

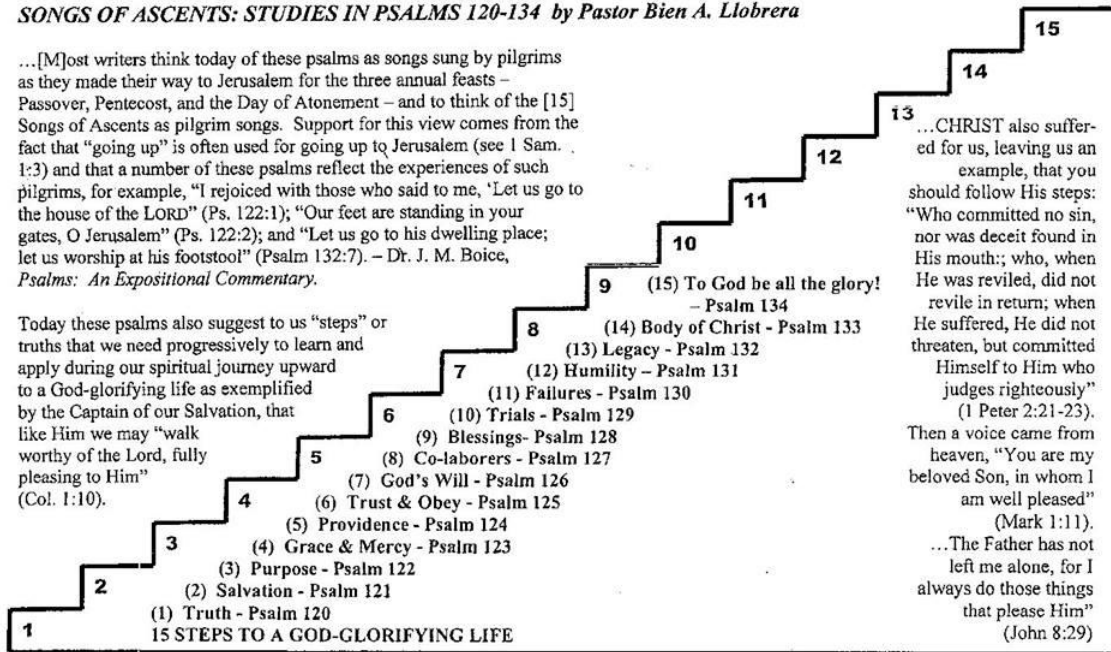
## 15 STEPS TO A GOD-GLORIFYING LIFE

### Studies in the Songs of Ascents – Psalm 120-134

*SONGS OF ASCENTS: STUDIES IN PSALMS 120-134 by Pastor Bien A. Llobrera*

...[M]ost writers think today of these psalms as songs sung by pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem for the three annual feasts – Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement – and to think of the [15] Songs of Ascents as pilgrim songs. Support for this view comes from the fact that “going up” is often used for going up to Jerusalem (see 1 Sam. 1:3) and that a number of these psalms reflect the experiences of such pilgrims, for example, “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD’” (Ps. 122:1); “Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem” (Ps. 122:2); and “Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool” (Psalm 132:7). – Dr. J. M. Boice, *Psalms: An Expository Commentary*.

Today these psalms also suggest to us “steps” or truths that we need progressively to learn and apply during our spiritual journey upward to a God-glorifying life as exemplified by the Captain of our Salvation, that like Him we may “walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him” (Col. 1:10).



The diagram above gives a bird’s eye view of where this series is going:

- Psalm 120 - Truth and Love, the foundational values of the Christian life.
- Psalm 121 - Salvation (after this life) & Security (in this life) - Someone said, "You are not ready to live until you are ready to die." In other words, our eternal salvation must be secured before we can enjoy genuine security in the present. God is the God of salvation "from this time forth and forevermore".
- Psalm 122 - Purpose: Question: What is the chief end of life? Answer: To know God and enjoy Him forever. The Christian life is worship. The tents of 12 tribes of Israel were set up around the Tabernacle as their center.
- Psalm 123 - Grace & Mercy: The Christian life totally depends on God's grace and mercy; hence, the attitude is always looking to God's face and God's hands.
- Psalm 124 - Providence - Israel's survival could only be explained by God's sovereign providence. So too our Christian life; Romans 8:28-30 is divine providence at work.
- Psalm 125 - Trust & Obey: The Christian life can be reduced to two attitudes/actions: trust

(verse 1, 2) and obey (verse 3-5). The close relationship between trust and obedience.

- Psalm 126 - God's Will: The Babylonian captivity and return were determined by God's will (verse 1-3; cp. Jeremiah 29). The psalmist is experiencing personal captivity and he seems to be saying, "Lord, how long until I am delivered?" The answer: God's will determines the time of captivity and deliverance. We must learn to submit to God's will, in the meantime there is a period of "sowing in tears".
- Psalm 127 - Co-laborers: We have a part - Yes, we labor, we watch; but God to do His part: to bless. Hence, we need to learn to co-labor with God.
- Psalm 128 - Blessings: This psalm pictures a life of domestic earthly bliss. God is a God of blessing (1 Cor 3:21-23; Phil 4:11-13), and He wants us to learn how to enjoy His blessings. The Bible does not teach asceticism or the monastic or eremite life of self-denial and flagellation.
- Psalm 129 - Trials: God's amazing refining process (lots of NT scriptures, e. g., James 1:2-5; 1 Peter 1:6-9).
- Psalm 130 - Failures: David's individual failures and Israel's national failures are all dealt with by God's grace and mercy. Where sin abounds, there grace much more abounds.
- Psalm 131 - Humility. Beautiful picture of godly humility.
- Psalm 132 - Legacy: God made a covenant with David (verses 1-11), but his sons must make David's God their own (verse 12). Our true legacy must be to leave behind a "temple", our own life and lives we have touched (our own children and others) that will continue to bring glory to God
- Psalm 133 - Body of Christ: The Christian life is never just an individual journey or contest where we achieve individual honors; no, we are the family of God, the Body of Christ, the kingdom of God (1 Cor 12-14; Romans 12; Ephesians 4:1-6; Hebrews 11:39-40, "And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." We become perfect Christians only as we become perfected as the Body of Christ, as the Bride of Christ.
- Psalm 134 - To God be all the glory: Romans 11:33-36; Eph 1:11-12;3:9-10. The whole purpose of all creation and of redemption is God's glory alone!

