal with all those things that are getting in the way. If we draw nigh to God, He will draw nigh to us. That is His promise. Wait expectantly!

This is how the Psalmist waited on the Lord: he waited more than they that watch for the morning - and in case you did not get it the first time, he repeats it. Those stationed on the city wall who, in ancient times, watched for the morning, were watching with a purpose. They longed for the night to be past, when unseen enemies might strike. They longed for the life-giving and life-filling activities of the day. They longed for the fellowship of family and friends. Did they wait in vain? Certainly not, for they knew the morning would come; however, in patience they had to wait for it. The Psalmist, therefore, waited with a stronger hope and a surer certainty of God's word being fulfilled. Now how more certain can you be than being sure of the morning's coming? That is how sure we may be of all God's promises.

## **Conclusion**

At the end of the Psalm there is rejoicing over the fact that with the Lord there is mercy and plenteous redemption. What a wonderful word that 'plenteous' is. It means there is more than enough for everybody and to spare. Not only that but the redemption provided is complete and perfect, for the Lord shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. Remember, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. In this full redemption, each one of us may move on to full and constant communion with God. Wait on that glorious hope - expectantly.

## Psalm 131

We believe in the Sovereignty of God, that the Lord reigns and is in complete control. I trust that each of us can say, **"The Lord rules and reigns in my heart and life."** If that is true, then we can rest in Him and quietly trust in the Lord our God.

Psalm 131 is the twelfth of the Songs of Ascents (or Degrees). Now we have come to understand that, in the Bible, twelve is a number that is associated with government. There were twelve tribes of Israel and twelve apostles of the Lord. There are also twelve months in the year and so on. This idea of God's government is what we find here in the twelfth Song of Ascents. The soul has stopped saying, **"I want to be in control of my life,"** and now desires and affirms that God should rule. It is the only way to know full and constant communion with Him.

### Humility

In Psalm 130 we got something of the idea of brokenness as the soul cried to the Lord out of the depths. We found also, in that Psalm, that God is the God of great mercy. The brokenness and contrition are good, for they bring us to the grace and mercy of God. They are good because, that which would challenge God's rule in our lives, self and the flesh, are driven out, so that God might rule.

In Psalm 131, by contrast, there is a scene of humility as the Psalmist confesses: **"My heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me."** This place was reached through the events of Psalm 130. The brokenness led to humility and no confidence in the flesh any more, but every confidence in the Lord whom we trust. Compare that with the character of our present age, as foreseen by Paul: **"...in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God;"** (II Timothy 3) It is self, self, self and more self. Oh, that we might know that place of true humility, where God is Lord of all.

Philippians 2 is a favourite passage of Scripture for me, which brings out, in a glorious way, the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ. From verse 5 we read, **"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, though it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."** Let this mind be in you.

Before His death, Jesus prayed, **"Not my will but Thy will be done."** Then in Matthew 11 we find Jesus issuing the invitation for all those that labour and are heavy laden to come to Him so that He could give them rest. He invited people to take His yoke upon them and learn of Him, **"For I,"** said He, **"am meek and lowly in heart."** Why is there pride and arrogance in human experience? Because the route to humility is not through effort or trying, but through meekness and brokenness, and that is what God does.

### God's Dealings With Us

In Psalm 51, which David wrote after his sin with Bathsheba, he spells out how God had dealt with him and broken him. **"Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones**

**which Thou hast broken may rejoice... The sacrifices of God are a broken Spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."** This is where the Lord has His way.

Jeremiah perceives truth in Lamentations 3: **"I am the man that has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. He has led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me is He turned; He turns His hand against me all the day."** Jeremiah had done nothing like David. He was God's servant, but as God's servant he must be one that lets God have complete control. So God dealt with Him in this way until all was yielded to God. Even his prayers seemed to be shut out. The catalogue of calamities continues but, and here is the blessing, in remembering those things his soul is humbled. He realises that, but for the mercies of God we would have perished long ago. Therefore we have a glorious hope. Therefore we rejoice.

We are all very familiar with that Scripture in II Corinthians which assures us that, if we are in Christ Jesus, we are new creations; old things have passed away and all things have become new. However, we have to be taught to walk in the truth of that by faith. There is a learning process. It is by treading this pathway that we have been considering in the Songs of Degrees, the pathway of God's dealing with us until we learn to let go of all that is of self and to put our full faith and confidence in Him.

### **Lofty Eyes**

The Psalmist had learnt that lesson and now could say: **"Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me."** In Proverbs it says that the issues of life come out of the heart. If there is pride and arrogance in our lives, it will affect every other aspect of our lives. Jesus said that it was from the heart that all manner of evil things come. If we have an unclean heart that entertains unclean thoughts, then unclean things will manifest themselves in our lives. But if there is a heart that is trusting God, that is not haughty, then there will be a life that shows humility and the works of God.

