



Materials for lifegroup use & personal reflection

St Peter's, Hextable & St Paul's, Swanley Village
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Quotable quotes

“Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.” *1 Chronicles 16:11*

“Safety comes in our nearness to God, not in our distance from our enemies.” *Dillon Burroughs*

“Hide yourself in God, so when others find you, they will have to go there first.” *Shannon Alder*

“Thou hast created us for thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it rests in thee!” *Augustine*

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



Look up! *Overview*
Comfort for the children of God.

I wonder what your Spotify playlist looks like? In our house Johnny's songs are all in one list whereas mine are, if you like, labelled for different moods, occasions and activities. I have a playlist entitled 'Looking up' and these are songs of declaration, songs that remind me of the sovereignty and love of God.

These for me are songs that invite me to draw closer to Him, to sing out, and to worship even when my circumstances may seek to message me differently.

'Look Up Child' by Lauren Daigle is one of my favourite songs on that list, the lyrics go like this:
Where are You now when darkness seems to win?
Where are You now when the world is crumbling?
Oh I, I hear You say, I hear You say
Look up child!

Where are You now when all I feel is doubt
Where are You now when I can't figure it out?
Oh I, I hear You say, I hear You say
Look up child!

You're not threatened by the war,
You're not shaken by the storm
I know You're in control
Even in our suffering
Even when it can't be seen
I know, You're in control
Look up Child!

Over the next eight weeks we are going to be looking at The Psalms of Ascent; songs sung by pilgrims going to the temple in Jerusalem for the festivals. There are 15 such Psalms, most of which are short with key words or phrases that we can hold onto as we continue to try to live well in these curious days or, as Sue recently put it, to 'grow and glow'!

Our prayer is that you may find strength, hope and encouragement in these Psalms as we journey together on the road. Whilst we may not be journeying to Jerusalem or to a church building for familiar worship, we can still sing out our praise and worship to a God who invites us to take our eyes off our circumstances, look up and trust Him that He knows, cares and understands.



Psalm 120-121 *Part One*

Call and Walk: Lord of my words and my ways

1. What is your instinctive, gut-reaction when things go wrong?

READ PSALM 120 in two different versions, one could be The Message.

What immediately strikes you?

2. What are the issues the Psalmist is calling out to God about? Any similarities to today?
3. Psalm 120 reminds us of the lying voices in the culture and the world. What might be the equivalent today? How should we react?
4. Eugene Peterson says, 'Psalm 120 is the decision to take one way over against the other. It is the turning point marking the transition from a dreamy nostalgia for a better life to a rugged pilgrimage of discipleship in faith, from complaining about how bad things are to pursuing all things good'. Discuss!

READ PSALM 121 in two different versions, what immediately strikes you from it?

5. Why do you think the Psalmist is looking up here?
6. What struck you from what Johnny said in his talk?
7. What prevents us from 'lifting our eyes to the hills?'
8. The Hebrew word 'Shamar' appears 6 times in Psalm 121; it means 'keeps', 'preserves.' What in your life reminds you that God is keeping or preserving you?
9. What other scriptures come to mind about God being our help?
10. Putting these two Psalms together, what do they tell us about the character of God?

Quotable Quotes

'God of peace, grant me Thy peace as I worship in Thy presence and let me find a bettered world when I come back to it, or at least being a bettered and more patient heart to its duties and strife's'. Samuel Cox

'Psalm 120 is the song of such a person sick with the lies and crippled with the hate, a person doubled up in pain over what is going on in the world. But it is not a mere outcry, it is a pain that penetrates through despair and stimulates a new beginning – a journey to God that becomes a life of peace'. Eugene Peterson

'The promise of the Psalm 121 is not that we shall never stub our toes but that no injury, no illness, no accident, no distress will have evil power over us, that is or will be able to separate us from God's purposes in us'. Eugene Peterson

'Faith is not a precarious affair of chance escape from satanic assaults. It is the solid, massive, secure experience of God who keeps evil from getting inside us, who guards our life, who guards us when we leave and when we return, who guards us now, who guards us always'. Alan Redpath



Psalm 122-123 *Part Two*
Worship and Service
Worship the King of mercy

Preparing to Journey Forward.