## **STUDY 1: PSALM 120**

### **Step 1: Truth and Love**

You will notice in your Bible a group of 15 psalms (120-134) bearing the title "A Song of Degrees" (KJV) or "A Song of Ascents" (NKJV and other modern translations). What is the meaning of this title?

According to Dr. James Montgomery Boice in his *Psalms: An Expository Commentary* the following explanations have been given by various commentators:

(1) Ascents are steps (gradations) within the psalms.

(2) Ascents are steps leading up to the sanctuary. Supposedly there were fifteen such steps and it's been speculated that the Levites sang these psalms as they negotiated those steps.

(3) Ascents are the "going up" from Babylon to Israel at the end of the exile.

The above explanations have not gained as wide an acceptance as the fourth explanation below.

(4) Ascents are the "goings up" of pilgrims at the annual feasts. Dr. Boice writes:

...[M]ost writers think today of these psalms as songs sung by pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem for the three annual feasts – Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement – and to think of the [15] Songs of Ascents as pilgrim songs. Support for this view comes from the fact that "going up" is often used for going up to Jerusalem (see 1 Sam. 1:3) and that a number of these psalms reflect the experiences of such pilgrims, for example, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD'" (Ps. 122:1); "Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem" (Ps. 122:2); and "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool" (Psalm 132:7).

We take this explanation as the take-off point of these studies. Just as the Songs of Ascents have encouraged the pilgrims as they went up to Jerusalem to worship God, to glorify Him in the temple; even so we, believers of today, will receive guidance and strength from these psalms to help us on our journey, the journey to spiritual maturity. We are thinking of spiritual maturity in this way: Spiritual maturity is being like Christ in consistently glorifying God in every area of our life. The goal of our journey is laid out in three scripture passages:

- To follow in the steps of Christ: 1 Peter 2:21-23: "...CHRIST also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously."
- To receive God's commendation similar to what Christ received: Mark 1:11: Then a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (excepting the commendation of His unique sonship, of course).
- To be able to say consistently like Christ: John 8:29: "...The Father has not left me alone, for I always do those things that please Him"

The Songs of Ascents suggest to us that there are certain definite steps we need to take, and at every step there is a key truth that we need to learn and practice if we want to develop the Christ-like lifestyle that always glorifies God.

## FOUNDATIONAL STEP

As we look closer at Psalm 120 we do discover a foundational step in the journey to the God-glorifying life. This first Song of Ascents shows us that the psalmist was struggling with two problems: the problem of lying, and the problem of war. He says:

- Verse 2: Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue.
- Verses 6, 7: My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.

If we are to live a God-glorifying life like Christ, we must confront these two problems at the very outset. These two problems go to the very root of the conflict between God and Satan. When Christ came into the world He attacked these problems head-on. He exposed who Satan was, even as He declared who He Himself was. See the stark contrast:

- John 8:44, 45: You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.
- John 10:10: The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.
- John 14:6: Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

The contrast is clear: Christ is the truth and the life, Satan is the liar and the murderer (war is nothing if not the activity of the murderer).

#### STEP #1: TRUTH AND LOVE

Psalm 120 points out to us the first step in our journey toward the God-glorifying life: We must completely commit to truth and love, and we must stand against lying and murder (war, and all acts that bring harm to others).

##### A. COMMITMENT TO THE TRUTH

###### 1. Truth in your personal faith in Christ.

(a) John 2:23-25. The issue is not whether you believe in Christ; the issue is whether Christ believes in the genuineness of your faith.

(b) John 6:26, 27, 69. What is your true motivation for following Christ – personal earthly gain? Or eternal life, a lasting relationship with God?

(c) John 20:28, 31: A God-glorifying life will be impossible for you until you have settled this question: Have you truly believed in Christ as your Lord and God and Savior?

###### 2. Truth in your relationship with others.

The Christians in Ephesus offer a very interesting case study.

(a) Ephesians 4:22-25: They were commanded to put off their old nature and to put on their new nature. To do that, the very first thing they had to do was to put away lying!

(b) Ephesians 4:15-16: In order to grow together as the Body of Christ they must learn to live the lifestyle characterized by “speaking the truth in love”!

3. To begin your journey toward the God-glorifying life, you must be genuinely committed to the truth – in your relationship with Christ and in your relationship with others. No wonder the psalmist prayed: “Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue” (Psalm 120:2).

## B. COMMITMENT TO LOVE

If you want to live a God-glorifying life, the other problem you must confront is the problem of war. The psalmist lamented, “My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war” (Psalm 120:6, 7). War is rooted in hate, and hate leads to wicked and destructive actions that bring harm to others. Of course, the ultimate harm that you can cause any person is to murder him. Cain is described as sharing in the nature of Satan precisely in his hatred.

1 John 3:12: Not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.

The only way to overcome this problem of hatred is through love.

In the 1960s, the slogan of the Hippie Revolution was “Make love not war.” Unfortunately, the hippies mistook sexual license for love, and our society continues to deteriorate morally because of misguided love. But with the true meaning of love restored, that slogan expresses a very profound truth. The right kind of love will end all wars because it will end all forms of hate among people.

To begin to live a God-glorifying life, we must have a deep and lasting commitment to love. Christ absolutely made clear that this love must first be vertical (toward God) before it can become horizontal (toward people). He summarized all of God’s commandments into the two great commandments.

1. First, love God.

Matthew 22:37, 38: Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.

2. Second, love others.

(a) Matthew 22:39: And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Later on, Christ made the focus sharper. John 13:34: A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you love one another.

(b) This love will motivate us and enable us to bring peace – shalom, well-being – to others. This is more than just speaking words of peace; rather, it means doing positive, practical good to someone else. Hatred and war harm others and take away good from others.

- James 2:15, 16: The apostle James points out the connection between speaking peace and doing good.

- 1 John 3:16-18: The apostle John makes it unmistakably clear that love for God must result in practical, helpful love towards people.
- Ephesians 4:26-28: Again, the Ephesian Christians give us a clear demonstration of this. In addition to stopping lying, they were also to learn to control their anger so that they do not become controlled by the devil (the liar and the murder). Also, they were to stop stealing (one of the manifestations of the spirit of war and hate and murder). Instead, they were to start doing honest labor not only in order to supply their own needs but also to give to the need of others.

## APPLICATION

Look at our diagram.

Here we are at the bottom step of the stairs that will lead us to that level of maturity characterized by a God-glorifying life. According to Psalm 120, what is the very first step we need to take? What is the very first truth we need to learn and practice?

Or, to return to the image of the journey: As the psalmist began his pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship God in the temple, he was very much aware of the place where he was starting from, it was a place of lying and war.