In Isaiah 14 a word is spoken to Lucifer: **"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning; how art thou cut down to the ground which didst weaken the nations? for thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God... I will ascend above the most high..."** It is all going on in the heart and it is I,...I,...I. Self is being exalted. On the other hand, humility, such as we see in the Psalm, is the absence of self. It is where the cross has been applied, where brothers and sisters can say, **"It is no longer I that lives but Christ lives in me."**

Let us walk in the good of these truths by faith, reckoning self to be dead, dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. It may have taken a path of brokenness and being broken to get us into the realisation of it. In the end we shall, as Paul, be able to glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world. (Galatians 6).

### **The Single Eye**

In this Psalm the writer explains to us also that his eyes are not lofty. The eyes reveal what is in the heart. Jesus said that if your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light. The eyes look to where the heart has a desire. If our heart is under God's control and self is crossed out, then the eyes will be looking to Him. If that is not the case, then the eyes will be lofty and, from a superior position, will be looking down at things worldly; they will look down on other people and that is the essence of pride.

In Proverbs 30 from verse 11 there is a revelation of the worldly generation which it mentions four times. Four often indicates that which is universal. ***"There is a generation that curses their father and does not bless their mother. There is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! There is a generation whose teeth are as swords...to devour the poor..."*** Do you see the focus? It is self, self, self, while everyone else is trampled underfoot. Praise God that He delivers His people from that condition, so that they can say with the Psalmist that their heart is not haughty, nor their eyes lofty, neither do they exercise themselves in great matters or in things too high for them.

These exercises are of the mind. How haughty are the thoughts of some! But Paul exhorts us with these words in Philippians 2: ***"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus..."*** That was a mind of complete humility. The mind that is not like that, the mind that is full of self, will always want to be in control. It will always want to understand everything or else reject it. There is, therefore, no room for faith or for yielding to God, or for receiving that peace of God which passes understanding. Understanding something gives the person control. The person who says, "When I understand what God is doing, then I will do what He asks," will never move in faith and, therefore, will never walk in full communion with God. We walk by faith, not by sight. All we need to understand is that God has promised and God is faithful. We are satisfied to know that God is in control without understanding all the details of how He will keep and direct.

May your eye be single, looking only to the Lord. ***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding."***

### **Like a Weaned Child**

Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child. The root meaning of that word which is translated "behaved" is "to level off". What it means is that, as a result of the dealings of the Lord with the Psalmist, he has adjusted his life. A transformation has taken place. He is now yielded to God's control. He has quieted himself. He has become silent, dumb. In other places in the A.V. it is translated as "cut down". Self has gone, has been dealt with, and has nothing more to say. The believer now waits patiently and silently on God. God's word is now all that is important. The soul has now settled down to wait on God. In Psalm 62 this word quieted is translated as "wait" - ***"wait thou only on God, for my expectation is from Him."*** Even the brevity of Psalm 131 ( 3 verses) bears testimony to the fact that the Psalmist has not got much to say; rather, it is God in control.

However, although there had to be a new beginning, although in the first stages of these Songs of Ascents the soul was really being nourished on baby milk, now we can see that progress is being made. He is now like a weaned child. He has moved from just milk to solid foods as well. We too must grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. There must come a time when we stop being spoon-fed by others and begin to feed ourselves. In Hebrews 5 v 12 we have that same comparison where Paul says, ***"For when for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For everyone that uses milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."***

Paul said to the Corinthians that he had fed them with milk because they were not spiritual. They were arguing like little children. We must progress from that childish idea that the

whole thing centres on us, the attitude that selfishly looks for blessings for me all the time. We need to move on and see that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Our hope is in the Lord.

So the Psalmist, as the result of his experiences of discipline, has learned humility. He is not trying to be humble: that would be a work of the flesh. He is letting God be in control. The New Testament exhorts us to let the mind of Christ be in us. That mind was a mind of humility, of making Himself of no reputation, of stooping lower and lower for the sake of others. Move by faith into the realisation of it. Then the Lord can and will rule and reign in your life.

Then we shall have that glorious hope in the Lord: ***"Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and forever."*** In Lamentations chapter 3 v 21 onwards, as a contrast to the painful scenes depicted before it, Jeremiah suddenly says, ***"This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion says my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."*** What is this hope based on? Its foundation is that God is faithful. He will never fail us. He will always be with us, even though the way may seem dark and difficult.

The Psalmist, in the same awareness, can say that he has now matured (been weaned). When we were children, for most of us in this society, life was pleasant. Parents protected us from hardships and difficulties and even in the poorest families sacrifices were made to ensure that children enjoyed their childhood. Our parents did their best to protect us as children from the nasty things of the "real world". However, there must come a time when children have to grow up and face reality. If by the time they reach their teens, they still expect all that fuss, always wanting their own way and so on, we tell them it is about time they grew up. God says to us that we must mature spiritually. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life. The going may seem tough at times, but if we have learned to trust the Lord, our hope is in Him.