1. Read Psalms 122 & 123. What immediately strikes you about these Psalms?
2. What do you get excited about? Including fun thoughts, food, football etc!
3. Read 122 v6-9. Mother Teresa said, “if we have no peace it is because we have forgotten we belong to each other”. How do you ‘Pursue Peace’ in a world that is in crisis and panic?
4. Read 123 v3. It has been said that, ‘Repentance is difficult and the difficulty grows greater with delay’. Do you think the discipline of daily repentance is important in building our relationship with God? Why or why not?
5. Read 122 v2. Expect God to move, protect and guide. It can be said, that the world trashes God and then wonders where He is when trouble comes. More and more people seem to be calling on God through these troubling times. Is there anything wrong in calling on him when we are in trouble but leaving him to one side when we are okay, knowing that he will listen when we need him next? Why?
6. Read 122 v4 Progress towards.... Is it important to make ‘progress’ in our Christian walk? What is progress and how can it be measured? Is it easy to get distracted on our journey and fall back?
7. Read 123 v1 Affirm God’s character all the time. Does praise and affirmation of other people come easily to you? Think of an example. If we find it easy to affirm others do you think it becomes easy to affirm God? Does it get easier the more we practice? Why is it necessary to affirm God?
8. Read 122 v 1 Rejoice The people of Israel had no Temple at this stage, but they saw Jerusalem as their home and they rejoiced when they ‘came home’ Where is your spiritual home on earth? Where do you feel most comfortable with God? Do you feel near to home or far off? Sometimes we may have to carry others home, have you had an experience of being carried or carrying?
9. Encourage each other. How do you encourage others on their Christian journey?
10. In Romans 12 v 1 Paul talks about service in our everyday, ordinary life. Thinking about your week, how might you and I serve God in the everyday?

Quotable Quotes

‘God did not become a servant so that we could order Him around but so that we could join Him in redemptive life’. Eugene Peterson

‘The goal of the pilgrim is not Jerusalem as important as that city was, or even the temple in Jerusalem, as important as it was, but God Himself, whose true throne is not anywhere on earth but in heaven’. James Montgomery Boice

‘We live under mercy. God does not treat us as alien others, lining us up so that He can evaluate our competence or our usefulness or our worth. He rules, guides, commands, loves us as children whose destinies He carries in His heart’. Eugene Peterson



Psalm 124-125 Part Three
Help and Home
Surrounded by the Protector

1. Where is your 'safe place', where you feel you can truly be yourself?

READ PSALM 124 in two different versions. What immediately strikes you?

2. What's brought the Psalmist to the point of 'lifting up' their eyes?
3. What circumstances make you most likely to turn to God?
4. Have you seen God's help at work in your life or the life of someone you know when you or they asked for it?
5. How might we grow in seeking God even in the mundane, or when things are going well?

READ PSALM 125 in two different versions. What immediately strikes you?

6. Where is the Psalmist's 'home' or 'safe place'? Can you relate to its description when thinking about your own safe place?
7. V4 and 5 talk about loyalty to God. Do you ever think about your relationship with God in this way? What might loyalty to God look like today in our nation?
8. Where else in the Bible do you see passages or stories that show God to be a place of safety, surrounding His people? What do these tell us about God's character?
9. These Psalms deal with the covenantal relationship between God and His people, whereby they are called to be loyal and God helps and protects. Does this fit with your own understanding of your relationship with God? Where does grace fit in to all this?
10. Where might you need God's help and protection this week?

Quotable Quotes

'God's angels often protect his servants from potential enemies'.

Billy Graham

'Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.' Deuteronomy 31:6

'God does not remove us from all harm; He uses harm to move us close to Him'.