At the start of our own spiritual journey, we, too, are keenly aware that before we can have a God-glorifying life, we must realize that two problems hold us back: lying and hatred. Christ shows us how to overcome these two problems. By making two commitments:

- Commitment to Truth: to Christ as Lord and Savior; and to being truthful, from now on, in our dealing with other people.
- Commitment to Love: to love God above all, and to love others as Christ loved us.

Are you ready to make these two commitments? Are you ready to take the first step?

## STUDY 2: PSALM 121

### Step 2: Present Security & Eternal Salvation

We are on a journey the goal of which is to attain a level of spiritual maturity characterized by a life that consistently and continually pleases God (Psalm 134).

The first step in this upward journey confronts us with the issue of truth and love (Psalm 120): through faith in Christ we must receive a new heart of truth and love, and with the help of the Holy Spirit we must commit to live a life of truth and love.

Psalm 121 shows us the second step in our upward journey.

**A. The Psalmist asks a question as he begins his pilgrimage: From whence shall my help come?**

- (1) He knows the mortal dangers of the journey.
- (2) He admits his limitations: he is not wise enough and not strong enough to protect himself.
- (3) He looks to the only One who has all the wisdom and power to protect him, the Creator of heaven and earth.

**B. Everyone of us is on a pilgrimage through life. Two questions confront us:**

- (1) The DAILY question: How do we overcome the dangers in this life? (Job 5:7; John 16:33)
- (2) The ETERNAL question: What will happen at the end of this life? (Job 14:14; Luke 10:27).
  - The Old Testament question: “If a man dies shall he live again?” (Job 14:14)
  - The New Testament question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25)

**APPLICATION**

(1) You must first answer the ETERNAL question. You are not ready to live until you are ready to die. God alone through Christ gives the answer to this question – place your life in the hands of the Good Shepherd (John 3:16-18; 10:10, 27-30).

(2) With your life safely in the hands of the Good Shepherd, you may answer the DAILY question by claiming all the promises in Psalm 121, summarized in one statement: The Lord is your KEEPER (Heb., SHOMER, same word six times, verses 3, 4, 5, 7, 8).

- Has all the wisdom and power: He made heaven and earth, v.2;
- Will not let go: He will not allow your foot to be moved, v. 3a;
- Does not need a break: He does not slumber or sleep, vs. 3b, 4;
- Your permanent Bodyguard: He is YOUR keeper, the shade at your right hand (sticks with you like your shadow), v. 5;
- Protects at all times in all seasons: The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night, v. 6;
- Preserves you from ALL evil, v. 7a;
- Protects your soul, v. 7b;
- Protects from the beginning to the end of your journey in this life and beyond this life: The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth and even forevermore, v. 8.

(3) Step 2 in the Songs of Ascents: Present Security & Eternal Salvation.

- Have you taken the second step?
- This step guarantees you a life free from fear and worry and a life of peace and joy and assurance of victory (John 16:33; Romans 8:28-32, 37-39).

**STUDY 3: PSALM 122**

**Step 3: Purpose & Priorities**

1. We have embarked on a journey toward the Christ-like life that always pleases God. The steps that bring us to our destination are suggested by the 15 psalms called Songs of Ascents (Psalm 120-134). Psalm 120 gave us Step #1: Commitment to Truth and Love; Psalm 121 gave us Step #2: Assurance of Present Security and Eternal Salvation.

2. The third step is suggested in Psalm 122: We must be clear about our purpose and our priorities.

(a) When He came into the world, Christ was clear about His purpose and priorities. Speaking to God the Father, He said (Hebrews 10:5-7):

**5** Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. **6** In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure. **7** Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come— In the volume of the book it is written of Me— To do Your will, O God.’”

(b) As a boy of twelve, when His earthly parents asked Him what He was doing in the temple, His purpose and priorities were clear (Luke 2:49):

And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”

(c) Once He was launched on His public ministry, His purpose and priorities never got clouded even under pressure of physical tiredness and hunger (John 4:34):

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.

(3) In Psalm 122 we find that same Christ-like clarity of purpose and priorities exemplified by the psalmist pilgrim.

## **A. THE PSALMIST PILGRIM’S PURPOSE AND PRIORITIES**

His purpose and priorities may be summarized in one word: JERUSALEM. Jerusalem was the goal of his pilgrimage, and Jerusalem determined everything about his purpose and priorities. Jerusalem was the core passion which determined his thoughts, feelings and actions. What made Jerusalem such a life-determining force for him? Three things:

1. God’s temple, vs 1, 4d, 9
2. God’s judgments (laws), 4c, 5
3. God’s people, 4a, b, 8

## **B. THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIM’S PURPOSE AND PRIORITIES**

As Christian pilgrims, we too have a life-determining city: NEW JERUSALEM (Heb 11:16; Rev 21:2-4; Phil 3:20, 21). Today, we express our passion for the New Jerusalem by our love and devotion to the church, for three similar reasons:

1. The church is God’s temple, Eph 2:19-22

2. The church teaches God's Word, Phil 2:18; 1 Tim 3:15
3. The church is God's people, 1 Cor 3:16, 17

### **APPLICATION**

How then do we make the church determine our purpose and priorities?

1. Are you always glad to go to the house of the Lord? V 1
2. Are you eager for the fellowship of God's people? v 4
3. Are hungry for God's Word? V 5
4. Are you motivated to worship the Lord? V 4

On their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, whenever they set up camp in the wilderness, God directed His people to set up the Tabernacle in the center, with their tribal tents around it. This showed that God must always be at the center of their life as individuals and as a community.

When the permanent temple was built in Jerusalem, God commanded His people to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate three feasts:

- Passover (the deliverance from Egypt);
- Pentecost or First fruits (the conquest of Canaan),
- Booths five days after the Day of Atonement (God's continual care).

We have the same three powerful motivations to worship God today:

- Passover – our salvation;
  - Pentecost – daily victory in the power of the Holy Spirit over trials and temptations and over the attacks of Satan;
  - Booths – God's faithful care throughout our life.
5. Are you zealous and faithful in supporting God's church? V. 9

## **STUDY 4: PSALM 123**

### **Step 4: Mercy and Grace**

To reach our goal of becoming like Christ, fully pleasing unto God, we must learn to draw continually upon God's mercy and grace. The pilgrim in Psalm 123 shows us how to do this.

## A. THE PSALMIST PILGRIM

1. Under attack by two enemies, vss. 3b, 4

(a) Those who are at ease (because they are rich);

(b) Those who are proud (because they have power).