## **Conclusion**

He has promised to be with us all the way; in His presence is fulness of joy and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore. Our treasure is this wonderful and certain hope, Christ in us the hope of glory. Paul said, ***"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope makes not ashamed..."***  
(Romans 5)

**Let this hope be ours from henceforth and forever. Psalm 132**

## Psalm 132

This is the longest of the Songs of Ascents and it concentrates on the main theme of these songs - that of a deeper, richer and fuller communion with the Lord.

### Longing for Full Communion

This is the Psalm of a heart that longs for such communion with God and will not be satisfied until it reaches that goal. It is one thing to say that with our lips but quite another to desire it with all our heart. God once said to Jeremiah, the prophet, **"You will seek me and find me, when you shall search for Me with all your heart."** God's complaint concerning His people of old was that they honoured Him with their lips but that their heart was far from Him.

On the other hand, this is a Psalm which reveals that God also desires to enjoy full communion with His people. So it is a full and complete Psalm. What we seek is what God wants too: it is God's will. Now, on an individual level, we might well long for fellowship with God: **"As the hart pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul after Thee, O God."** Here, in Psalm 132, however, it becomes apparent that as we come to that full communion with the Lord, it is a fellowship with God AND with His people. It is not just "Jesus and me". We have been baptised into one body and are members of that body. **"If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another..."**

Throughout this Psalm we find that God confirms everything by His desire for communion with us. If David says to the Lord that he will never let Him go, the Lord assures David that He will never let him go. There is a glorious unity of purpose as we desire Him with all our heart. Has He not promised? **"Delight yourself also in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your heart."**

(Psalm 37 v 4).

### Enduring Afflictions

Now, in verse 1, David speaks of his afflictions. These are the afflictions that he encounters in his upward climb to know the Lord. Paul spoke of that same quest in these words: **"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings..."** (Phil 3 v 10) Moving on to enjoy the presence of the Lord in a real way costs - but what glory!

When we have a desired goal in mind, we put ourselves to all sorts of trouble to achieve it. When an athlete trains for a race, at times it is agonising. Or, if you are decorating, there are all sorts of unpleasant tasks to do in preparation, if the job is to be done properly and with pleasing results. However, in your mind your thoughts are focused on the marvellous results and so you endure the unpleasant tasks. Here David endures the afflictions because he wants the Lord, and he pleads with the Lord not to forget them.

David's zeal is commendable. He will not seek his house, his bed, or his sleep until he knows the Lord. He will not rest until the Lord is where He should be in his life. Everything else has got to come last. So the Psalmist maps out for us the pathway to worship and full communion with God. In verse 6 he says, **"Lo, we heard of it..."** (Notice that he changes from "I" to "we") **"...at Ephratah."** Bethlehem was in Ephratah. That was where David used to live as a young man. That was where he used to look after the sheep. That was where the Lord began to deal with David, and where He called him when Samuel visited them.

## The Presence of God

What has David heard of then? He has heard about the presence and the glory of the Lord, which, in recent years, had been something rare in Israel. That presence of the living God amongst His people was history. The glory and the power of God was the stuff of tales from the past. Could we not say the same for the Church of today? Is the presence and glory of God something strange, which we have heard of, but which we ourselves have not experienced? Do you realise, that until David became king, the ark of the covenant of the Lord was not in the place that it should have been? Therefore there was no manifestation of the presence and power of God. All through the reign of King Saul, there had been no ark in Israel. Saul had not bothered to consult God (I Chronicles 13 v 3). Before Saul came to the throne, the ark had been captured by the Philistines, but because it caused so much trouble, they sent it back on a cart. Where it came to rest, there it stayed and nobody bothered about it.

Today, we need a people like David who are not satisfied with the dead, outward form, but want the reality of the Lord's presence.

## Hearing the Word of God

It is when people begin to hear the word of God that things start to move spiritually. Today we are hearing the word of God, and, therefore, we are learning what the will of God is. However, we are exhorted in the Scriptures not just to be hearers of the Word but doers also. When David heard that word, as a teenager looking after sheep back in Ephratah, it began to produce a desire in him that one day he would know the presence and glory of God in reality. If, day by day, we get the word of God into our hearts, it will work in us that which God wants. It will produce in us a desire for full communion with Him. How powerful is the word of the living God! It all begins with hearing the word, and David recalled that he had heard these things a long time ago back where he used to live.

There were others too that had heard the word, for David said, "**We heard of it...**" And we can join the number of those that say, "**We have heard...**" We have heard of all that Jesus said and did in the Scriptures, how he healed the sick, raised the dead and cast out demons; we have heard how he healed the brokenhearted and forgave sins. We have heard that he told the disciples that those who believe in Him would do greater things than these. We have heard how the disciples went out and did those greater works. Now we have that desire awakened in us to see the presence and the power of God in our own time.

## The Lord in His Rightful Place

The second part of the verse gives us the balance we are looking for. David said, "**We have found it in the fields of the wood.**" They found it in Kirjath-Jearim which means literally "the city of the woods". What did they find there? It was the ark, which had been abandoned, but David brought it to Jerusalem. You will recall that even here, David had to learn obedience. When he tried to bring it on a new cart, drawn by oxen, a man died when he tried to steady it with his hand. When it was carried in the way ordered by God, borne on poles by Levites, then there was great rejoicing as it was placed in Jerusalem, under the covering of the tabernacle. David's desire to see the presence of the Lord in the midst of His people was fulfilled. We also have the promise, that, if we seek, we shall find. Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.

