



GROWING UP IN GOD A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PSALMS OF ASCENT

We are on a journey into the heart of God. Is it the soul's quest for God, or God's quest for the soul? This is a question we must ask before we start because if this is the soul's quest for God, we will be striving to get somewhere. If, on the other hand, it is God's quest for the soul – we simply need to respond to Him as He calls us, through these psalms, to 'Come up higher'.

Let us settle it right now then – we love because He first loved us...so from our position as the well-beloved in the Beloved, held in His passionate embrace, we will look at these psalms, both as they related to the nation of Israel and how they apply to us in the 21st century.

The role of the Holy Spirit in the earth in this time is to indwell us, God's people. The role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was that He came upon people, for a specific purpose. This means that we are truly something unique upon the earth. You could say that we are something which has never been seen on the earth before – a people who are indwelt by God Himself – a nation within a nation: a Kingdom within a kingdom, a nation set apart unto God.

It is my desire to cause you to pause and consider, to think about what is said in each one of these psalms – to meditate, slow down, step off the roundabout, go deeper, higher, wider with God than you have hitherto.

We are all on a journey; we all have a destiny and a story to tell. Savour this time with Him; enjoy Him as He enjoys you, delight in Him as He delights in you...withdraw now into your interior castle, the castle of your heart, where He waits for you.

'My Father, keeper of the sanctuary of my soul – my heart is your altar – let Your fire fall, let Your glory fill this sacred place, the glory that was revealed in Jesus that You want me to share...rekindle my inner fire of love...bring my scattered self to You...fuse my heart to Yours in an eternal embrace..Late I have loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new.'

**THE PSALMS OF ASCENT:
SESSION 1
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For the nation of Israel, the ascent to Jerusalem and the Temple was a pilgrimage: the Psalms the Jewish believers recited and sang took them up towards their goal – which was to meet with God in the Temple on Mount Moriah in order that they may worship Him.

It is clear that they recalled as they ascended, their return from the captivity in Babylon and the psalmist describes them as being ‘... like them that dream’. Psalm 126:1. And in Psalm 137 – not one of the psalms of ascent - they recall a lament that they could not sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land – they bitterly mourned not being able to ‘go up’ to Jerusalem to worship whilst they were in captivity... The psalms are a journal of the journey of the people of Israel – mostly of David, but other writers too such as Asaph – 1 Chronicles 16.

Psalm 137

¹*By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down and wept,
When we remembered Zion.*
²*Upon the willows in the midst of it
We hung our harps.*
³*For there our captors demanded of us songs,
And our tormentors mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."*
⁴*How can we sing the LORD'S song
In a foreign land?*
⁵*If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
May my right hand forget her skill.*
⁶*May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
If I do not remember you,
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.*

This is a cry of those who have realised what they have lost; it is a cry of anguish at separation from the one place where they could meet with God.

The word ‘Babylon’ means confusion – my prayer is that as you study these 15 Psalms, you will come out of any confusion about God’s heart, His desire, His intention, His will, towards you and His pleasure in you, and if you have in some way drifted from Him, that you will hear again His voice calling you to ‘Come up higher’ in order that you may indeed ‘sing the Lord’s song’ in a foreign land.

As you ascend ever closer to the Living Flame of Love, may you come to recognise **His** dream for you and for your life as He seeks to captivate your heart as you have captivated His. The journey that we are about to take together is an inward one...inside your heart and His...

As we travel together through these fifteen psalms, from 120 – 134, we will have the opportunity to examine our hearts to see if we are set on that upward path, whether there is a highway there which leads upwards to the dwelling place of the King.

I want to start with Psalm 84 not one of the Psalms of Ascent, but it is a fitting place to begin – C H Spurgeon called this psalm ‘the pearl of psalms’. The writer declares precisely where his heart is set –

Psalm 84 NKJV

*¹ How lovely is Your tabernacle,
O LORD of hosts!*

*² My soul longs, yes, even faints
For the courts of the LORD;
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.*

*³ Even the sparrow has found a home,
And the swallow a nest for herself,
Where she may lay her young—
Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts,
My King and my God.*

*⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in Your house;
They will still be praising You. Selah*

*⁵ Blessed is the man whose strength is in You,
Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.*

*⁶ As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
They make it a spring;
The rain also covers it with pools.*

*⁷ They go from strength to strength;
Each one appears before God in Zion.*

*⁸ O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
Give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah*

*⁹ O God, behold our shield,
And look upon the face of Your anointed.*

*¹⁰ For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God*

*Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
The LORD will give grace and glory;
No good thing will He withhold
From those who walk uprightly.*

*12 O LORD of hosts,
Blessed is the man who trusts in You!*

Verse 5, 'blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage'- in the Hebrew the literal translation of this verse is 'in whose hearts are highways...' this is the theme of our studies - the highway in our heart, and a heart which is set on pilgrimage.