2. His only defense: God's mercy, vss. 1-3a

(a) Mercy: The Strong One (who sits enthroned in the heavens) bending down to help the weak one.

(b) CHANAN (mercy, the word used here) is closely related to CHESED (the lovingkindness of Yahweh, Israel's covenant God; equivalent to the New Testament word GRACE)

## B. THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIM

1. Will be prevented from reaching his goal by two wrong attitudes

(a) Self-satisfaction: The Laodicean Plague,

Rev. 3:14-17 – **14** “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans[**a**] write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: **15** “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. **16** So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot,[**b**] I will vomit you out of My mouth. **17** Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

(b) Self-confidence: Simon Peter's Syndrome,

Matt 26:31-35 – **31** Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ **32** But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.” **33** Peter answered and said to Him, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.” **34** Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” **35** Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” And so said all the disciples.

2. The only resource to reach the goal: God's mercy and grace

(a) Sure salvation by God's mercy and grace alone, Titus 3:5; Eph 2:8, 9

Titus 3:5 – **5** not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

Eph 2:8, 9 – **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, **9** not of works, lest anyone should boast.

(b) Fruitful service by mercy and grace alone.

Rom 12:1 – I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

1 Cor 15:9-11 – **9** For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. **10** But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me. **11** Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

## APPLICATION

1. How do we obtain mercy and grace?

(a) It is as easy as lifting our eyes to God: prayer is looking to God, vs. 1a;

(b) We must have the right idea of God to show the correct attitude toward God

- **Faith:** He sits on His throne in heaven, has sovereign control of everything, 1b
- **Obedience:** He is the Master whose hand we must watch: ancient oriental masters indicated their wishes, not by words, but by the motions of their hands; hence, the servants' eyes were glued to their master's hands.
- **Patience:** "Our eyes look to the Lord our God, UNTIL He has mercy on us." God is Sovereign in His choice of time and means to help us.
- **Humility:** "Our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has MERCY on us." God is not obligated to do anything for us; so we look to His mercy and grace alone. Remember the classic definition: In His MERCY, God does NOT give us the punishment that we DO deserve; in His GRACE, God GIVES us the favor that we DON'T deserve.
- **Boldness:** Hebrews 4:15, 16.

2. How may we show that we are living by God's mercy and grace?

(a) Do not receive God's grace in vain: respond in faith and obedience immediately, 2 Cor 6:1, 2;

(b) Treat others with the same grace and mercy God gave you: Matt 18:32, 33;

(c) Give God all the glory for everything: your life's theme song must be "Amazing Grace", Psalm 115:1-3, 18

## STUDY 5: PSALM 124

### Step 5: Providence

Step 5 in our spiritual journey toward becoming like Christ, fully pleasing unto God, is suggested by Psalm 124: We must cast ourselves completely upon the PROVIDENCE OF GOD. The keyword is: IF THE LORD HAD NOT BEEN ON OUR SIDE. In this psalm the psalmist is speaking to and in behalf of God's chosen nation, Israel.

### **A. PILGRIM ISRAEL**

The whole OT story of Israel, from its founding father Abraham until the birth of the promised Messiah, is marked at every turn by miraculous deliverances of DIVINE PROVIDENCE. We pick only a few highlights:

1. The Lord was on the side of Abraham when old age and sterility threatened to cut off the nation before it even got started.
2. The Lord was on the side of Jacob when his own sinful character and choices threatened to disqualify him. Note God's promise: Genesis 28:15.
3. The Lord was on the side of the nation of Israel during their sojourn in Egypt, when a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph arose and threatened systematic genocide of the chosen people.
4. The Lord was on the side of Israel when they were carried into exile, with no human hope of returning to their homeland. One threatened genocide of Israel in exile almost succeeded had not the Lord raised Esther, a Jewish maiden, to become the queen in that foreign kingdom.

### **B. PILGRIM CHURCH**

The NT story of the Church, from the first coming of her Founder and Savior and Lord Jesus Christ until His second coming, is also marked by miraculous deliverances of DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

1. The earthly life of Jesus was filled with deliverances of divine providences.
2. The infant church in Jerusalem was immediately threatened with extinction through persecution. But God turned the most murderous persecutor into the most dedicated apostle.
3. Just before the second coming of Christ, persecution of Christians will increase in frequency and intensity leading up to the time called the GREAT TRIBULATION. Many respected Bible teachers believe that Christians will NOT go through the Great Tribulation; still others equally respected Bible teachers believe that Christians WILL go through it. What should be our attitude? Let us hope and pray that we will not go through the great tribulation; but let us prepare as if we will go through it. "Hope like a pre-tribulationist; prepare like a post-tribulationist!"

### **APPLICATION**

1. The Book of Romans gives us probably one of the most powerful promises of DIVINE PROVIDENCE THAT GOD IS FOR US. Romans 8:31-39 is the NT version of Psalm 124.

<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us?<sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shal* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written:

"For Your sake we are killed all day long;  
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

<sup>37</sup> Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.<sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. We will attain our goal, and we will arrive safely in heaven, not because we hold on to God but because God, in His DIVINE PROVIDENCE, will never let go of His hold on us!

3. One hymn beautifully puts God's sovereign providence as follows:

1. I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew  
he moved my soul to seek him, seeking me.  
It was not I that found, O Savior true;  
no, I was found of thee.

2. Thou didst reach forth thy hand and mine enfold;  
I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea.  
'Twas not so much that I on thee took hold,  
as thou, dear Lord, on me.

3. I find, I walk, I love, but oh, the whole  
of love is but my answer, Lord, to thee!  
For thou wert long beforehand with my soul;  
always thou lovedst me.

Author Unknown

## STUDY 6: PSALM 125

### Step 6: Trust and Obey

We continue our journey toward that level of spiritual maturity that pleases God in every way. Step 6 in that journey consists of the twin truths of Trust and Obey. These twin truths serve as the two feet that enable us to march forward in the Christian life: Trust (the right foot), and Obey (the left foot). The ancient Chinese said, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." We may add this saying: "When you feel like you can't go on, just put one foot in front of the other – one step at a time – and you'll arrive at your destination." Trust and obey, Psalm 125 suggests these twin truths powerfully.