When the Lord was in His rightful place in their lives and everything in the right order, then could the people of God say that they would go into His tabernacles. Then they could go into His presence with joy. Then they could worship at His footstool here on earth together.

There can be no constant and full communion with the Lord in isolation; there is no idea here of some secret, mystical experience. The people of God are one together in Him. That's when the people of God experience the blessing of God, when brethren dwell together in unity (Psalm 133).

At this point the Psalm moves from "we" to "Thou". The focus of our worship is the Lord. **"Arise, O Lord,"** cries the Psalmist, **"into Thy rest; Thou and the ark of Thy strength."**

Now this might well be why some people think the Psalm was written by Solomon. In II Chronicles 6 vv 40ff. Solomon prayed this same prayer when the temple had been built:

**"Now, my God, let, I beseech Thee, Thine eyes be open, and let Thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. Now therefore arise, O Lord God, into Thy resting place, Thou, and the ark of Thy strength: let Thy priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let Thy saints rejoice in goodness. O Lord God, turn not away the face of Thine anointed: remember the mercies of Thy servant David."**

I believe that Solomon was praying the prayer that David had written but in the way that God had given reply to David later on in this Psalm. The overwhelming desire here is that God should be pleased, that God should be satisfied. Is that not the desire of our own hearts? Is that not all part and parcel of entering into full communion with the Lord? From the beginning of creation the word "rest" has been important. On the seventh day God rested from His labours. Man spoiled that rest when sin entered. Since that time the work of salvation has been in progress. When Jesus was challenged because He did things on the Sabbath day, He replied, **"Hitherto, My Father works and I work."** How we long that God should be satisfied in receiving us, the fruit of the work of His precious Son. And so we too desire with David that the Lord should arise and enter into His rest, a dwelling place among the people that have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, a full and sweet communion.

### **Mercy and Grace**

The ark of God's strength which David refers to in this Psalm speaks of the presence of God, but, first and foremost, of the mercy of God, for, on top of the ark, was the mercy seat. Is that not the strength of God revealed to His people - His mercy and His grace? And is not the presence of the Lord, working in and through His people, the strength of God also, destroying the enemies of God and saving those who will return to Him? God had said that His presence would be there, above the mercy seat, between the cherubim. That also was where the glory of God would be revealed. That surely is the strength of God, to reveal His glory. For a while that glory was veiled inside the Holy of holies. Now the veil has been torn in two and the glory of God is revealed to those who will come to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ.

To those under the old covenant, the veil is still upon the face. The Israelites of old could not look at the face of Moses because of the glory that radiated from it. Yet it was a fading glory. We, however, behold the glory of the Lord, for we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour. At the time of the Babylonian captivity, Ezekiel saw something leave Jerusalem. He saw the glory of God departing from the temple and from the city. What a sad day that was! Do you know the glory of the Lord? Do you know the ark of His strength? Do you know His abiding presence? That was what David longed for and so will you if you are moving towards full and constant communion with Him.

### **Pure, Holy and Joyful Worship**

Then David speaks of the priests, the servants of the Lord, who serve the Lord in worship and praise day and night. His desire is that they should be clothed with righteousness. His desire was, and ours should be, that worship should be pure and holy. We cannot offer anything to God. We must worship Him in Spirit and in truth; that is not just giving our best,



but giving the best that can be given. He fills us and clothes us with His righteousness so that we can give Him the best. The wonderful thing is that when God's people are so occupied, they too receive blessing. The saints shout for joy. Those that are upright in heart rejoice and are glad. In the beginning all the sons of God shouted for joy. Seek His presence, be clothed in His righteousness and shout for joy.

The Lord wants all His saints to shout for joy. When will this happen? When God is in His rightful place and when those who serve and worship Him are clothed in righteousness. Through the gospel this can be so; indeed it is our testimony. Therefore we ought to shout for joy. That is what happened in the beginning when the morning stars sang together; all the sons of God shouted for joy. You do not see a lot of joy these days, let alone shouting for joy. People have this or that trial to share or talk about, going into great detail about the suffering and deprivation being experienced. The woeful look of depression accompanies the oft repeated tale. Yet the Bible exhorts us, "**Count it all JOY when you fall into various trials...**" Shout for joy; live in the victory!

Have you seen the carry-on these days when a footballer scores a goal. There's jumping and acrobatics, kissing and hugging; a shout goes out to the fans and all because a goal has been scored. Big deal! Think of what Jesus has done - He has won the biggest victory of time and eternity. Look at what He has done for you - rescued you from sin and shame and made you a child of the living God. Is it right to come into His presence with a long face and in sulky silence? Is a benign, middle-class, condescending smile of silent politeness any better? No, let the saints of God shout for joy. Let's hear it!

