

# EXPLORING THE PSALMS

## HOMEGROUP BIBLE STUDY NOTES: THE JOURNEY OF FAITH

*All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees (Ps 25:10)*

The Psalms are full of advice and encouragement about what it means to live for God in this complex, wonderful - yet sometimes difficult - world. Sometimes our faith is tested; we have questions - about who we are and who God is; we go through times of suffering, sin, lament and penitence. Throughout history, we see God's gracious actions of rescue, restoration and renewal. And that gives rise to a hope, in which we look to God's future when justice and peace embrace and God's King rules over all.

So the question - as we travel through our journey - is **"how should we then live?"**

### The Way of Wisdom

#### TAKE A LOOK AT

#### Psalm 37

***"Do not fret because of those who are evil  
or be envious of those who do wrong;***

***for like the grass they will soon wither,  
like green plants they will soon die away.***

***Trust in the Lord and do good;  
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.***

***Take delight in the Lord,  
and he will give you the desires of your heart.***

***Commit your way to the Lord;  
trust in him and he will do this..."***

*These are words from a teacher of Wisdom.  
The entire Psalm is a rich exposition of aspects of the journey of faith.*

*Take a few moments as a group to reflect on times when you've asked questions like:  
"why do bad people appear to succeed"?  
or  
"why do wrongdoers escape punishment"?*

*Then read verse 20:  
**"But the wicked will perish:  
Though the Lord's enemies are like the flowers of the field,  
they will be consumed, they will go up in smoke."***

So: "How should we then live?"

*Here are a few extracts from the Psalm - take time to reflect on them  
and discuss how these pithy instructions might enable us  
to live a life of faith under the providence of God:*

*Trust in the Lord and do good;  
Take delight in the Lord;  
Commit your way to the Lord;  
Be still before the Lord;  
Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;  
do not fret;  
Turn from evil and do good;  
Hope in the Lord;  
keep his way.*

## **The Pilgrim's Way**

There are 15 Psalms (120-134) known as "Songs of Ascents". Typically, they would have been Psalms to sing on the journey - perhaps exiles, joyously returning to Jerusalem, or scattered Israelites living far away, "going up" to Jerusalem for an annual festival. These "pilgrimage Psalms" illustrate different aspects of what growth in faith might involve - in other words, "how should we live?". They:

- **reflect the joys and fears of pilgrims:** Imagine how exiles from Babylon might feel on their return to Jerusalem. Have you ever returned to somewhere that is very special to you, where you have lots of memories? How did you feel? Was there a bit of fear? Apprehension, as well as joy and anticipation? What's it like to be with a group of worshippers walking together to a Festival? Have you ever experienced that? Look at some of the emotions:

Psalm 120: Distress (v 1: "In my distress I cry to the LORD")

Psalm 122: Gladness (v 1: "I rejoiced with those who said unto me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD'")

Psalm 123: Longing (v.1: "I lift my eyes to you...")

Psalm 126: Joy and Laughter (v.2: "...our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with songs of joy...may those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy")

Psalm 129: Lament and anguish (v.5: "May all who hate Zion be turned back in shame")

- **serve as reminders of God's promises:** Psalm 121 - the subject of this week's sermon - is a good example. God, our ever-present help - has promised to look after us, watch over us, and keep us from evil. We find the same in Psalm 124 v 8. And in Psalm 127 we are reminded that everything depends on God's provision (Psalm 127:1: "unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labour in vain");
- **remind us of the centrality of prayer:** Pilgrims pray for peace - in Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6); and upon Israel (Psalm 124:7). Psalm 123:1-2 tells us a lot about the Psalmist's prayerfulness: "To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God."

### **DISCUSS**

What does it mean to be people on a journey of faith?  
How should we live?

*The Psalms often use the metaphor of the 'way' or the 'path':*

***"You show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy; in your right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11)***

***"All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and decrees" (Psalm 25:10)***

***"He leads me in right oaths, for his name's sake" (Psalm 23:3)***

***"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:125)***

*And the response is often to pray for guidance and help on the journey*

***"Make me to know your ways O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation" (Psalm 25:4-7)***

- **give hope to the pilgrims:** Pilgrims undertake their journey of faith in the confidence of God's promises, and the assurance of God's salvation. Because the LORD has been gracious in the past, they look forward in expectation that God will continue to bless them. The journey of faith is a journey of hope. Often, the Psalms refer to expectant waiting - waiting for God, longing for God, anticipating God's gracious actions towards them again:

Psalm 130:5,7: I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

Psalm 33:22: Let your steadfast love, O LORD be upon us, even as we hope in you;

Psalm 130:7: Put your hope in the LORD

Psalm 34: 18,19: Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love

**AND FINALLY...**

Some words of encouragement from the Psalms  
(selected by Bishop David)

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me. (Ps 23.4)*

*Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. (Ps 30.5);  
...O Lord, be my helper! (Ps 30.10).*

*Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord. (Ps 31.24).*

*I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God...  
As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O Lord my God. (Ps 40.1-3, 17);*

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear. (Ps 46.1-2).*

*Be gracious to me, O God, for people trample on me; all day long foes oppress me....  
O Most High, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you.  
In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I am not afraid; what can flesh do to me?...  
In God I trust; I am not afraid...  
You have delivered my soul from death, and my feet from falling,  
so that I may walk before God in the light of life. (Ps.56.1,2,3,13).*

*May those who sow in tears, reap with shouts of joy.  
You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle.(Ps 56.8).*

*Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. (Ps 126.5-6).*

*"Be still, and know that I am God." (Ps 46.10).*