#### A. THE PSALMIST PILGRIM

1. Knew the blessing of complete TRUST in God, vss. 1, 2

(a) God's protection is an unshakeable foundation, vs. 1

**1** Those who trust in the Lord<sup>[SEP]</sup> Are like Mount Zion, *Which* cannot be moved, *but* abides forever.

(b) God's protection is an unbreakable wall, vs. 2

**2** As the mountains surround Jerusalem, So the Lord surrounds His people From this time forth and forever.

2. Knew the importance of complete OBEDIENCE to God, vss. 3-5

(a) The constant danger of wickedness, vs. 3a

**3** For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest On the land allotted to the righteous,

(b) The constant need for obedience, vs. 3b

Lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity.

- God blesses obedience, vs. 4, 5c

**4** Do good, O Lord, to *those who are* good, And to *those who are* upright in their hearts.

**5c** ... Peace *be* upon Israel!

- God punishes disobedience, vs. 5

**5a,b** As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways,<sup>[SEP]</sup>The Lord shall lead them away With the workers of iniquity.

## **B. THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIM**

1. Holds the promise of God's triple protection

(a) Safe in hands of the Son

John 10:28 – And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

(b) Safe in the hands of the Father

John 10:29 – My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand.

(c) Safe under the seal of the Holy Spirit

Eph 1:13, 14 – **13** In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,

**14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

2. Gives proof of his/her Christian identity: obedience

John 10:27 – My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

(a) Obedience founded on humility: accepting the Creator-creature, Master-slave relationship

Acts 9:5, 6 (NKJV) – **5** And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads.” **6** So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord *said* to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

(b) Obedience sustained by trust: God’s commandments are not a burden but a blessing

1 John 5:3 – **3** For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

(c) Obedience proves love: if you love God you obey God, if you obey God you love God

John 14:23, 24 – **23** Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. **24** He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.

(d) Obedience shows Christ-likeness: like Christ we too must learn obedience

Hebrews 5:8 – **8** though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

(e) Obedience leads to usefulness: like Christ, the obedient Christian will be used to bring salvation to others

Hebrews 5:9 – **9** And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

## **APPLICATION**

1. From New Testament times salvation by grace through faith has been misunderstood to mean license to sin,

Romans 3:5-8 – **5** But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? *Is* God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) **6** Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? **7** For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? **8** And *why* not say, “Let us do evil that good may come”—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.

Romans 5:20 – Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.

Romans 6:1 – What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

2. The Gospel brings us the Good News:

(a) Of the Savior who saves from sin – its penalty, its power, and its presence,

Matthew 1:21 – And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

(b) Of the Holy Spirit who will enable us to fulfill God's commands

Romans 8:1-4 – **1** *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. **2** For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. **3** For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, **4** that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

(c) Of the Father who planned to make us perfect like His own Son

Romans 8:29, 30 – **29** For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. **30** Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

3. Therefore, the Christian pilgrim's journey is a journey of trust and obedience.

(a) We trust God to give us power to live as children of God

John 1:12 – But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

(b) We prove that we are God's children by obeying His commands

1 John 5:4 – For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

## STUDY 7: PSALM 126

### Step 7: God's Will

In our journey toward becoming like Christ in living a life fully pleasing to God, Psalm 126 suggests *Step 7: Understanding and accepting the will of God*, particularly as it relates to God's answer to our prayers.

#### A. GOD'S WILL FULFILLED

The Psalmist is looking back and testifying to a mighty deliverance from past captivity, vss. 1-3.

- 1** When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream.  
**2** Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."  
**3** The Lord has done great things for us, *And* we are glad.

1. God's Will promised deliverance at the beginning of captivity, Jeremiah 29:10-14

**10** For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. **11** For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. **12** Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. **13** And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. **14** I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

2. God's Will limited the time and purpose of captivity, Jeremiah 31:17-20

**17** There is hope in your future, says the Lord, That *your* children shall come back to their own border. **18** "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: 'You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained bull; Restore me, and I will return, For You *are* the Lord my God.

**19** Surely, after my turning, I repented; And after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, Because I bore the reproach of my youth.' **20** *Is* Ephraim My dear son? *Is he* a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord.

## **B. GOD'S WILL NOT YET FULFILLED**

The Psalmist is struggling to understand and accept God's will regarding some kind of captivity in the present, vs. 4.

**4** Bring back our captivity, O Lord, As the streams in the South.

1. The Psalmist has been praying for deliverance fervently and for a long time;
2. But God seems to be delaying in answering his prayer

## **APPLICATION**

Like the Psalmist, many times during our journey we will find ourselves in a situation where we pray for something for a long time, but the answer seems to be a long time in coming. In fact, we might be exactly in that situation right now. We are wondering, when will God answer my prayer? We are asking, what is God's Will in this situation?

1. *Comfort*: God's Will has a fruitful and joyful ending, vss. 5, 6b

**5** Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy.

**6** He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves *with him*.

2. *Counsel*: God's Will includes the time...

(a) For sowing, John 12:24-26;

**24** Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. **25** He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him *My Father* will honor.

(b) For weeping, Hebrews 12:11a;

**11** Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful...

(c) For reaping, Hebrews 12:11b;

**11** ... nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

(d) For rejoicing

Psalms 126:6b - ... Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves *with him*.

Hebrews 5:8, 9 - **8** though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. **9** And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 - **3** Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, **4** who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

3. *Challenge*: God's Will demands action!

(a) Shake off! Hebrews 12:1. Note: God sent His people into captivity to strip away their besetting sin of idolatry. You need to ask: What is God seeking to remove from me in my present "captivity"?

**1** Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us

(b) Look up! Hebrews 12:2;

**2** looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(c) Shape up! Hebrews 12:12, 13

**12** Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, **13** and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

(d) Move on! Hebrews 12:14-17

**14** Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

**15** looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; **16** lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. **17** For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

(e) Live for God's glory alone! Hebrews 12:28, 29

**28** Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. **29** For our God *is* a consuming fire.

## STUDY 8: PSALM 127

### Step 8: Partnership with God

To live a life fully pleasing to God, we need to take *Step 8: Learn to work in partnership with God*. This is suggested in Psalm 127. However, this is not a partnership of equals; rather, it is a partnership to which we humans are invited by our divine Creator and Lord to join Him in His purpose.

#### A. WHEN GOD IS NOT OUR PARTNER

1. Our best human efforts fail, vs. 1
2. We lose God's blessings, vs. 2

#### B. WHEN GOD IS OUR PARTNER

Children are a blessing of divine human partnership, vs. 3-7

#### APPLICATION

Divine-human partnership has always been God's way of forwarding His purpose in the world. Let's look at three key passages.

1. Adam and Eve in the garden, Gen 2:15
2. Jesus and the boy with five loaves and two fish, John 6:1-13
3. Christians are partners with God in bringing forth spiritual children, 1 Cor 3:5-9

## STUDY 9: PSALM 128

## **Step 9: Enjoying God's Blessings**

Psalm 128 shows us that the life which fully pleases God has boldly taken *Step 9: Enjoying God's Blessings*.

### **A. THE GOD OF BLESSING**

Our faith must stand boldly on the truth that the God of love and grace has purposed to bless:

1. The individual: person and work, vss. 2, 4
2. The family: marriage and children, vss. 3, 6a
3. The city, vs. 5
4. The nation, vs. 6b

### **B. THE GOD-GIVEN KEY TO BLESSING**

1. Fear the Lord, vs. 1a
2. Walk in His ways, vs. 1b

### **APPLICATION**

In 1 Timothy 6:6-19 we find the Christian lifestyle which enjoys God's blessings:

1. Godliness with contentment, vss. 6-8
2. Beware! the love of money, vss. 9-10
3. Avoid, aim, vs. 11
4. The good fight of faith, vs. 12
5. Coram Deo – In the presence of God, vss. 13-16
6. God really wants to bless you! vs. 17
7. Do good, share, 18

## **STUDY 10: PSALM 129**

### **Step 10: Persecutions**

Like a coin, the pilgrim child of God is stamped with two unmistakable marks. One side reads "Blessed"; the other side reads "Persecuted". In our previous study in Psalm 128 we found out

what “blessed” means. In our present study in Psalm 129 we discover what “persecuted” means. We will also discover from Psalm 129 that in our journey toward becoming like Christ in living a life fully pleasing to God, this step is necessary and unavoidable: *Step 10: Accepting and overcoming persecution.*

### **A. The experience of Israel**

1. Persecuted continually (vss. 1-3);

**1** “Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth, ”Let Israel now say—

**2** “Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; Yet they have not prevailed against me.

**3** The plowers plowed on my back; They made their furrows long.”

2. Delivered unfailingly (vss. 2b, 4);

**2** ...Yet they have not prevailed against me.

**4** The Lord *is* righteous; He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked.

3. Avenged eventually (vss. 5-8).

**5** Let all those who hate Zion Be put to shame and turned back.

**6** Let them be as the grass *on* the housetops, Which withers before it grows up,

**7** With which the reaper does not fill his hand, Nor he who binds sheaves, his arms.

**8** Neither let those who pass by them say, “The blessing of the Lord *be* upon you; We bless you in the name of the Lord!”

### **B. Lessons from Israel’s Egyptian persecution**

Psalm 129 refers to persecution suffered from the time of Israel’s youth, most probably referring to the time in Egypt. This Egyptian experience may serve as an example that shows why God allows persecution to happen to His children.

1. To fulfill God’s covenant (Genesis 15:13-21);

When God allows persecution to come into His children’s lives, most often it is because He is getting them ready to take the next step toward the blessing He has promised in His covenant to give them.

**13** Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. **14** And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

**15** Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.

**16** But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete.”

**17** And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. **18** On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying:

“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— **19** the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, **20** the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, **21** the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

2. To drive Israel to God (Exodus 2:23-25);

When we are going astray, God allows persecutions in order to drive us back to Him; or when we think we are walking closely with Him, He allows persecutions in order to draw us even closer to Him.

**23** Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. **24** So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. **25** And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged *them*.

3. To prepare Israel for the journey (Exodus 1:11-14);

Persecutions serve as training programs to make us fit (physically, emotionally, spiritually) for rigorous tasks God is about to give us. The Israelites did not know they were about to go on a very long and demanding journey through the wilderness. How were they going to achieve the physical fitness for that journey? God sent them cruel taskmasters who made them work to the limits of their endurance.

**11** Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. **12** But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. **13** So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. **14** And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve *was* with rigor.

4. To glorify God before the world (Exodus 12:12; Joshua 2:9-11).

Persecutions provide the stage for God to display His glory by delivering His people from their enemies.

**Exodus 12:12:** 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the Lord.

**Joshua 2:9-11:** **9** and said to the men: "I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. **10** For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. **11** And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

## APPLICATION

1. Like Israel, true Christians will surely suffer persecution.

a. Forewarned by Christ (John 15:18-21);

**18** “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. **19** If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. **20** Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. **21** But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

b. Forewarned by the apostles (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 5:8).

**12** Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

**8** Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

2. How to overcome under persecution (Revelation 12:11)

**11** And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

a. The blood of the Lamb; our lives must be grounded in the Gospel truths of salvation;

b. The word of our testimony (cp. Matthew 10:18-20);

**18** You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. **19** But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; **20** for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

c. Love God more than our life (cp. Matthew 10:28-33):

- Fear God more than humans (vs. 28);

**28** And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

- Trust God with your life (vss. 29-31);

**29** Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. **30** But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. **31** Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

- Confess Christ before people (vss. 32-33)

**32** “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. **33** But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

3. Let’s evaluate ourselves against the words of this hymn by Isaac Watts:

Am I a soldier of the cross, A follower of the Lamb?  
And shall I fear to own His cause, Or blush to speak His name?

Must I be carried to the skies On flowery beds of ease,  
While others fought to win the prize, And sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend to grace, To help me on to God?

Sure I must fight, if I would reign; Increase my courage, Lord;  
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, Supported by Thy word.

## STUDY 11: PSALM 130

### Step 11: Recovering from Failure

In our journey toward becoming like Christ, we must realize that times of failure (minor and major ones) will surely come. In such times of failure, we need to learn to take *Step 11: Recovering from Failure*. Psalm 130 has been known in church history by its Latin title, DE PROFUNDIS, which literally translates the first part of verse 1, “Out of the depths”.

#### A. The Psalmist Pilgrim’s Failure & Restoration

1. He has fallen into the depths of moral failure:

**Vs. 1** Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord;

2. He cried to the Lord for deliverance:

(a) God is merciful: vs **3** If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

(b) God is gracious: vs **4** But *there is* forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.

(c) God answers prayer: vss 5, 6: **5** I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope. **6** My soul *waits* for the Lord More than those who watch for the morning— Yes, *more than* those who watch for the morning.

3. He testified to others after his deliverance:

Vss. 7, 8: **7** O Israel, hope in the Lord; For with the Lord *there is* mercy, And with Him *is* abundant redemption. **8** And He shall redeem Israel From all his iniquities.