### **Abundant Provision**

Finally the Psalmist prays, "**..for Thy servant David's sake turn not away the face of Thine anointed.**" You see, those who are righteous and those who are joyful, will enjoy the fulness of the Holy Spirit. The Lord will not deny the anointed one any of His promises. It is true. All God's promises are "Yes" and "Amen" to us in Christ Jesus. He will not deny us. If you know the promises of God, then you also know that the promises will not be denied. They are referred to in verses 11 & 12. What a wonderful place of blessing there is here in Psalm 132. But God is greater than all this for all that David has been speaking about and asking God for, God says, "**This is what I have chosen; what you have asked for is what I want.**" This is when we also can pray in faith and receive, when we ask according to His will. This is when God assures us He will grant us the desires of our heart.

It is truly wonderful to know, when you are following the Lord, the things that you want are exactly the things that God wants. In Philippians Paul puts it like this: "**For it is God who works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure.**" If we desire to do His will, God's desire for that to be so is even stronger than our desire.

David desired with all his heart that the Lord should dwell in Zion, that His presence should be known there. The first thing David did when he became king was to capture Jerusalem and Mount Zion. Having established it as his capital, he arranged for the tabernacle to be erected there and, after initial failure, installed the ark of the covenant there, where, above the mercy seat, the Lord promised His presence would dwell. In fact, the Lord said, "**I have chosen Zion; I have desired it.**" The Lord declared that He would dwell there forever. And when we call out to the Lord for Him to come and dwell in our heart and life, His reply assures us that, in fact, that is His heart's very desire. God's desire is that we should be saved, that we should be built together as a habitation for the Spirit and that we should enjoy full communion with Him.

Further God promises here in this Psalm that He will abundantly bless the provision of Zion. Yes, God has promised that He will supply all our need. He delights to do it. He goes on to make clear that He will satisfy her poor with bread. There will be no hunger, no want for those who are His people. **"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."** Now in John chapter 6 Jesus spoke about Himself as the **"Bread of Life."** Whoever eats of this Bread that comes down from heaven will never hunger again. It is satisfying nourishment.

David had asked for the priests to be clothed in righteousness. God replied that He would clothe them with salvation. God wants to do a complete work. David had asked that the saints might shout with joy. God promises that they will shout ALOUD with joy. God always gives more than we ask. In fact God gives a mighty promise that He would cause the horn of David to bud. Springing forth from David's line would come the one in whom all God's promises are fulfilled - our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

## Psalm 133

In the previous Psalm, David desired a resting place for the Lord, where He might dwell in the midst of His people. In Psalm 133 that resting place is revealed - not a building made with man's hands. Solomon had come to the realisation of that when he dedicated the temple. **"Why," he declared, "not even the heaven of heavens could contain God."** Here is the house of God just as we find it also revealed in the New Testament in 1 Timothy 3 v 15: **"..the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and the ground of the Truth."** Here is God's dwelling place - the church of the living God, the very people of God. This is what is brought out in Psalm 133 when it refers to brethren dwelling together in unity. There is nowhere else on earth where brethren dwell together in unity, apart from the church.

### Unity in Love

In Ephesians 4 vv 1-6 Paul speaks of that wonderful unity. **"There is one Body and one Spirit even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in you all."** Do you not know that you are the temple of God, a temple of the Holy Spirit?

Now the love that we have for God is not just some emotional feeling that we have for Him. You can have some emotional feeling for God but never meet together with brothers and sisters in the Lord. Of course, if we do love God it will affect our whole being, but to love God is also to love what God loves. The word of God exhorts us that we should love one another, something which we cannot do of our own ability. The only time that we can love one another is when God has done that work of salvation, when the cross is applied to our life and self is crossed out. Then we are reconciled to God. Then there is no more self to oppose. Then we are one in Christ Jesus.

Why do we love God? Because He first loved us. When we truly love God and He is working in our lives, then we will love one another. The world cannot keep the command to love one another, only those that are redeemed and know the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. How sweet and pleasant to dwell in unity.

Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. That unity is not manufactured by us but comes from hearts filled by the love of God. If we do not love one another then, and I say this on the authority of the Bible, it is because we do not love God. If we love God, then we will love one another. The first epistle of John chapter 4 v 20 makes it quite clear.

## Family Unity

Stop pretending! Look at what the possibilities are in Jesus Christ and live the reality, the life that is available for us in Christ Jesus. Now you may wonder what right I have to say these things. You know me. I am not a visiting speaker who can perhaps put on an act. You know what I am like. You know my faults and failings. That is where this Psalm encourages me for it is described as a Psalm of David. Now amongst David and his brethren there was anything but unity. His elder brothers were annoyed when he turned up at the Israelite camp when Goliath was taunting them. His own children fought amongst themselves even to the point of murder. Later, David's own son, Absalom, rebelled against him. There was much strife in his own family and yet he could write about a pleasant and beautiful unity among brethren.

