

Moving Through the Psalms of Ascent

Week 4: Psalm 128 - 129

Day 1 – Psalm 128

Read Psalm 128 in ESV, CSB, AMPC, and NIV or NLT. As you're reading jot down what stands out to you.

1. What does it mean to be blessed according to Psalm 128? Write down any other words you see used for blessed in other translations.
2. There are two things a blessed person does in Psalm 128:1. What are they?
3. What are the descriptions of the man who is blessed in Psalm 128:3-4?

You probably saw that a blessed person is one who fears God and who walks with God. The description of the blessings in his life are great work, wife, and kids. At a shallow first reading of this chapter it can read as lifestyle math problem. Good Guy + Good behavior = Good life. If you find yourself either currently in or looking back on a season where you tried as hard as you could to do right and aren't seeing the results described in this chapter, reading Psalm 128 can sting. And though we try to make life fit neatly into If-Then scenarios where we can control outcome, God isn't impressed by our independent need to manage our lives well. He is determined to teach us to walk with Him on paths that lead to dependency and joy and real blessedness. So let's get to a fuller and deeper understanding of the blessed life.

4. In the Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary the authors define true happiness (*or the blessed life*) as satisfaction and fullness. Look up the following verses all from Psalms and make a list of what they teach about a blessed, happy, satisfied life.
 - 1:1-2
 - 94:12
 - 112:1
 - 119:1-2
5. Looking back on question 3 and what you learned with the additional passages in question 4, what produces a blessed life?

As we continue our journey to understand what it means to be blessed, read Matthew 5:1-12 in your study bible and in the NCV (New Century Version). Keep adding to your list of what it means to be blessed.

6. Who is speaking the words in this passage? What's the context?
7. Make a list of the conditions of the blessed person next to the blessing they receive. How does this brief look at the beatitudes add to your understanding of what *blessed* really is?

8. Prayerfully look back on all your work today, then answer: What habits or disciplines should you add or remove from your life right now to make your life more blessed?

⇒ **Daily Pilgrim Progress:**

- What does this lesson teach you about where your heart is set?
- How do these passages encourage you to move toward God?

Day 2 – Psalm 128

Yesterday we spent the entire day defining blessed, we will likely spend time in our teaching session defining it still more. Today we are going to dig deeper into the two actions taken by a blessed person in Psalm 128.

1. What is the first thing a blessed person does in Psalm 128:1?
2. What does it mean to you to fear the Lord?
3. Read the following passages in the NLT and the AMP (*not AMPC this time*). What is the definition of the fear of the Lord? Write down additional words that are associated with the fear of the Lord.
 - Proverbs 1:7
 - Proverbs 9:10
 - Proverbs 15:33
 - Job 28:28

It might seem strange to spend two entire days of study on the first verse of Psalm 128. But as I've been sinking into the lessons of this psalm, I've been so challenged to re-examine these familiar phrases. I hope that you also are finding these lessons scratching at the tidy understanding you've held, or even better bringing them to life for the first time! I want us to finish up our study about the fear of the Lord with one last familiar passage.

You may have noticed that much of our study on the fear of the Lord has been found in Proverbs, a book full of encouragement and warning for God's people to make choices that follow Him and His ways. Read Proverbs 3:1-12 in two of your favorite translations.

4. Where do you see the key theme of the fear of the Lord that we've been studying?
5. Make a list with two columns: One titled *Instructions* listing all the commands given in this passage and one titled *Blessings* with the connecting blessing when the instruction is obeyed.

In Angela Thomas' Bible Study on the Sermon on the Mount she described the conditions and blessings of the beatitudes (*Matthew 5:1-12, remember in the homework yesterday?*) as "when you are..." met with "Jesus comes with..." For example, in her interpretation, "blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" could be understood as "when you are mourning...Jesus comes with comfort." I've never forgotten that lesson because it helped me so much to let go of an entitled transactional way of counting blessings and feeling God owed me something.

Go back to the top of the lists you've just made from Proverbs 3. Next to Instructions write "when you are" and next to Blessings write "Jesus comes with." Some of the wording doesn't quite make the transition, but I hope this helps you generally to see the relational importance of fearing God.

6. Review your lists using these new titles. What new insight or understanding does this give you?

When I remember His teaching and keep His commands, when I am careful to prioritize loyalty and kindness. When I trust God completely and stop leaning only into what I can understand. When I am intentional to acknowledge His ways before my own with reverence. When I am resolute to turn away from evil. When I am quick to welcome correction and honor God with my possessions. In *that* way of living, He meets me with a satisfying life full of healthy relationships, a good reputation, guidance for all my decisions, strength in my body, all the possessions I need, certainty that I'm loved. That is the blessed life.

