

# Psalms of Ascent, part 1

## Long-Term Growth in a Culture of Immediacy

---

One of harmful aspects of our modern American culture is the assumption that anything worthwhile can be acquired at once or immediately.

“In the beginning the church was a fellowship of men and women centering on the living Christ. Then the church moved to Greece, where it became a philosophy. Then it moved to Rome, where it became an institution. Then to Europe, where it became a culture. And finally, it moved to America where it became an enterprise.”

Richard Halverson, Former Chaplain of the United States Senate

*John 14:6*

“It is not difficult in such a world to get a person interested in the message of the gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest. Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is slim. In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is packaged freshly; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap. There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.”

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

Everyone is in a hurry

These are songs that were used by Jewish pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem for the three annual festivals/celebrations of Passover, of Pentecost, and of the Tabernacle.

In the same way, the themes of these songs can help us on our journey. They can help us press on when we grow tired. They can inspire us when we are tempted or feel discouraged.

**Pilgrims:** Pilgrims are restless to reach their journey’s end.

**Prayer:** The Psalms provide patterns for prayer/worship

“It is no wonder that the Psalms were considered Israel’s prayer book. As we study these psalms, let us not forget to pray them, sing them, meditate on them, and live by them---that is prayer.”

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

**Expression:** The Psalms reflect the emotional responses of believers as they encounter the mysteries of God’s ways. They give dynamic expression to deep faith.

**Poetry:** The Psalms (in general) are considered poetry.

Poetry can connect the visible with the invisible.

The language of poetry is not always as clear as literal language, but it nevertheless communicates in a way that normal prose cannot. It enables us to explore God’s nature and our relationship with Him in ways not otherwise available to us.

**Relationship:** The Psalms are declarations of the relationship between God and His people. The psalmists cling to God's covenant promises of provision, protection, and preservation. What we find in the Psalms is not a neat and tidy systematic theology, but rather theological reflections on the relationship of God to His people.

**My/our Prayer:** As together as we read and study the Psalms of Ascent, may we learn about both God and ourselves. Our emotions will be touched, our minds informed, and our wills moved. Over the next 10-12 weeks, may these Psalms penetrate our souls and nourish us for the journey.

*Psalm 120:1-7*

**Movement one: Remember who God is...**

*Psalm 120:1 ESV*

Can you think of time that God answered a prayer, responded in some way that you were reminded of his presence and work in your life?

**Movement two: The reality of the world we live in...full of sin and brokenness**

*Psalm 120: 2-5*

*Proverbs 26:18-19*

What or whom represents lying and deceiving in our day and age for you personally?

**Movement Three: Human exasperation**

*Psalm 120: 6-7*

Peace/Shalom

And then the Psalm just ends with no resolution...

So much of life, this journey of life with God, is a life of waiting and grieving.

["I am beginning to see that much of praying...is grieving."](#)—Henri Nouwen

We serve a God whose calendar moves by millennia not minutes, and who thinks in generations, not seasons. Until we understand this about God, we will never understand his ways with us...

*Psalm 130:5-6a*

God will not be rushed. Sometimes we will have to wait until the present becomes the past before what we are going through becomes even remotely understandable.

*Isa. 40:30-31*

Thoughts and Practice:

- Read Psalm 120 every day and linger...
- Re-write the Psalm in your own words..
- Share with a trusted friend your current exasperations and spend some time praying with them about it this week