*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

August 13 - 18

*Summer in the Psalms*

**Monday, August 13 Psalm 123 - 125**

*“The Lord surrounds and protects his people”*

Psalm 123 encourages us to come humbly before God in prayer, like servant boys and girls. Servants don’t have power or prestige, but they have a master who has power and prestige and can intervene on the servant’s behalf. When he does so, he is showing them mercy.

Mountains in the Bible are a symbol of God’s strength and protection. Psalm 125 starts from the fact that, when in the city of Jerusalem, a person can look around at higher mountains such as the Mount of Olives. It uses this reality as a visual reminder that, like those mountains, the Lord surrounds and protects his people.

This conviction, however, does not make it unnecessary to pray for God’s protection. Rather, it makes such prayer possible. The testimony expressed in Psalm 124 is an example of God’s protection in the past, and reminds us to pray in times of present crises or threats.

*Gracious God. You have promised your people that you will protect them, and I trust in your promises. I pray for your protection this day. Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 14 Psalm 126 - 128**

*“He grants sleep to his loved ones”*

Like you, when I am worried, anxious, or preoccupied, I don’t sleep well. We find a possible explanation in Psalm 127. Its point about sleep relates to putting too much energy into seeking to achieve and to safeguard. The psalm does not imply that people should not build houses or guard their cities from attack. Rather, it reminds us that we do not have as much control of our future as we would like to think. In effect, it encourages us to relax a little because God loves us. And anyway, it is God’s building activity that counts.

While not stated explicitly, the underlying issue of insomnia may also be present in Psalm 126. “Will my life today and tomorrow be as pleasant as the Lord made it in the past?” may be a question that keeps us up at night. Further, Psalm 128 reminds us that those who follow the Lord and trust in him will enjoy the fruit of their labor (which is much better than sleeplessly worrying whether our labor is good enough).

*I trust in you, Lord. Give me rest that I may be happy in all my work. Amen.*

**Wednesday, August 15 Psalm 129 - 131**

*“From the depths of despair, O Lord, I call for your help”*

Psalm 129 tells the story of Israel being abused by foreign powers. It began with the Amalekites’ unprovoked attack when the Israelites were a tired, thirsty, hungry group of nomads who had just escaped from Egypt (Exodus 17), and it has continued over the centuries. The prayer looks to God not only for protection but for the putting down of the perpetrators of abuse.

Psalms 130 and 131 use the verbs “expect” and “wait,” and near the end both issue exhortations to “put your hope in the Lord.” As Christians we apply these words to our expectation of Christ’s second coming and our hopeful waiting for his return. The word *wait* can suggest an attitude of patience, of calm mellowness. In the Psalms, as in the New Testament, however, waiting is more impatient. It implies an urgency for God’s help and intervention to happen sooner rather than later. Out of the depths of our current struggles we cry out to God for help and, while God provides for us on a daily basis, our ultimate salvation from trouble will not happen until Christ returns.

*O Lord, the daily difficulties of this life cause me to desire the eternal peace and joy of heaven. I wait with eager expectation for that day. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

August 13 - 18

*Summer in the Psalms*

**Thursday, August 16 Psalm 132 - 134**

*“May the Lord bless you”*

Psalm 132 is based on the story of the origin of the Jerusalem temple, told in 2 Samuel 6-7. There it is King David’s idea to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and build a temple in the city. God is not very keen on the idea, telling David that his initiative reverses the proper relationship between him and God. God is the one who is going to build a house (in the sense of a household, a line of succession), and that building needs to come first.

When God acts first and we respond by joyfully engaging in the work he is already doing, then we will be blessed. This is the theme of Psalms 133 and 134. Psalm 133 links blessing and the unity or harmony of the extended family, and Psalm 134 connects blessing to the creative power of God. God’s blessing is concrete and down to earth; it suggests the fruitfulness of human beings and animals and the flourishing of crops.

*Dear God. As I follow you, bless me and my family this day. Amen.*

**Friday, August 17 Psalm 135 - 136**

*“His love endures forever”*

To a small, powerless people such as the Israelites, the power of God to influence natural and political events expressed in Psalm 135 was reassuring. It was easy for them to feel overwhelmed by the power of the mighty nations around them and to be impressed by the supposed power of the gods these peoples worshiped. The psalm reminds them of the power that the real God has given to this insignificant people by choosing them to be his special possession.

The Hebrew word for the forever-enduring love of God is *hesed,* and it is this word that recurs in the second part of every line of Psalm 136. Perhaps the word *commitment* best represents the idea of *hesed* in English. The repetition of the word encourages the process whereby we can internalize the fact that commitment is one of God’s most basic characteristics. As the first two verses of the psalm point out, the commitment of God toward us is seen in his goodness which is empowered by his greatness as the God of gods.

*Loving God. Although in this world most focus on themselves, I humbly commit myself to you because you first loved me and committed yourself to me. Amen.*

**Saturday, August 18 Psalm 137 - 139**

*“O Lord, you know me”*

Psalm 137 is a lament by a people who long for the freedom to return to their homeland. They tell God what they desire and then leave it up to God to bring it about. Their confidence in doing so is that they know they are simply asking God to do what he has promised, which is to put down Babylon.

Psalm 138 is a witness to when God responds to our prayers. With all his heart, the psalmist confesses God before the gods, before earth’s kings, and before his enemies. The psalm sees God’s entire character expressed in the kind of deliverance it looks back on and in the kind of deliverance it now seeks. There is found God’s commitment and God’s faithfulness to his promises.

Psalm 139 wonders at the process of how a baby develops stage by stage in its mother’s womb and marvels at the way God is involved in it. Israelites knew that conception and birth were natural processes at one level, yet they also knew that it was God who worked through the natural process. It encourages us to know that we can never get beyond the realm of God’s care for us.

*All-knowing God. You know me better than I know myself. Use that knowledge, Lord, to shape me into the person you desire me to be. Amen.*