

The book cover features a stylized landscape with a large, bright yellow sun in the center, partially obscured by a range of mountains. The mountains are rendered in shades of dark teal and light green. The title 'PSALMS OF ASCENT' is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the image.

# PSALMS OF ASCENT

**A GUIDE THROUGH THE  
PSALMS OF ASCENT**

**BY JIMMY GOTTA**

## Introduction

Tucked within the massive collection of 150 poem-songs we call the Book of Psalms is a smaller collection of 15 psalms that all bear a brief superscription: "A Song of Ascents." To ascend means to go up, to climb. What are these psalms climbing? A mountain? A staircase? As it turns out, both!

Jewish tradition has it that these 15 songs were sung by families of Israelites making one of the annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot), which commemorates the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness, sustained by God. Because Jerusalem is geographically higher than the surrounding countryside, with the temple atop Mount Zion, the road there from any direction is up. It's an ascent.

Furthermore, Jewish tradition tells us that these 15 songs were sung by priests standing on the 15 stairs between the Court of the Women and the inner courtyard of the temple. So a Jewish family might sing these songs on the way up to Jerusalem and then hear them sung again by priests as they go up into the temple. Songs of ascents!

It's a little hard to see at first glance, but these 15 songs are definitely connected. Not only are they all labelled "A Song of Ascents," they share repeated words, phrases, and images. If you pay careful attention, a story begins to emerge: We start at Psalm 120, feeling alone and cut off from God, but we make the decision to go on pilgrimage. Psalm 122 invites us to travel to Jerusalem to meet with God and His people in the temple, His House. There is resistance to this journey. Enemies arise. Danger threatens. Old memories haunt us. Discouragement creeps in. However, by Psalm 134, the final psalm in the collection, we are gathered together in God's house, safe and sound, worshiping the LORD.

Over the course of the next 8 weeks, the Sunday sermons will be diving in to 8 of the 15 Psalms of Ascent. We hope these psalms will help us as a congregation to live in light of Jesus' Resurrection as we journey through the world into an ever-deepening encounter with God. We've designed this devotional booklet to help you access and explore the remaining 7 psalms on your own, with a friend, or in a small group.

So! Are you all ready to begin this journey? Perhaps you don't know if you are. Life is hard enough as it is without climbing uphill. But here are two final thoughts:

1. You might not feel up for a major journey, but are you at least tired of the status quo? Are you weary of feeling weary? Discouraged? Defeated? Alone? Perhaps a journey away from your current reality will be less exhausting than staying where you are.
2. You won't be traveling alone. These songs were meant to be sung by families all traveling together. This is no solo endeavor. We go up together and we go one step at a time. As we travel this road to get to God, we begin to learn that He is also traveling with us on the way, though we didn't recognize Him at first. Know this: if you get tired, there will be someone to take your hand and offer fresh strength.

If you're still uncertain, let's just take the first step together. Let us go to the House of the Lord—He will be with us every step of the way.



Going Home Julian Scott

**Psalm 120**, April 12<sup>th</sup> Sermon

**Psalm 121**, Booklet Devo

**Psalm 122**, April 19<sup>th</sup> Sermon

**Psalm 123**, Booklet Devo

**Psalm 124**, April 26<sup>th</sup> Sermon

**Psalm 125**, Booklet Devo

**Psalm 126**, May 3<sup>rd</sup> Sermon

**Psalm 127**, May 10<sup>th</sup> Sermon

**Psalm 128**, Booklet Devo

**Psalm 129**, Booklet Devo

**Psalm 130**, Booklet Devo

**Psalm 131**, Booklet Devo

**Psalm 132**, May 17<sup>th</sup> Sermon

**Psalm 133**, May 24<sup>th</sup> Sermon

**Psalm 134**, May 31<sup>st</sup> Sermon



If you are unable to attend in person, you can catch the sermons on our YouTube page!

# PSALM 120

## APRIL 12TH, 2026

A song of ascents.

1 I call on the Lord in my distress,  
and he answers me.

2 Save me, Lord,  
from lying lips  
and from deceitful tongues.

3 What will he do to you,  
and what more besides,  
you deceitful tongue?

4 He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows,  
with burning coals of the broom bush.

5 Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek,  
that I live among the tents of Kedar!