Dillon Burroughs



Psalm 126-127 Part Four
Restoration and Building
The Lord, our restorer and builder

1. Is there anything you are particularly proud of building or renovating yourself? (Maybe during lockdown?)

READ PSALM 126 in two different versions. What immediately strikes you?

2. What situation, do you think, has prompted the psalmist to look up? How do they find encouragement in the midst of the crisis?
3. What can we learn about the character of God from this Psalm?
4. Where in the Bible have you seen God redeem a hopeless situation? Have you experienced this in your own life?
5. How can we play a part in the process of redeeming hopeless situations in the lives of those around us?

READ PSALM 127 in two different versions. What immediately strikes you?

6. What do you think the Psalmist means by 'house'?
7. How might this Psalm help in our every-day home life and our relationships within our family?
8. This Psalm talks about children being a blessing from the Lord. This can be understood as a blessing for the whole community of faith, not just the parents. How can the whole church help raise children in their faith-journey?
9. What would you like God to restore or build in your life or in the lives of those around you? Pray about these as a group.

Quotable Quotes

'For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.' 1 Corinthians 3:9

'Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.' John Newton

'And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.' Isaiah 58:22



Psalm 128-129 Part Five
Blessing and Strength
A people blessed and sustained

1. Can you think of a time when you have felt particularly 'favoured' by someone?

READ PSALM 128 in two different versions. What immediately strikes you?

2. What are the indicators of blessedness according to the Psalmist?
3. Does the lack of these particular indicators mean a lack of blessing? Where does suffering fit in to the blessed life? Think about Jesus' own example and experience.
4. How might you know that you are blessed by God? Can you find places in Scripture that support these ideas?
5. 'God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him' Discuss!?

READ PSALM 129 in two different versions. What immediately strikes you?

6. This Psalm shows the community of faith looking back and remembering their struggles and God's faithfulness. Do you have any examples of this from your own life?
7. In v1 and v2 Israel is called to remember together. What do you think is the value of a whole community remembering their journey of faith together? Are there positives and negatives of a community bringing up past sufferings?
8. 1 Cor 12:12-26 talks about the church's identity as one body, made up of individuals. What do you think we can do as a community to support collective as well as individual suffering?
9. Who might need our prayers of blessing or strength at this particular time? How could we practically help and support them in this?

Quotable Quotes

'All believers receive the power to become children of God, to be transformed and restored to our true nature, people created in the image of God.' Charles Colson

"Pray, and let God worry." Martin Luther

"Let your life reflect the faith you have in God. Fear nothing and pray about everything. Be strong, trust God's word, and trust the process." Germany Kent

'It is such a glorious thing when Christ so transforms someone that you can't even imagine that person being what he or she used to be. You realize that it is the power of a changed life. And that is what God can do.' Greg Laurie



Psalm 130-131 Part Six
Wait and Rest
Wait in hope for the Lord

1. What kind of person are you? Are you someone who would love a silent retreat, or would that drive you crazy?

READ PSALM 130 in two different versions (one could be the Message version). What immediately strikes you?

2. This Psalm talks about waiting for the Lord. What do you think the Psalmist is waiting for? Can you relate?
3. The Message version says that ‘forgiveness is your [God’s] habit’. Do you believe this is true? How do you balance this with God’s other characteristics and actions?
4. When we get things wrong, where else do we end up turning before we come to God?
5. Read verses 5 and 6 again. Is there hope for those who struggle with the idea of waiting and feeling powerless to do anything about it? (Think about the occupation of ‘watchmen’)
6. What might it look like to wait upon the Lord in the midst or aftermath of individual struggles and sins in our church community?

READ PSALM 131 in two different versions (one could be the Message version). Allow a short moment of silence after each reading, to pause and reflect on the words.

