

SUMMER DEVOTIONAL REFLECTION GUIDE

AN INVITATION

During our summer sermon series, we will spend each week looking at one of the Psalms of Ascent from the book of Psalms. These psalms are called the Psalms of Ascent because the people of God would sing them as they journeyed up (or *ascended*) to Jerusalem for worship. Although the people of God don't make pilgrimages today, Christians often use the metaphor of a journey to describe what it's like to move toward maturity in life with God. Jesus invites us all on a similar journey when he says, "Come, follow me" in Matthew 4:19.

So what does it mean to follow Jesus? Jesus was a 1st century Jewish rabbi. And all Jewish rabbis had followers called *disciples* or *apprentices*. We don't use the terms *disciple* or *apprentice* much today, but a disciple or apprentice is someone who spends time with another person in order to become like them. This is what Jesus did with his disciples—he spent time with them passing on his teachings and his way of life in order to see them flourish as God intended. And after his resurrection Jesus gave his original disciples instructions to "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

What this means is that to be a Christian is to be a disciple or apprentice of Jesus—to spend time with him in order to become like him. C.S. Lewis once said, "Every Christian is to become a little Christ." And Dallas Willard summed up the Christian journey this way: "[Christians] are those who are with him learning to be like him."

Since Jesus is no longer physically present with us, we may wonder how we can be *with him* in order to become like him. For over 2,000 years of church history, Christians have practiced what have become known as spiritual disciplines or spiritual practices in order to be with or "abide" in Jesus as he invites us to do in John 15. There are many of these practices, but the two most foundational—and essential—are prayer and engagement with Scripture.

Over the course of the summer, you're invited to follow Jesus by spending time with Jesus through the practices of prayer and Scripture. We face a great temptation in our world to fill our lives with "Jesus things"—church attendance, serving, Christian podcasts, worship albums, etc.—but neglect to spend personal, undistracted time with Jesus himself. But Jesus said when we come to *him*, when we learn from *him*, when we are *with him*, we will find rest (Matthew 11:28-30). That's the invitation. Will you join us on the journey this summer?

PRACTICE

This summer, our weekly Reflection Guide will include a spiritual practice to engage in your personal devotional time. This week's practice is to pick a time in your day to spend 20-30 minutes of personal, undistracted time with God. Use this time to pray or read Scripture (to begin, you may want to read Psalm 121 each day or read a chapter in Psalms or Proverbs). As you move through your week, consider the following questions: What keeps me from regularly spending personal, undistracted time with God? What do I want God to do in me as I spend time in prayer and Scripture over the summer? Close your time praying and asking for God to increase your desire to spend time with him each day.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

PSALM 121 | THE LORD OUR KEEPER

LEARNING THE WORD

1. Each week this summer, our Reflection Guide will include a spiritual practice for you to engage in your personal devotional time. Begin this week by reading page one of the reflection guide. Do you invest in a personal, undistracted daily devotional time with God? Why or why not?
2. Read Psalm 121 aloud. Throughout the passage, what word(s) or theme is repeated throughout? How does this reveal the primary focus of the psalm?
3. The psalmist begins by saying, "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?" The writer is highlighting the fact that, rather than looking to God, we often look to earthly solutions for help. What aspects of your life cause you to look for help? Why are we tempted to look for earthly help rather than looking to God, the maker of heaven and earth?
4. The rest of Psalm 121 tells readers to look to the Lord – that's where real help comes from! In verses 2-8, what specific attributes and character of God that makes him a trustworthy source of help?

LIVING THE WORD

5. If this psalm is true (and it is!), this should be a tremendous confidence builder for our lives – although we will face various trials and hardships in life, nothing can *ultimately* harm us. How would your daily perspective change if you approach each day with this truth in mind?
6. Read Romans 8:31-38. These verses from the New Testament reinforce the teaching of Psalm 121. How is Christ's victory through his cross and empty tomb proof that we are more than conquerors over all the trials we face?

Practice this week: Pick a time in your day to spend 20-30 minutes of personal, undistracted time with God. Use this time to remind yourself that *the Lord is your Keeper*. As you move through your week, consider the following questions: What keeps me from regularly spending personal, undistracted time with God? What do I want God to do in me as I spend time in prayer and Scripture over the summer? Close your time praying and asking for God to increase your desire to spend time with him each day.