All of us have started out on new adventures with great enthusiasm and expectation, only to find our hopes dashed by reality.

We have looked at that mountain and longed to scale it – but sometimes even before we have reached the first level we find that we have neither the resources nor the resolve to complete the climb. We have suffered losses; maybe we just did not count the cost before embarking on the climb...

We all have a story to tell, we are all on a journey – life with God is not a destination, it is a journey, so we must train ourselves to pay attention to His presence in at all times and in everything.

A question we need to ask ourselves at this point then is - do we really **want** to walk with God?

Do we **want** to follow His plan for our life as it unfolds on the stage of history?

Are we willing to give Him our dreams and allow Him to show us what His dream for us is?

Do we want to make this climb?

Do we desire a heart which is set on pilgrimage?

Just stop right there for a moment before you continue and answer that question before you go any further. God will not love you any the less whatever you choose, but choose you must because there is a cost involved...

The path up the mountain will separate you from other people; it is a place where you and He walk alone together, it is a place where only His voice is heard; it is the path of unknowing...it is the path of misunderstanding – others will not understand where you are going – it is the path of the closed mouth and the open heart...apprenticed to our Master, Jesus, we learn our 'trade' as we go, in communion and community with Him, the Father and the Holy Spirit. We describe ourselves as disciples...but we are also

pilgrims, people who spend our lives going somewhere, going with God to God, and whose pathway is the Way, Himself, Jesus Christ.

To follow Him, to walk with Him on the high places requires rigorous concentration and discipline. It requires passion, daily sacrifice and service. It requires that He be your focus, your lodestar, your intention, your goal, your all sufficiency...

...there are no short cuts; the climb is arduous at times, but our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, through the indwelling Holy Spirit. (1 John 1:3)...

And everything we do is for an audience of just One.

'Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage...'

The natural man's heart has many pathways, diverse and destructive, but the heart that has been touched deeply by God's grace has a single highway. It is a narrow one, and it is the King's Highway, it leads up to the presence of the King Himself.

The starting point for true pilgrimage is a deep, deep desire for God Himself; as we raise our level of God consciousness, as we *'lift our eyes to the hills from whence cometh our help'* as we look up to Him, we begin to see we are designed, we are destined as a race, a nation, a people, for something so noble, so much more than the commonplace, we have destiny, we have purpose, we have identity and security and God issues an invitation to us to walk with Him.

Enoch walked with God and he was not...

Noah found favour with the Lord...

Abraham was His friend...

Moses talked with Him as a man speaks with his friend...

There *is* more – an old Pentecostal hymn writer. Johnson Oatman, Jr put it this way –

I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day,
Still praying as I onward bound
'Lord, plant my feet on higher ground'.

My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay,
Though some may dwell where these abound,
My constant aim is higher ground.

I long to scale the utmost height,
Though rough the way and hard the fight,
My song while climbing shall resound,
'Lord, plant my feet on higher ground'.

Lord lead me up the mountain side,
I dare not climb without my guide
And, heaven gained, I'll gaze around,
With grateful heart from higher ground.

This journey is unique – it is a long obedience in the same direction and the important thing is not how we start, but how we finish.

The common ground with Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses is an intimate relationship with the Almighty.

The key to a journey that is remarkable is **intimacy** with God, the key to a journey that reaches its destination is walking with Him – so are you living your life, or are you walking with Him?

Amos 3:3

'Can two walk together except they be agreed?'

We need to establish now whether we are in **agreement** with Him – that is, He leads, and we follow – wherever He says – we go, whatever He asks, we do. John 2:5.

He initiates, we respond, the way we came into the Christian life is the way we go on.

He doesn't negotiate – He's inviting you to join Him, I wonder what your answer will be...

A W Tozer in his book 'The Pursuit of God' says this:

'The approach of God to the soul or of the soul to God is not to be thought of in spatial terms at all. There is no idea of physical distance involved in the concept. It is not a matter of miles but of experience...A man may say, "I feel that my son is coming nearer to me as he gets older," and yet that son has lived by his father's side since he was born and has never been away from home more than a day or so in his entire life. What then can the father mean? Obviously he is speaking of experience. He means that the boy is coming to know him more intimately and with deeper understanding, that the barriers of thought and feeling between the two are disappearing, that father and son are becoming more closely united in mind and heart...'

John 17:3

³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.'