6 Too long have I lived  
among those who hate peace.

7 I am for peace;  
but when I speak, they are for war.

Notes:

# PSALM 121

A song of ascents.

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains—  
    where does my help come from?
- 2 My help comes from the Lord,  
    the Maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot slip—  
    he who watches over you will not slumber;
- 4 indeed, he who watches over Israel  
    will neither slumber nor sleep.
- 5 The Lord watches over you—  
    the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
- 6 the sun will not harm you by day,  
    nor the moon by night.
- 7 The Lord will keep you from all harm—  
    he will watch over your life;
- 8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going  
    both now and forevermore.

The journey has begun. We have left the isolation, discouragement, and outright hostility of the places far from God. This pilgrimage won't be easy! We're going to need help. Fortunately, that's exactly what the LORD has promised. Let this classic psalm which celebrates God's protection and help embolden you to take new steps of faith.

1. What is one idea or image that stands out to you?
2. What question does this passage raise?
3. Where is there joy in this passage?
4. What new step of faith could God be inviting you to take by promising you His care?



Looking Down Yosemite Valley Albert Bierstadt

# PSALM 122

## APRIL 19TH

A song of ascents. Of David.

1 I rejoiced with those who said to me,

“Let us go to the house of the Lord.”

2 Our feet are standing

in your gates, Jerusalem.

3 Jerusalem is built like a city

that is closely compacted together.

4 That is where the tribes go up—

the tribes of the Lord—

to praise the name of the Lord

according to the statute given to Israel.

5 There stand the thrones for judgment,

the thrones of the house of David.

6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

“May those who love you be secure.

7 May there be peace within your walls

and security within your citadels.”

8 For the sake of my family and friends,

I will say, “Peace be within you.”

9 For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,

I will seek your prosperity.

Notes:

# PSALM 123

A song of ascents.

1 I lift up my eyes to you,

to you who sit enthroned in heaven.

2 As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master,

as the eyes of a female slave look to the hand of her mistress,

so our eyes look to the Lord our God,

till he shows us his mercy.

3 Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy on us,

for we have endured no end of contempt.

4 We have endured no end

of ridicule from the arrogant,

of contempt from the proud.



Jesus Washing Peter's Feet Ford Madox Brown

The proud and haughty are forever opposed to our humble Lord and His patient, humble servants. Is your heart weary or burdened by the contempt or scorn of others? Let this psalm re-direct your gaze to the only audience you need pay attention to: the Master who is full not of harsh demands, but tender mercy.

1. What is one idea or image that stands out to you?

2. What question does this passage raise?

3. Where is there joy in this passage?

4. How might knowing a truly merciful God is your only Master change the way you live, work, and even relate to others?

# PSALM 124

## APRIL 26TH

A song of ascents. Of David.

<sup>1</sup>If the Lord had not been on our side—

let Israel say—

<sup>2</sup>if the Lord had not been on our side

when people attacked us,

<sup>3</sup>they would have swallowed us alive

when their anger flared against us;

<sup>4</sup>the flood would have engulfed us,

the torrent would have swept over us,

<sup>5</sup>the raging waters

would have swept us away.

<sup>6</sup>Praise be to the Lord,

who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

<sup>7</sup>We have escaped like a bird

from the fowler's snare;

the snare has been broken,

and we have escaped.

<sup>8</sup>Our help is in the name of the Lord,

the Maker of heaven and earth.

Notes:

# PSALM 125

A song of ascents.

- 1 Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,  
which cannot be shaken but endures forever.
- 2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem,  
so the Lord surrounds his people  
both now and forevermore.
- 3 The scepter of the wicked will not remain  
over the land allotted to the righteous,  
for then the righteous might use  
their hands to do evil.
- 4 Lord, do good to those who are good,  
to those who are upright in heart.
- 5 But those who turn to crooked ways  
the Lord will banish with the evildoers.  
Peace be on Israel.



The Return of the Prodigal Son  
Rembrandt

Having withstood the attacks of our enemies on this journey with and towards God, we can say with renewed confidence that trusting the LORD makes us unshakeable. The LORD Himself takes care of us and assures us that the wicked will not have the last laugh. We must resist shortcuts that would compromise our identity as good pilgrims journeying ever closer to God's heart.

1. What is one idea or image that stands out to you?
2. What question does this passage raise?
3. Where is there joy in this passage?
4. What is one "shortcut" you're tempted to use when it seems trusting God isn't working?
5. Who could help renew your confidence in God and His ways?