David knew that this was not a unity which you could find in the world. It was not a natural unity. This unity is in the Lord. There were brethren that David had in the Lord. Did not Jesus make such a comment when his family, in earthly terms, came to see Him. Jesus said, turning to those who faithfully followed Him, **"These are my brethren: those who listen to and do the will of God."** That is where there is unity - in the family of God. We are children of the living God, born of His Spirit and filled with His Spirit. We are brethren. We are untied by closer ties than the natural tie. We are one in the Spirit.

Behold how good and pleasant it is. The command to behold is an instruction to us to be aware of it, look for it and value it. In John 17 Jesus prayed for this unity. If Jesus prayed for it, then it is ours. He said, **"Now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own Name those whom Thou hast given me that they may be one as we are."** That is the fulness of it. In John 17 Jesus prayed for a perfect unity for every one of His people: **"That they all may be one; as Thou Father art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me. And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved me."** There is a testimony here in this glorious unity, that the world may know the reality of who Jesus is and who we are. By this shall all men know that we are His disciples, by the love we have one for another.

## Unity of the Spirit

Praise God that we have been baptised by One Spirit into the one body of Christ that we might know this glorious unity. The early church experienced this straight away. In the early chapters of Acts, all the believers - not just twelve, or one hundred and twenty, but three thousand were added to the church on the Day of Pentecost and a little later five thousand - all had everything common. They shared everything. Some sold possessions of lands and such like and brought the money to the apostles to distribute amongst needy believers. Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive the apostles and the Lord by withholding money they had promised as a result of which they died. The threat to this precious unity could not be allowed. Others, however, brought what they had. People did not call things their own; they had all things common.

Jesus prayed for this unity. The early church experienced it. Now we, through the word of God are exhorted to keep and maintain that unity. And we can, by faith, as we go on in the Lord. Ephesians 4 v 3 gives us the mind of God to act upon: **"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."** Then Philippians chapter 2 v 2: **"Fulfil ye my**

***joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*** With such a mind in us, there will be the perfect unity that evokes the cry, ***"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."***

Jesus prayed for our unity; the early church experienced it; we too may know and maintain that precious unity in the Spirit. We are brethren. We are born of the Spirit into the family of God. We are indwelt by the same Spirit and we are dwelling together in Him. We do not just come together for the occasional meeting. No, brethren dwell together in unity. The word translated by "**dwell**" means "**residing permanently**". We reside together. There can be no pretence, no lies or deceit, no outward show. We know each other well, dwelling together as a family, the family of God.

### **How Good and Pleasant it is!**

As we dwell closely together in the Spirit, as we get to know what each one is like, we need to bear in mind that it is by grace that we are the children of God. Of course, we must come to know the self-life crucified, otherwise there will be strife and bitterness. But the Body of Christ makes increase of itself in love. In 1 Peter 4 v 8 we learn that love covers a multitude of sins. So although we may have many shortcomings, love can cover all that. It should be like that in the church. Other people's shortcomings should not be the opportunity to have a go at them, or to gossip about them. Love should cover it all. God's love to us was so great that not only did he cover our sins, but he dealt with them and put them all away, blotting them out. He paid the price. And the Word of God says, ***"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."***

We could maintain an outward unity, being nice and polite to each other, meeting occasionally, briefly and formally. As soon as the meeting is over then it would be, "Sorry, I can't stop; must dash." What sort of coming together or unity is that? There is no communication or communion because we are locked into a particular form of service and as soon as it is over - home. There is no desire to share in real fellowship with other brothers and sisters. No, this Psalm speaks of dwelling together in unity. If we are in continual and close contact with each other, there may be times when there will be a bit of friction between various personalities, but that is the opportunity for the Lord to bring those things to light and deal with them.

### **How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.**

## **Psalm 134**

This is the last of the Songs of Degrees, the Songs of Ascents. This is the summit. It speaks to us, therefore, of full, complete and constant communion with God. This is the place of being occupied wholly with God. Today, as we read this Psalm, we read about the final step, not the final step that we shall ultimately make when we step into His presence, in the glory, at the end, but now, here on earth.

### **Constant Communion**

You may remember, that in Israel of old, the men went to Jerusalem, to the temple, three times every year at the Feasts of Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles. Each occasion was a time of great blessing and of rejoicing before the Lord. Many believe that these Songs of

Degrees were their song as they approached the great city. Psalm 133 was, in itself, a sort of climax, as they encourage each other with the words, "**Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.**" They could speak of the wonderful anointing that was to be experienced in joining together in such a way in glorious fellowship.

As they turned to go home, about to leave the blessedness of that fellowship, as they went back to their various places throughout the land of Israel, as they left the priests whose joy and privilege it was to remain in Jerusalem and serve in the tabernacle, they sang to those priests these words of encouragement: "**Bless ye the Lord all ye servants of the Lord, which stand by night in the house of the Lord.**" And the reply from the priests would come, "**The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.**" It was, perhaps, also a time tinged with sadness as they left that blessing behind until the next time.

However, for us this morning, this Psalm 134 is the great climax, where we may abide continually in the presence and in the blessing of the Lord. Together we are kings and priests unto Him, rejoicing in His presence. This blessing we may enjoy now.

This Psalm holds promise for us now. We may rejoice and abide in His presence continually now, not just in the future, "in the sweet by and by." There is blessing for us today. Those that stand by night in the house of Lord are a type of us, now, in this present, dark, evil world, standing in the presence of God. In the "sweet by and by," all will be light. Then it will be glorious and eternal day, but this is a Psalm for the night, in which we may continually worship and enjoy communion with the Lord. This is the height to which the soul ascends.

### **Constant Worship and Praise**

Remember, back in Psalm 120, the soul was far off from God. Then there was that seeking for the blessings of the Lord, even though the soul was in a strange land. He sought the Lord and began to return. He experienced a cleansing from sin and then a learning process as he came to the light. Then he discovered things in his life that were not fitting, things of the flesh which hindered progress. These are the lessons we also learn - "**in my flesh dwells no good thing.**" That is when we let the cross be applied to our lives to allow the things which are not fitting to be destroyed. Sometimes that can be painful; self does not like being put down; self does not like giving way. Brokenness brings humility. When self has thus been dealt with, then we are ready to move into Psalm 133 where we can enjoy the love of the brethren, the love that the saints have one for another. As you know, we cannot say that we love God unless we love one another.

In I John it makes it clear that, if you hate your brother, then you dwell in darkness. Praise God that we are of the light, and we do have that love for each other. That brings us into the place where we know the mighty anointing of the Holy Spirit, represented by the abundance of oil that ran down Aaron's beard and garments. That is also the place of being refreshed, typified in Psalm 133 by the dew of Mount Hermon.

What do we do when we are amongst the brethren in unity? We praise and worship the Lord. In ancient times the men of Israel knew such times only briefly at each festival. We, however, are able, as priests unto our God, to move into the blessing of Psalm 134 and enjoy that communion all the time.

### **Blessing the Lord**

At this point of the fulness of blessing, the Psalmist says "**Behold!**" just as he did at the beginning of Psalm 133. In other words, there is something to take note of here. It is true that, if we allow ourselves to become affected by the things of the world around us, we

become blind to the things that God wants us to see. Thus the Lord draws our attention to precious things. There is a glorious blessing here in serving and praising God in unity. Let us take note of what the Lord shows us here.

**"Bless the Lord,"** says the Psalmist. There's a remarkable thing. How can we bless God? Well the word 'bless', in Hebrew, carries with it the idea of happiness and gladness. If we are blessing God, we are making Him glad, and we do that when we respond fully in faith to Him and His grace, and when we ascribe to Him the praise, the majesty and the glory. What is God contented in most of all but the work of His precious Son, our Lord Jesus Christ? **"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,"** He declared from heaven itself. What pleases God most is when we are found in Christ Jesus and Jesus is in us. When he sees the saints, the Lord sees His precious Son and in that He is well pleased.

In the beginning, when God looked at His work of creation, He saw that it was good. On the sixth day He looked, and it was very good. When God looks at the work of the new creation in Christ Jesus, He sees that it is very good. There is great blessing for the Lord.

In Psalm 103, David encourages Himself: **"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgives all thine iniquities, who heals all thy diseases, who redeems thy life from destruction, who crowns thee with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfies thy mouth with good things... Bless the Lord you His angels... bless ye the Lord all ye His hosts, ye ministers of His that do His pleasure; bless the Lord all His works in all places of His dominion; bless the Lord, O my soul."**

**Let us bless Him today!**

When God is being blessed, there is great joy amongst the people of God. That is why this Psalm emphasises in its instruction that **ALL** the servants of the Lord should bless Him. There is a wonderful goodness, as we have seen, in brethren dwelling together in unity, and all such should be blessing Him. In 1 Corinthians 12-14 it tells us that God, through the Holy Spirit, has given gifts to everyone so that the Church, the Body of Christ might profit and be built up. God is bringing us all into a place where we might be pleasing to Him, because His Son is revealed in them.

### **Standing by Night**

Now another important phrase indicates that all the servants of the Lord stand by night to bless Him. In other words, God wants this blessing now, not just at the end when earthly things shall be ended. Now it is night. It is the night of the rejection of Jesus, the Light of the World. The whole world lies in darkness. When Judas went out to betray Jesus, the gospel of John makes the significant comment, **"...and it was night."** As far as the world is concerned, Jesus is still the rejected one, but that is not the case for us. He is our Lord and our Saviour. In His light, we see light. In this world of darkness there is light. Jesus certainly said **"I am the Light of the World"**, but He also told His disciples, **"You are the light of the world."** Keep shining in this world. We are the servants of the Lord who stand by night, in this darkness, and bless God as we shine for Him and lift up His holy Name.

In the tabernacle of old, there was light in the Holy Place. The seven branched lampstand provided light as it shone in a dark place illuminating the shewbread opposite, the full provision of God for all His people in whom the Lord was indeed blessed. It shone all the time. It was fuelled by holy oil. We too need the infilling of the Holy Spirit that we might shine for God and ever be pleasing to Him, that we might worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

We may stand by night, but we are receiving a constant supply from heaven itself where all is light.

***"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."***  
(Isaiah 60 v 1)

Back in Psalm 120, when David took stock of his situation, and found that he was far away from God, where was he? He was dwelling among the tents of Kedar. In the Song of Solomon, the bride said that she was black, as the tents of Kedar. However, in Isaiah 60 v 7, we find the flocks of Kedar coming up and gathering together in the presence of the Lord. Those that were astray and far off, those that were black with sin, are brought back, cleansed, into the presence of the Lord. There they praise and glorify the Lord: ***"All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto Thee... they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory."*** Praise God, although we dwell in this dark world now, although we stand by night, we know His glory shining in our heart, we know the glory of His presence now, but there is coming an endless day when Jesus will be the light. There will be no night there.

Let us rejoice that we are not of the darkness. We have been translated from darkness and have been brought into His most marvellous light. We have a foretaste of glory divine. The Israelites of old endured the hard times of slavery in Egypt. When God poured out terrible plagues upon the land of Egypt, there came a time when God put a difference between His people of Israel and the Egyptians. When the ninth plague came bringing darkness for three days, God put a difference between the two peoples. When there was a darkness that was so thick that it could be felt, there was light in the dwellings of the Israelites. That is a picture of those who are the Lord's today.

### **Standing not Sitting**

Finally, let us notice that the servants of the Lord stand to minister. In this world there is no sitting. Jesus is seated at the right hand of the majesty on high because He completed the work that He came to do. It is finished. In Ephesians it reveals that God has raised us up to sit together with Christ in the heavenly places. We rest in His completed work. However, in this world there is no sitting. There is work to be done in ministering to the Lord and to one another and in proclaiming the message of the Gospel. In the tabernacle there were no seats, because the work was not finished. Today there is a work for each one of us to do for the Lord. Let us stand firm in that work.

In the Old Testament, the worker was one who stood. We too, as the priests in the House of the Lord, stand because there is a work to do. We stand by night, in the darkness of this world, to declare the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, to exalt His name, and to point lost souls to Him that they might be saved.

We stand because the Victor, the mighty Conqueror, stands. Although we like to think of Jesus being seated at the right hand of the majesty on high, the position of one whose work is completed, nevertheless, there is an occasion where it is recorded that the risen Lord Jesus was standing in heaven. That was when Stephen, the martyr, was slain. He cried out that he could see Jesus standing at the right hand of God. It was the Lord Jesus, the mighty Victor. Stephen, in his dying moments, saw the One who has forever conquered death, and was received into His presence to live forever.

When the Conqueror stands, he does so because He will never yield. When we stand in His strength it is because we are more than conquerors and will always have the victory over the enemy. We are unmovable in Christ Jesus, as it so counsels us in 1 Corinthians 15 v 58

**"...Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."** Never yield an inch to the enemy. When you have put on the whole armour of God and have done all, then stand! (Ephesians 6) We can do it because of our Mighty Victor in the glory.

Then there is yet another aspect to our standing. Subjects stand in the presence of the king. We are standing in the presence of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. So we stand to worship Him and to honour and magnify His name.

Yet again there is another reason. When the Israelites were preparing to leave Egypt on the night of that first Passover, they ate the Passover meal standing up. Why? It was because they were ready to move out of Egypt. That is why we stand by night, because we are ready to move out when the morning of that new day approaches. This world is not our home and we are not going to sit and make ourselves comfortable in it. We are ready to go.

As the servants of the Lord, we stand by night, worshipping Him, waiting for the morning, looking for His coming. In Isaiah, the cry goes out, **"Watchman, what of the night?"** Back came the reply, **"The morning comes and also the night."** We are not of the night, but of the day. When the morning comes, it will also be a time of judgment, a night of great judgment, not upon us but on all those who have rejected the Lord. We, however, look for that morning, that day without clouds, that day without end.

### **Blessing from God**

Where are God's servants standing? They stand in the holy place, in the house of the Lord. Now we know that the house of God is actually the church of the living God; it is the pillar and the ground of truth. We are really a part of that building as we are worshipping and praising Him. It is a building that is made of living stones. We are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. And so we are given the exhortation to lift up our hands in the sanctuary and to bless the Lord. That is our response of faith to all the Lord has done: we just lift up our hands. In Hebrews it commands us to lift up the hands that hang down, to strengthen the feeble knees. Let us respond in faith to worship Him. The hands are involved in both giving and receiving. We can give God praise and blessing and glory. God will give back to us too. In fact, He gave first. He gave His only begotten Son. God commends His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And as we respond in faith, God continues to give and give and give again.

This is what we find at the end of the Psalm. The Lord is still giving. **"The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion."** That is the place, according to Psalm 133, where He has commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. Life in all its fulness and abundance is the blessing with which God wants to bless you today.

**Surely goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

The End

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