7. John Mark Comer writes: “love, joy, and peace are at the heart of all Jesus is trying to grow in the soil of your life. And all three are incompatible with hurry.” Why do you think hurry is so prevalent in our society today? What might be the effect of hurry on our relationship with God?
8. Why do you think the Psalmist speaks of faith and relationship with God like a ‘weaned child’? A helpful quote: ‘He compares himself with a weaned child ‘in its mother’s arms’ no longer fretting for its mother’s milk and craving for its own desires to be satisfied but finding contentment in a cuddle and the nearness of love.’ said FF Bruce. How does this speak to you today?
9. What’s the difference between the confidence of a toddler and the confidence of an adult? How can we cultivate a more childlike approach in our faith?

Quotable Quotes

“Faith has to do with things that are not seen and hope with things that are not at hand.” Thomas Aquinas

“True faith means holding nothing back. It means putting every hope in God's fidelity to His Promises.” Francis Chan

‘The words *wait* and *hope* are connected with the image of watchmen waiting through the night for the dawn. The connection provides important insights for the person in trouble who cries out: “But surely there is something for me to do!” The answer is yes, there is something for you to do. Or more exactly there is someone you can *be*: Be a watchman.’ Eugene Peterson



Psalm 132-133 *Part Seven*

Chosen and United

Our faithful Lord who binds us together

1. Imagine you're Jesus and you're putting together your team of disciples, what are the characteristics you look for in your selections?

READ PSALM 132 in two different versions. What immediately strikes you from it?

2. As Christians we are part of the People of God described in this Psalm. How does it feel to hear that you are chosen and wanted by God? Is that an easy thing to believe?
3. David and Israel as a whole made many mistakes and turned their backs on God at various points in the Old Testament. How do you balance God's free gift of grace, welcoming us into the family, with obedience and commitment on our part?
4. John Calvin states: 'True knowledge of God is born out of obedience.' With this in mind, what is the most important thing in our approach to God and His Word? What's the goal and your expectations when you sit down to read the Bible or pray?
5. God's promise that He will bless His people and bring salvation through them is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. This is a powerful reminder to us that even when we are not faithful, God is. Can you think of any passages in the rest of the Bible that help remind us of this?

READ PSALM 133. What immediately strikes you?

6. 'You can be a Christian, but you don't have to be part of the church'. What do you think about this comment?
7. Where do we see divisions in the church, historically, globally and locally? What should our reaction be to them?
8. Pursuing unity can be a costly and challenging task. Why do you think this is?
9. How can we play a part in bringing about unity within our church family?

Quotable Quotes

'Obedience is not a stodgy plodding in the ruts of religion, it is a hopeful race towards God's promises.' Eugene Peterson.

We are loved by love Himself. God has come to us in Jesus, and His life and love change everything!

'Where relationships are warm and expectancies fresh, we are already beginning to enjoy the life together that will be completed in our life everlasting.' Eugene Peterson



Psalm 134 *Part Eight*
Blessing and Blessed
Bless the One who blesses

1. When we ask God to bless someone, what do we actually mean?
2. How can you more and more be a person of blessing?

READ PSALM 134. What immediately strikes you?

3. Does God need blessing in the same way we do when someone blesses us? When we sing 'Bless the Lord O my soul', what do we mean?
4. How does the posture of lifting up our hands impact the way we think about and worship God?
5. What else helps your approach to praise and thanksgiving?
6. Which of the Songs of Ascent that we have been studying over the past few weeks has impacted you the most?
7. What are some of the reasons we should 'look up' in the face of whatever life throws at us?
8. How did Jesus live a life of 'looking up' even as he journeyed towards the cross?
9. The Songs of Ascent are about the journey of long obedience of God's people towards not only Jerusalem, but His presence, and ultimately the hope of new creation. Where would you like to continue to grow in your walk towards that same goal?
10. What are the three main takeaways for you...?

Quotable Quotes

'It describes what God does to us and among us; He enters into covenant with us, He pours out his own life for us, He shares the goodness of His Spirit, the vitality of His creation, the joys of His redemption. He empties Himself among us, and we get what He is. That is *blessing*.' Eugene Peterson

Never forget that the heart of God is very kind!

'The unthankful heart discovers no mercies; but the thankful heart will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings.' Henry Ward Beecher