Father desires that we **know** Him, that we become intimately acquainted with Him, become one with Him in mind and heart. That we think as He thinks, we see things the way He sees them, we respond in the way He responds...The nearness of God is our goal and our good. He doesn't send an answer, He is the answer. Jesus doesn't give peace, He is peace, the 'I AM' is with us.

As children of the King and part of His Kingdom on the earth we are learning that we don't need to understand everything, or have an answer for everything, we don't even need to know where we are going or why – our hearts are opening ever wider to the Father and we find ourselves saying -

*'Wherever you are going, wherever you are taking me is all right. I just need to **be** with You...'and we place our hand in His...'*

One of my own favourite verses in the Psalms is -

Psalm 65:4 NKJV

*⁴ Blessed is the man You choose,
And cause to approach You,
That he may dwell in Your courts.
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house,
Of Your holy temple.*

Blessed is the man whom You choose...and cause to approach you...that he may dwell...and be satisfied.

'Come, walk with Me...and be satisfied' in Father's house.

The dimensions of Father's house are fathomless, unsearchable and indescribable. The kingdom of God is a nest built right into Father's altar in the midst of where He lives (Psalm 84:3).

As we travel together I will recommend you read various writers such as Molinos, Fenelon, Madam Jeanne Guyon, to name but three who are grouped together brilliantly in a book by Gene Edwards; and some modern writers such as Andrew Murray and A W Tozer, last century and most recently, Graham Cooke. All these people had or are having a journey in God which was and is remarkable. We have so much to learn from them.

Meditation is a lost art. It is time we slowed down and became more thoughtful, thinking deeply about the things of God, Who He is, meditating on His nature and what His purposes are in the earth and how that relates to us as His people.

Jeremiah 6:16 NKJV

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD:

"Stand in the ways and see,

*And ask for the old paths, where the good way is,
And walk in it;
Then you will find rest for your souls.
But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'*

'But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' Which was why they ended up in captivity...

I am a fellow climber with you on the journey to the summit of His heart, I have not arrived, but my heart is set on pilgrimage. My desire is not to weigh you down by putting burdens on you, but to inspire you to follow in the steps of some of the choicest saints in order that you might travel lightly, swiftly and brilliantly in the company of the Godhead. I'm sure I will mix my metaphors and cause you to scratch your head at the way I describe things sometimes, but hear my heart – I **love** Him and I want you to love Him and walk with Him in intimate embrace too – there is no sibling rivalry in the Kingdom.

Come then let us go on together and study our first psalm...

Psalm 120 - The ways of God:

Have you noticed that God uses various ways to get our attention?

Psalm 120 NASB

Prayer for Deliverance from the Treacherous.

A Song of Ascents.

¹*In my trouble I cried to the LORD,
And He answered me.*

²*Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips,
From a deceitful tongue.*

³*What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you,
You deceitful tongue?*

⁴*Sharp arrows of the warrior,
With the burning coals of the broom tree.*

⁵*Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech,
For I dwell among the tents of Kedar!*

⁶*Too long has my soul had its dwelling
With those who hate peace.*

⁷*I am for peace, but when I speak,
They are for war.*

In this psalm, God is using **distress** to get David's attention. And the form of distress expressed here is the deceit of others...David has been criticised unfairly; he says he's been lied about, and he is crying to the Lord about it.

The Midrash – the Jewish commentary on the Old Testament says this about ‘arrows’ of disparaging words spoken by one person about another, out of their hearing – slander:

‘All other weapons smite from close quarters, whereas the sharp arrows of the tongue smite from a distance. Even so is slander, because it is spoken in Rome but it kills in Syria. Nor is it like any other coals but the coals of the broom tree. For all other coals are extinguished inside when they are extinguished on the outside. But the coals of the broom are still burning within, even though they are extinguished without. So is he who listens to slander...even if you go and appease him and he lets himself be appeased, he is still burning within.’

Words that burn within, even though there is no outward sign...it is reported that a broom tree burned for 18 months without going out...Is something burning and consuming you on the inside that is damaging no-one but yourself? Are you holding a grudge or is a grudge holding you?

And gossip, that tasty favourite of favourites, the Hebrews described as the ‘*dust of slander*’...how important is the tongue in the life of a believer.

We all have distress, including at times the distress of slander, things spoken about us. The question is, what do we do about it, how do we handle it, how do we respond?

Sometimes we react to distress by withdrawing, sometimes we react by attacking, but the spiritual person, the one whose heart is set on pilgrimage, learns to turn to God in all circumstances so every situation is an opportunity for a closer walk with Him – and to respond rather than react.

Psalm 24:3

*³Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?
And who may stand in His holy place?
⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood
And has not sworn deceitfully.*

Here is something we need to set a watch on then, if we are to journey up to Zion and ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in His holy place. Not only not speaking out bad words, but not listening to them.

Proverbs 16:28, Proverbs 26:20.

James tells us if we can control our tongue we can control our whole body. Slander - the Greek word is ‘*katalalia*’, literally ‘down speaking’, ‘evil speaking’ or ‘slander’ James has a lot to say about in his epistle –

James 3:4 – 6 The Message

'A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it! ⁵⁻⁶It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.'

'Sticks and stones may hurt my bones, but words will never harm me...'

Criticism hurts: it is painful even if it is true – in fact sometimes the criticism we receive is painful because it *is* true. The truth when it first arrives is almost always negative...If the criticism you have received is not true, be patient, God will vindicate you in due time – and when He does, you will not care, your heart will have been softened by the experience.

If you let it...

Let God handle it.

He likes that.

He likes it when we *trust* Him with the things that hurt us the most; not seeking to attack the other, defend ourselves, or burn within, but leaving it to Him to judge in due time and in the manner in which He thinks fit.

David knew this, he went straight to the Lord and in his journal, which is the psalms, he wrote exactly how he felt...

God doesn't like it when we try to handle things ourselves, going to this one and that for support, any more than a Father would like it if his child went to the father of a neighbour when they were in trouble.

You can trust Him with your pain and confusion and the lies...

It's is called – abandonment, surrender to the Divine Will...

Kissing the hand that hurts....

Practising forgiveness...

Responding in the opposite spirit...and it has a purpose...

'Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress...'

Psalm 4:1 KJV – again, a heart cry of David -

⁴Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.'

David knew that distress was the instrument God was using to enlarge his heart...to develop him...

He allows in His wisdom what He could easily prevent by His power.

Francois de Fenelon put it this way:

*“Don’t be angry about what people say. Just follow God and let them talk. As far as people are concerned, you will never be able to satisfy them. Silence, peace and union with God should comfort you from all that people speak against you.”*¹

And David is living between Meshech and Kedar – he’s ‘between the devil and the deep blue sea’, we would say. He is sandwiched between Bedouins in the north and enemies in the south; they are for war, when he is for peace – added to which these people had a lust for things, wealth, position, power. This describes the person who is surrounded by enemy activity on the one hand and the world on the other – living between Meshech and Kedar.

Under such pressure it is easy to drift to the edge of the Christian walk – in his psalm David is crying out to God because he feels the pressure, the draw of going back into the world’s methods for settling his ‘debts’.

Much like the situations we find ourselves in on a daily basis. But there is another element here – perhaps he is living in the wrong place, like Lot, as near to the world as he can get without falling into it...

Are you living in the wrong place - spiritually or physically?

Perhaps you are feeling a little sorry for yourself, got the POM syndrome – poor old me – but there’s more to this for David, he is living in a place of danger. Are you one of those people who like to live on the edge of things, on the edge of danger, so that you sail close to the wind, one foot in the world and the other in the Kingdom and now you find that you are in trouble?

Distress: one of God’s methods, one of His ways, of getting our attention. But also and more importantly, it is there for our development, for enlarging our hearts; it is so important that we respond positively to His call, even if it be through distress, danger or discord – I am for peace, but they are for war...

What makes for peace is when I really understand that the problem is not the situation itself or the person, but **my** reaction and what God wants to do in me and what He wants to be for me – ‘*never will I leave you, never will I forsake you*’ – He is with me in it – but He never comes to take sides, only to take over.

As I learn to keep my mouth shut and my heart open to Him...I am changed into His image...distress has done its work.

Maybe you have been misunderstood and maligned and you are still smarting under the attack – here’s a prayer to help you – it was written by one of my mentors:

‘Father,

I am weary of being misunderstood. Renew my mind that I may not sin with my lips. I am tired of the ungracious scrutiny of others; refresh my heart to look on them with love. Guard my heart from people who speak about me, but not to me.

I am helpless against the riptide of their words. I cannot defend myself.

Hide me dear Lord, in your secret place, help me to be silent. I accept this as part of Your cross. Change my heart through this.

Let their words chisel away my roughness, forming Christ. Through misunderstanding, sculpt my life to reveal Your own beauty.

In Jesus name and for His sake.

Amen.’

God bless you, see you next month.

Beryl M

¹100 days in the secret place – Gene Edwards, page 24.

Recommended reading:

‘The Pursuit of God’ A W Tozer

‘Absolute Surrender’ Andrew Murray

“100 days in the Secret Place” Gene Edwards – available as paperback or Kindle from Amazon.co.uk

"A Short Method of Prayer, and Spiritual Torrents" by Jean Marie Bouvieres de la Motte Guyon; Paperback; £9.98 available from Amazon, or available on Kindle for as little as .49p.

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