

Small Group Guide

"A Long Obedience in the Same Direction" -- Psalm 122: Songs for the Road

Overview

This week's sermon drew from Psalm 122, one of the Psalms of Ascent sung by ancient pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem. The sermon explored what it means to journey toward God together, why the gathered church matters, and how regular worship shapes us even when we do not feel like showing up. The central message is simple but demanding: we were never meant to walk this road alone.

Key Takeaways

- Faith is a journey, not a destination. There is no point at which a follower of Jesus has fully arrived.
 - The church is not an optional accessory to the Christian life. It is the God-ordained community of pilgrims who carry one another on the road.
 - Worship is a discipline, not merely an expression of feeling. We act ourselves into a new way of feeling far more readily than we feel ourselves into a new way of acting.
 - Gratitude and praise are not passive emotions. They are active practices that reshape how we see our lives and counteract anxiety and discontentment.
 - Believers are individually and collectively temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 6:19). God dwells among his people.
 - The biblical question is not "What does the church offer me?" but "What can I offer the body?"
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Opening Question

Take a few minutes to check in as a group before diving into the discussion.

- How has your week been on the journey? Where have you felt strong, and where have you felt worn out?
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Discussion Questions

On Community and the Journey

1. The sermon opened with the image of pilgrims traveling together to Jerusalem. In what ways does that image resonate with your own experience of the Christian life? In what ways does it challenge you?
2. The pastor said, "It is awfully hard to follow Jesus if you do not have others around you also following him." Do you agree with that statement? Can you think of a time in your own life when the presence or absence of Christian community made a real difference in your faith?
3. American culture places a high value on independence and self-sufficiency. How have you seen that cultural value affect the way people approach church and Christian community? How has it affected you personally?
4. The sermon pointed out that Jesus gathered a tax collector and a zealot -- two people who would have been natural enemies -- and made them part of the same family. What does that tell us about what unity in the church is actually based on? Are there people in your life or in this group with whom you find unity difficult? How does the gospel speak to that?

On Worship as Discipline

5. The pastor quoted Eugene Peterson: "We can act ourselves into a new way of feeling much quicker than we can feel ourselves into a new way of acting." What do you think of that idea? Have you experienced it to be true in your own life, in worship or in any other area?
6. Have you ever shown up to church when you genuinely did not want to be there? What happened? Looking back, are you glad you came?
7. The sermon described Sunday worship as giving our lives rhythm and structure in the middle of a chaotic week. How do you currently experience that rhythm? Is it something you actively lean into, or is it something you take for granted?
8. The pastor said, "The world spends six days out of the week trying to make us forget what church reminds us every week." What are some of the specific things the world works hardest to make you forget? What does gathered worship do to push back against that?

On Gratitude and Anxiety

9. The sermon connected praise and thanksgiving directly to the fight against anxiety and discontentment. The pastor said it is almost impossible to be anxious and genuinely thankful at the same time. Do you find that to be true? How does intentional gratitude affect your emotional and spiritual state?
10. Where in your life right now is comparison stealing your joy? How might a more deliberate practice of thanksgiving address that?

On Giving Rather Than Receiving

11. The sermon drew a sharp contrast between asking "What does the church offer me?" and asking "What can I offer the body?" Which question do you find yourself asking most often, if you are honest? What would it look like in your life to shift more fully toward the second question?
12. The pastor said, "Pilgrims do not just receive help. Pilgrims become help for other pilgrims." Who in your life right now might need you to be a traveling companion for them? What would it look like to take a concrete step toward that person this week?

Reflection on Scripture

Read the following passages together as a group and briefly discuss what each one adds to the themes of the sermon.

- 1 Corinthians 12:27 -- What does it mean practically for your group to function as part of one body?
- 1 Corinthians 3:16 -- How does the truth that God's Spirit dwells among his gathered people change the way you think about showing up on Sunday?
- John 14:23 -- Jesus promises that he and the Father will come and make their home with those who love him and obey his teaching. What does that promise stir in you?

Practical Applications

Choose one or two of the following to discuss as a group, or to commit to individually before the next meeting.

1. **Examine your attendance pattern.** Be honest with yourself about whether you treat church attendance as a priority or as optional. If it has become optional, identify one

specific obstacle and talk with someone in your group about how to address it.

2. **Practice gratitude this week.** Set aside five minutes each morning to name three specific things you are thankful for. At the end of the week, reflect on whether this practice affected your level of anxiety or discontentment.
3. **Reach toward a fellow pilgrim.** Identify one person in your church or small group who may be struggling or isolated. Send them a message, make a phone call, or invite them to coffee. Do not wait for them to reach out first.
4. **Ask the better question.** Before your next Sunday gathering, ask yourself: "What can I bring to the body this week?" It might be encouragement, a helping hand, a listening ear, or simply a decision to be fully present rather than distracted.
5. **Pray for the church.** Set aside time this week to pray specifically for your local church and for the broader church. Use the categories the pastor mentioned: that God would make the church loving, holy, unified, patient, generous, courageous, and faithful -- and ultimately that the church would look like Jesus.

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by praying as a group. You may want to use the following as a guide.

Lord Jesus, thank you that we are not alone on this road. Thank you for the people you have placed around us. Forgive us for the ways we have isolated ourselves or treated your church as something we consume rather than something we build together. Teach us to worship you even when we do not feel like it, trusting that you will meet us there. Make us grateful people. Make us generous people. Make us the kind of traveling companions that others are glad to have on the journey. We love you. Amen.