#### B. Two Famous Believers who failed

1. King David – Psalm 51.

**51** Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.

**2** Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.

**3** For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin *is* always before me.

**4** Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight— That You may be found just when You speak, *And* blameless when You judge.  
**5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.  
**6** Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden *part* You will make me to know wisdom.  
**7** Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
**8** Make me hear joy and gladness, *That* the bones You have broken may rejoice.  
**9** Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.  
**10** Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
**11** Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.  
**12** Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.  
**13** *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.

2. Peter the apostle – Luke 22:31-34:

**31** And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. **32** But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.” **33** But he said to Him, “Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.” **34** Then He said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know *Me*.”

## APPLICATION

1. God’s plan is for us NEVER to fail, 1 John 2:1a

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.

2. But God has made a provision for when we DO fail, 1 John 2:1b, 2

And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. **2** And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

3. God will use our testimony of failure and restoration to help others

(a) King David: Psalm 51:12-13

**12** Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.  
**13** *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.

(b) Peter the apostle: Luke 22:31-32

**31** And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. **32** But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.”

## STUDY 12: PSALM 131

### Step 12: Learning Humility

After experiencing intense trials and persecutions from which only God could deliver him (Psalm 129), and after falling into the depths of failure from which only God's grace and mercy could restore him (Psalm 130), the Pilgrim Psalmist was well prepared to take *Step 12: Learn True Humility*.

C. H. Spurgeon, prince of English preachers, said about Psalm 131: "It is one of the shortest psalms to read, but one of the longest psalms to learn." What are the lessons in humility that, like the Psalmist, we need to learn?

#### 1. HUMILITY ABOUT OUR HUMAN SINFULNESS

vs 1a: "Lord, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty" (cp Lk 18:10-14)

**Luke 18:10** "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' **13** And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' **14** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

#### 2. HUMILITY ABOUT OUR HUMAN ABILITIES

(a) Not trusting our ability to understand

vs 1b: "Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me"

(b) Not trusting our ability to do (cp Job 40:1-9; 42:1-6)

**Job 40:1-9** Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said:

**2** "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct *Him*? He who rebukes God, let him answer it."

**3** Then Job answered the Lord and said:

**4** "Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth.

**5** Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further."

**6** Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:

**7** "Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me:

**8** "Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?

**9** Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His?

**Job 42:1-6** Then Job answered the Lord and said:

**2** "I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose *of Yours* can be withheld from You.

**3** *You asked*, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what

I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

**4** Listen, please, and let me speak; *You said*, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.'

**5** "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You.

**6** Therefore I abhor *myself*, And repent in dust and ashes."

## APPLICATION

1. Humility is resting as a child in the arms of the Lord (cp Lk 18:17)

vs 2: Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, Like a weaned child with his mother; Like a weaned child *is* my soul within me.

**Luke 18:17** Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

Illustration: Someone said, "I finally found peace when I resigned from the position as CEO of the universe."

2. Humility is hoping in the all-wise, all-powerful, all-loving Lord:

vs 3: O Israel, hope in the Lord<sup>[SEP]</sup> From this time forth and forever.

(a) That He will accomplish His purpose in our lives (cp Rom 8:29-30)

**28** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. **29** For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

**30** Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

(b) That He will accomplish His purpose in the world (cp Rom 11:36; Eph 1:9-11)

**Romans 11:36** For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

**Ephesians 1:9** having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, **10** that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. **11** In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

3. Humility is living as a yokefellow with Jesus, Matthew 11:25-30:

**Matthew 11:25** At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. **26** Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. **27** All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*. **28** Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take My yoke upon you

and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.”

## **STUDY 13: PSALM 132**

### **Step 13: Leaving a Legacy**

In our journey toward becoming more like Christ, one question we need to answer concerns our legacy: What significance will my life leave behind after I'm gone? One answer is suggested in Psalm 132, which also suggests to us *Step 13: Leaving a Legacy*. This psalm gives to us the example of David and his legacy.

#### **A. THE TEMPLE (vss 1-10, 13-18))**

(1) Although David was not actually allowed by God to build the Temple, it was his life's passionate purpose to build a house for God's Ark that later motivated and enabled his son Solomon to build it, vss 1-10;

(2) This Temple became a part of David's legacy because of the blessings it brought to God's people, vss 13-18:

#### **B. THE MESSIAH (vss 11-12)**

(1) David was not perfect but God used him, along with a long line of people beginning with Abraham and culminating in Joseph and Mary, to be the human channel through which the promised Messiah would come;

(2) The Messiah will bless the world to the end of the world and to eternity

### **APPLICATION**

Today, if we remain faithful to God (1 Cor 15:58), through the help of the Holy Spirit, we may also leave a lasting legacy:

(1) Through our children who are nurtured in the Lord;

(2) Through our spiritual ministry of winning people to Christ and discipling them;

(3) The poem "Only One Life" challenges us to leave a legacy for eternity.

### **Only One Life**

C T Studd

Two little lines I heard one day,  
Traveling along life's busy way;  
Bringing conviction to my heart,  
And from my mind would not depart:

*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

Only one life, yes, only one,  
Soon will its fleeting hours be done;  
Then, in 'that day' my Lord to meet,  
And stand before His Judgment seat:  
*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

Only one life, the still small voice,  
Gently pleads for a better choice  
Bidding my selfish aims to leave,  
And to God's holy will to cleave:  
*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

Only one life, a few brief years,  
Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;  
Each with its claims I must fulfill,  
Living for self or in His will:  
*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

When this bright world would tempt me sore,  
When Satan would a victory score;  
When self would seek to have its way,  
Then help me Lord with joy to say;  
*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

Give me, Father, a purpose deep,  
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;  
Faithful and true whate'er the strife,  
Pleasing Thee in my daily life:  
*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

Oh let my love with fervor burn,  
And from the world now let me turn;  
Living for Thee, and Thee alone,  
Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne:  
*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

Only one life, yes, only one,  
Now let me say, "Thy will be done";  
And when at last I'll hear the call,  
I know I'll say "'Twas worth it all!"  
*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

## Isang Buhay Lang

Dalawang pangungusap narinig ko isang araw,  
Habang ako'y naglalakbay sa daan ng buhay;  
Na bumagabag sa aking kalooban,  
At sa isip ko'y ayaw itong pumanaw:  
*Isang buhay lang, usok itong dagling mapapawi,  
Tanging paglilingkod kay Cristo ang mananatili.*

Isang buhay lang, oo, tanging iisa,  
Di maglalao't ito'y tiyak na matatapos na;  
At sa dulo nito'y haharap ako sa Diyos,  
At sa kanyang hukuman ako'y magtutuos.  
*Isang buhay lang, usok itong dagling mapapawi,  
Tanging paglilingkod kay Cristo ang mananatili.*