# PSALM 126

## MAY 3RD

A song of ascents.

<sup>1</sup>When the Lord restored the fortunes of<sup>[a]</sup> Zion,  
we were like those who dreamed.<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Our mouths were filled with laughter,  
our tongues with songs of joy.

Then it was said among the nations,  
“The Lord has done great things for them.”

<sup>3</sup>The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we are filled with joy.

<sup>4</sup>Restore our fortunes,<sup>[c]</sup> Lord,  
like streams in the Negev.

<sup>5</sup>Those who sow with tears  
will reap with songs of joy.

<sup>6</sup>Those who go out weeping,  
carrying seed to sow,  
will return with songs of joy,  
carrying sheaves with them.

Notes:

# PSALM 127

## MAY 10TH

A song of ascents. Of Solomon.

<sup>1</sup>Unless the Lord builds the house,  
the builders labor in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city,  
the guards stand watch in vain.

<sup>2</sup>In vain you rise early  
and stay up late,  
toiling for food to eat—  
for he grants sleep to<sup>[g]</sup> those he loves.

<sup>3</sup>Children are a heritage from the Lord,  
offspring a reward from him.

<sup>4</sup>Like arrows in the hands of a warrior  
are children born in one's youth.

<sup>5</sup>Blessed is the man  
whose quiver is full of them.

They will not be put to shame  
when they contend with their opponents in court.

Notes:

# PSALM 128

A song of ascents.

- 1 Blessed are all who fear the Lord,  
    who walk in obedience to him.
- 2 You will eat the fruit of your labor;  
    blessings and prosperity will be yours.
- 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine  
    within your house;  
    your children will be like olive shoots  
    around your table.
- 4 Yes, this will be the blessing  
    for the man who fears the Lord.
- 5 May the Lord bless you from Zion;  
    may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem  
    all the days of your life.
- 6 May you live to see your children's children—  
    peace be on Israel.



*Mulberry Tree Van Gogh*

Life is good for those who walk with Jesus. It's not all toil and hardship, but blessing and satisfaction as well. The joys of family life can be sweet, but in Christ we are included at a family Table far bigger and grander than we ever dared imagine. We get to be God's own kids, sharing a feast with our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world and throughout time!

1. What is one idea or image that stands out to you?
2. What question does this passage raise?
3. Where is there joy in this passage?
4. For what does this Psalm inspire you to be grateful for?
5. To whom can you extend the blessings you enjoy?

# PSALM 129

A song of ascents.

- 1 "They have greatly oppressed me from my youth,"  
let Israel say;  
2 "they have greatly oppressed me from my youth,  
but they have not gained the victory over me.  
3 Plowmen have plowed my back  
and made their furrows long.  
4 But the Lord is righteous;  
he has cut me free from the cords of the wicked."  
5 May all who hate Zion  
be turned back in shame.  
6 May they be like grass on the roof,  
which withers before it can grow;  
7 a reaper cannot fill his hands with it,  
nor one who gathers fill his arms.  
8 May those who pass by not say to them,  
"The blessing of the Lord be on you;  
we bless you in the name of the Lord."



*A Ride for Liberty—Fugitive Slaves*  
Jonathan Eastman Johnson

Life can be rough, and sometimes we carry scars from old wounds. At times, our only comfort comes in knowing that the LORD desires our complete freedom and will not allow evil to endure forever.

1. What is one idea or image that stands out to you?
2. What question does this passage raise?
3. Where is there joy in this passage?
4. Do you have old "scars" you've never expressed or processed? To whom could you safely reveal them?
5. Nothing opposed to God or His people can endure. Over what sort of evil/pain/enemy could it help to pronounce the "negative blessing" of verses 5-8?

# PSALM 130

A song of ascents.

<sup>1</sup>Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;

<sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive  
to my cry for mercy.

<sup>3</sup>If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,  
Lord, who could stand?

<sup>4</sup>But with you there is forgiveness,  
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

<sup>5</sup>I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.

<sup>6</sup>I wait for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

<sup>7</sup>Israel, put your hope in the Lord,  
for with the Lord is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.

<sup>8</sup>He himself will redeem Israel  
from all their sins.