So we can make the turn from creating a "good girl gets good life" checklist to the reality of embracing a true spiritually blessed life. Stay with God here. Keep journaling and doing the work of understanding the fear of the Lord.

7. Look back at your answer to Day 1, question 2. What is the second description of a blessed person?

As we are finishing up today, this is the final application point. A blessed woman knows what it really means to be blessed, she has a healthy deep fear of God, and she walks in obedience. This word "walk" in Psalm 128:1 refers to our way of life. May our ways; everything we look for, think, feel, and do, be moving toward Him.

8. How is God challenging you in your walk with Him? Specifically and prayerfully consider the attitudes that shape your motives and how they're affecting your behavior.

⇒ **Daily Pilgrim Progress:**

- What does this psalm teach you about where your heart is set?
- How does this psalm encourage you to move toward God?

Day 3 – Psalm 129

Read Psalm 129 in ESV, CSB, AMPC, and NIV or NLT. As you're reading jot down what stands out to you.

The transition toward from chapter 128 to 129 might cause us a little bit of whiplash.

1. Write down the titles for Psalm 128 and 129 according to your Bible.

Mine said this, "*Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord*" (128), compared to "*They have afflicted me from my youth*" (129). The ideal of Psalm 128 doesn't seem to follow into the real lament of Psalm 129...and aren't we glad? One of the best gifts of the entirety of the book of Psalms is that it gives words to such a vast array of emotions and experiences. I just read this week that it's good to be singing and remembering past affliction because it gives us hope for the future.

2. What does affliction mean to you? As you read Psalm 129:1-2 what experiences past or present come to mind?
3. The psalmist repeats his affliction twice in verses 1-2. What other details does he add?

His affliction is great.

And his affliction has been from his youth.

This made me stop a bit with extra compassion. The cross-references I looked up for this verse speak to the rebellion and stubbornness of youth, and we all know that's a true thing. But I wonder as we all have come into adulthood, how much the things that have hurt us since youth color and taint the way we see God with grown-up brains and emotions.

4. Read Psalm 71:17-19 and write out the hope that it represents (*if you have time you can read more of the wonderful surrounding verses*).
5. How can you apply the hope in Psalm 71 to your situation as a parent, teacher, aunt, grandmother, friend to the younger ones in your life?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 4:8-10. Make a list using "*We are _____, but not _____*" and write down the descriptions of affliction and protections we see there.

We will be spending a big chunk of our group study time defining affliction and going deeper into each of the descriptions you just wrote down. For now, just read them again and spend a minute or two thanking God for the protections and purpose He alone gives.

7. In Psalm 129:2, what does the psalmist say after he repeats the affliction he's experienced? Write the entire phrase out.

I've long believed that one of the best words in the Bible is **"yet"** and this is a really, really good one. As I looked at this phrase, I saw it translated as **"Yet, they have not prevailed, they have not gained the victory, they have never defeated me."** I love the negating words in these phrases. God turns the plans of the Enemy into big ole' **NO's** in my life. He does that in yours too.

8. How does the psalmist describe God in verse 4?
9. What actions does God take on the psalmist's behalf in verse 4? What does this teach you about God?
10. What is the psalmist praying for in Psalm 129:5-8?

This section of the psalm is what we call an imprecatory psalm. If you want to dig into this topic, please do! I can't wait to see what you learn. I'll be addressing this specifically in the group lesson because it's a little scary at first glance. For your personal study time, please know this: these verses emphasize the importance of being heard over the "rightness" of the specific request. <- read that last sentence again.

11. How does it fall on you today that God is listening, that He hears you even when you're wrong?

Close your time by reading Psalm 62:8. How beautiful is it that when we are smothered by the confusion of hardship and affliction of life, we can go to Him? He is our refuge, and we can pour out our heart to Him...without editing. Write an unedited prayer to Him today, asking for His help and thanking Him for His protection.

⇒ **Daily Pilgrim Progress:**

- What does this psalm teach you about where your heart is set?
- How does this psalm encourage you to move toward God?

Day 4/5 – Weekly Travel Journal

This was another shorter 3 day week with only 2 psalms, which makes it a great opportunity to catch up on previous weeks or spread out the three days for this week.

Review your notes, and study question answers from this week. Summarize each psalm below in a couple of sentences:

- Psalm 128:
- Psalm 129:

What have you learned most about God this week?

Now look at your daily Pilgrim Progress journal prompts:

- What did you learn about yourself this week?
- What changes do you need to make in what you're thinking or what you're doing to stay close to God?