Isang buhay lang, sa loob ko'y may isang tinig,  
Na nagsasabing dapat sundin ang daang matuwid,  
At dapat kong talikdan ang masasamang hilig,  
At sa salita ng Diyos lamang ako ay kakapit:  
*Isang buhay lang, usok itong dagling mapapawi,  
Tanging paglilingkod kay Cristo ang mananatili.*

Isang buhay lang, ang mga taon ay lumilipad,  
Sampun ng mga lungkot, saya, ginhawa at hirap,  
Sa tuwina'y sa akin isang pagpili ang inihaharap,  
Kalooban ba ng Diyos o sarili ang hangad?  
*Isang buhay lang, usok itong dagling mapapawi,  
Tanging paglilingkod kay Cristo ang mananatili.*

Pag sa aki'y malakas ang tawag ng sanlibutan,  
At tukso ni Satanas ay parang nangingibabaw;  
At ang puso ko'y unti-unting naliligaw,  
Panginoon, tulungan po akong manindigan:  
*Isang buhay lang, usok itong dagling mapapawi,  
Tanging paglilingkod kay Cristo ang mananatili.*

Bigyan po ako, Ama, ng pasiyang taimtim,  
Sa hirap man o ginhawa ito'y lagi kong kimkim;  
Mananatiling tapat, makikibaka sa lahat,  
Mabigyan lang ang Diyos ng luwalhati't galak:  
*Isang buhay lang, usok itong dagling mapapawi,  
Tanging paglilingkod kay Cristo ang mananatili.*

O magingas nawa ang pag-ibig ko sa Diyos,  
At sa lahat ng linlang ng mundo ako'y tatalikod;  
Tanging sa Panginoon, ngayon at kailan man,  
Tanging sa kalooban Niya ako'y mabubuhay:  
*Isang buhay lang, usok itong dagling mapapawi,*

*Tanging paglilingkod kay Cristo ang mananatili.*

Isang buhay lang, oo, tanging nag-iisa,  
"Kalooban mo'y susundin ko," ito ang aking pasiya;  
At sa huling araw pagdating sa akin ng tawag,  
Ako ay sasagot, "Sulit na lahat aking mga paghihirap!"  
*Isang buhay lang, usok itong dagling mapapawi,  
Tanging paglilingkod kay Cristo ang mananatili.*

Sinalin ni Pastor Bien Llobrera

## STUDY 14: PSALM 133

### Step 14: Keeping Our Unity

We have now come to the second to the last of 15 steps toward that level of maturity in which, like Christ, we can say, "I always do the things that please the Father." *Step 14: Keeping Our Unity.* In the experience of the psalmist, Psalm 133 pictures all the tribes of the Lord as having finally arrived in Jerusalem, and they were now worshiping the Lord in complete unity. From Israel's example, we Christians today see the absolute importance of unity.

#### A. UNITY OF ISRAEL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- (1) How good, vs. 1a
- (2) How pleasant, vs 1b
- (3) How precious, 2-3a
- (4) How blessed, 3b

#### B. UNITY OF CHRISTIANS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- (1) Unity in the Spirit, Eph 4:3-6

**3** endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6** one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

- (2) Unity of Mind, Phil 2:5-11

**5** Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, **6** who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, **7** but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross. **9** Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of

those on earth, and of those under the earth, **11** and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(3) Unity in Action, Phil 1:27

**27** Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,

## APPLICATION

Unity is absolutely important in the Christian life.

(1) God will perfect Christians not as individuals but as a complete Body of Christ and Family of God. Illustration: Military people have a motto and commitment: No soldier left behind. This is also true in the Christian life.

Hebrews 11:39-40: **39** And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, **40** God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

1 Corinthians 12:15-19: **15** If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? **16** And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? **17** If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling? **18** But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. **19** And if they were all one member, where *would* the body *be*?

(2) The process of becoming perfect like Christ is not merely through individual activity but through the teamwork of the whole Body.

Ephesians 4:15-16: **15** but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— **16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

(3) Christ made unity a condition for effective evangelism.

John 17:23: **23** I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

(4) We come to know God's love and to be filled with the fullness of God together with all the saints.

Ephesians 3:18-19: (that you) **18** may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— **19** to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Illustration:

Imagine a jar; break it into pieces, and let each one hold a piece. With our little piece let us try to draw water from the fountain for our needs and for the needs of others. How much water can we have individually; how much water can we carry to others? What will happen when we unite all our individual pieces in order to form the whole jar again? With the whole jar, how much water can we hold for ourselves and for others? Unity enables us to contain more of God for ourselves and more of God to carry to others!

## STUDY 15: PSALM 134

### Step 15: A Life of Continual Worship

At the start of this series we said that the fifteen psalms or Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134) were most probably sung by God's people on their annual pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem. As our application, we also said that these psalms suggest "steps" or truths that we need progressively to learn and apply in order to attain that level of spiritual maturity characterized by a God-glorifying life after the example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who said, "I always do those things that please the Father" (John 8:29). We have now reach the final rung of the ladder: *Step 15: A Life of Continual Worship*.

#### A. PRIESTLY TEMPLE WORSHIPERS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

This psalm was originally about the priests assigned to serve at night, in order to maintain continual worship in the temple.

1. They were servants of the Lord
2. They served at night
3. They blessed (worshiped) the Lord
4. They lifted up their hands in the sanctuary
5. They blessed the people in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

#### B. THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. All believers, corporately and individually, are God's temple

Eph 2:19-22: **19** Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, **21** in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, **22** in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

1 Cor. 3:16-17: **16** Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? **17** If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are.

1 Cor. 6:19-20: **19** Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?* **20** For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body[**a**] and in your spirit, which are God's.

2. All believers are God's priests

1 Peter 2:9: **9** But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

## APPLICATION

1. We gather as a church to worship God, not to be entertained.

2. We must learn to worship during the night, not only during the day, not only during times of joy and but also during times of sorrow.

Cp: Paul & Silas, Acts 16:25-26: **25** But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. **26** Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

3. The Christian life is a life of unceasing worship. Worship is not only on Sunday but every moment of everyday. This life is only an apprenticeship for our forever occupation in heaven.

Heb 13:15: **15** Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name.

1 Cor 10:31: **31** Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

4. Someday in heaven, our forever occupation will be to worship our God day and night without ceasing,

Rev 7:15: Therefore, they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them.

5. To review all 15 STEPS, please go back and study our diagram at the beginning of this series