*Waiting at the Railway Station*  
Takamura Shinpu



*Nativity*  
Julius Garibaldi Melchers

Sometimes a conversation with the LORD can feel a little one-sided. Answers come slowly (if at all), bad situations persist, and our own sins convince us we aren't worthy of a response anyway. This psalm is meant to re-ignite hope that the longest night has a dawn; our Lord Jesus hears every cry, forgives our sin, comes to us at last.

1. What is one idea or image that stands out to you?
2. What question does this passage raise?
3. Where is there joy in this passage?
4. Is there sin in your life you're convinced is unforgiveable? A situation you're sure can't be changed? Could you entrust it (perhaps again), right now, to God?

# PSALM 131

A song of ascents. Of David.

- <sup>1</sup>My heart is not proud, Lord,  
my eyes are not haughty;  
I do not concern myself with great matters  
or things too wonderful for me.
- <sup>2</sup>But I have calmed and quieted myself,  
I am like a weaned child with its mother;  
like a weaned child I am content.
- <sup>3</sup>Israel, put your hope in the Lord  
both now and forevermore.



*Mother and Child*  
Pablo Picasso

This journey UP has a destination, and in the end, it's not a place at all! It's a person: Jesus. With Him are His pilgrims—all those who have left behind the wickedness and deceit of this world and of themselves and come to Him. In the end, we join Him AND His people, and that reunion is the Home we've searched for all along. There is state of mind—better yet, of soul—that has found rest in the LORD. Outward desires are stilled, ambitions cease, and perfect contentment reigns. God is enough, and when we come to realize this, we find true peace. Let this psalm usher you into the Presence of the One in whom all our longings find their satisfaction. Let Him be, even now, your heart's Home.

1. What is one idea or image that stands out to you?
2. What question does this passage raise?
3. Where is there joy in this passage?
4. What keeps you from experiencing the rest David describes in this psalm? Would you give these obstacles and hindrances to God?

# PSALM 132

## MAY 17TH

A song of ascents.

<sup>1</sup> Lord, remember David

and all his self-denial.

<sup>2</sup> He swore an oath to the Lord,

he made a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob:

<sup>3</sup> "I will not enter my house

or go to my bed,

<sup>4</sup> I will allow no sleep to my eyes

or slumber to my eyelids,

<sup>5</sup> till I find a place for the Lord,

a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."

<sup>6</sup> We heard it in Ephrathah,

we came upon it in the fields of Jaar:<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Let us go to his dwelling place,

let us worship at his footstool, saying,

<sup>8</sup> "Arise, Lord, and come to your resting place,

you and the ark of your might.

<sup>9</sup> May your priests be clothed with your righteousness;

may your faithful people sing for joy."

<sup>10</sup> For the sake of your servant David,

do not reject your anointed one.

<sup>11</sup> The Lord swore an oath to David,

a sure oath he will not revoke:

"One of your own descendants

I will place on your throne.

<sup>12</sup> If your sons keep my covenant

and the statutes I teach them,

then their sons will sit

on your throne for ever and ever."

<sup>13</sup> For the Lord has chosen Zion,

he has desired it for his dwelling, saying,

<sup>14</sup> "This is my resting place for ever and ever;

here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.

<sup>15</sup> I will bless her with abundant provisions;

her poor I will satisfy with food.

<sup>16</sup> I will clothe her priests with salvation,

and her faithful people will ever sing for joy.

<sup>17</sup> "Here I will make a horn<sup>[b]</sup> grow for David

and set up a lamp for my anointed one.

<sup>18</sup> I will clothe his enemies with shame,

but his head will be adorned with a radiant crown."

# PSALM 133

## MAY 24TH

A song of ascents. Of David.

<sup>1</sup>How good and pleasant it is

when God's people live together in unity!

<sup>2</sup>It is like precious oil poured on the head,

running down on the beard,

running down on Aaron's beard,

down on the collar of his robe.

<sup>3</sup>It is as if the dew of Hermon

were falling on Mount Zion.

For there the Lord bestows his blessing,

even life forevermore.

Notes:

# PSALM 134

## MAY 31ST

A song of ascents.

- <sup>1</sup>Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord  
who minister by night in the house of the Lord.
- <sup>2</sup>Lift up your hands in the sanctuary  
and praise the Lord.
- <sup>3</sup>May the Lord bless you from Zion,  
he who is the Maker of heaven and earth.

Notes: