



*Journey with
Jesus*

**A Spiritual Pilgrimage
through the
Psalms of Ascent**

FRED FARROKH

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Fred Farrokh

Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples



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by Fred Farrokh

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Dedication

To the believers in Christ from Muslim background
who have set out on a spiritual pilgrimage
with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Pursuing the Presence of God with the People of God

Greetings from your brother Fred Farrokh. I am a Christian of Muslim background. I write this devotional to encourage my brothers and sisters from a similar background.

This short booklet follows an Old Testament theme. Hebrew worshippers were required to leave their homes to make a pilgrimage to the Temple three times per year for these high holy days: Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The Temple was located in Jerusalem, which sits elevated in the mountains. No matter which direction the pilgrims came from, getting to Jerusalem required a long upward ascent, or climb. The return trip home was downhill, but the trip to the Temple was invariably uphill.

These worshippers often formed traveling groups to walk to Jerusalem for the appointed feasts. According to tradition, they would sing a section of songs from the Book of Psalms. The specific section is fifteen short Psalms, numbered 120 through 134. Several of these Psalms are attributed in the text to David. One of them is attributed to Solomon. The authors of the others are not known, but the authorship is not as important as the content.

As the pilgrims walked uphill to the Temple for worship, they would sing these beloved psalms. For this reason, Psalms 120 through 134 are known as the “Psalms of Ascent.” These are the Psalms which will be the subject of our devotional, a spiritual pilgrimage with Christ on the road to the heavenly Jerusalem. We do not easily see the topography of the Holy Land on the pages of the Bible, but worshippers in those days knew it well. Jerusalem was a high place dedicated to the Most High God. Since it was home to the Temple, Jerusalem was also associated with the presence of God. Psalm 84 describes the joy of being in God’s presence in the Temple:

How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. ... For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. (Psalm 84:1, 2, 10, NASB)

When Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, He stated: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead” (Luke 10:30). The man literally was going downward. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho runs steeply downward from the mountains of Judea to the Jordan Valley, which is the lowest point on the face of the earth! The man was going down physically and spiritually. He was going away from the presence of God. There, he fell among the thieves. This reminds us of our own spiritual condition before Jesus, the greatest Good Samaritan, rescued us. We were helpless and beaten by sin, but Jesus bore our sins and healed our souls.

The idea of pilgrimage exists in nearly all religions, as if it were hard-wired into the human soul. Worshippers of God in Old Testament times made pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Pilgrimage is also important in Islam, through the *hajj* to Mecca. There are also lesser pilgrimages made by Muslims to Mecca and other sites. In the New Testament, we do not find God's Spirit confined to a location. When Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the Temple was split in two (Matthew 27:51). This represents the Spirit of God leaving a confined location to be poured out throughout the world, into the hearts of those who worship Jesus.

We are not making pilgrimage with our feet to a physical location. Rather, we are making a spiritual pilgrimage with the Lord Jesus in our hearts to our eternal home in heaven. We can think of this as the heavenly Jerusalem:

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

For 2,000 years, people from every nation have been making this journey with Jesus. Many people from Muslim background have now set out on this path. I have also joined this spiritual pilgrimage and have been walking with Jesus for nearly 40 years.

The Psalms of Ascent represent a joyful expectation: pursuing the presence of God with the people of God. What a happy journey! This is our journey with Jesus along the path He has prepared for us! Let these Psalms encourage you along the way, my brothers and sisters.

Psalm 120

*In my trouble I cried to the LORD,
And He answered me.*

² *Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips,
From a deceitful tongue.*

³ *What shall be given to you, and what more
shall be done to you,
You deceitful tongue?*

⁴ *Sharp arrows of the warrior,
With the burning coals of the broom tree.*

⁵ *Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech,
For I dwell among the tents of Kedar!*

⁶ *Too long has my soul had its dwelling
With those who hate peace.*

⁷ *I am for peace, but when I speak,
They are for war.*

We set our feet on this spiritual journey in Psalm 120, which is the first Psalm of Ascent. If your situation is difficult, be encouraged! The worshippers here also begin with many challenges. The picture here contrasts the righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit that mark Jesus' kingdom. Whenever difficulties arise, God, by His grace, gives us a glimpse from His perspective.

This psalm paints a picture of this sinful world. It is a world in which people are beset by many troubles (v. 1). Much trouble is

caused everywhere by lying lips and deception. Jesus stated, *“The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart”* (Matthew 12:34). Jeremiah tells us, *“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it”* (Jeremiah 17:9)?

Indeed, we have a heart problem. The heart is the center and seat of our being. Our hearts are plagued by sin. One way this manifests itself is through lying and deception. Our tongues often shoot out sharp arrows and flaming coals by the words we say to the people around us. James tells us: *“The tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire”* (James 3:5)! How often we say things we later regret. Yet, the problem is not born from the tongue. The problem lies in our heart, which overflows outward in the things we think and say.

The worshippers in Psalm 120 are confronted not only with lying and deception, but also violence and war (verses 5-7). The worshippers seek peace, but there is opposition! The road to the presence of God is not an “easy street.” In verse 5, the worshippers lament, *“Woe is me!”*

In the picture painted by Psalm 120, the worshippers starting this pilgrimage dwell among the tents of Kedar. Interestingly, Kedar is the second son of Ishmael (Genesis 25:13). Islamic genealogies point to Kedar as being the son of Ishmael through whom Muhammad came. It is difficult to verify genealogies from antiquity. Paul tells his disciple, Pastor Timothy, not *“to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith”* (1 Timothy 1:4).

Simply stated, the tents of Kedar represent a house of war. The worshipper seeks peace with God through the Lord Jesus

Christ, but an opposing force is in the way: *“I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war”* (verse 7).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ from Muslim background, whatever path we must take, let us pursue the presence of Jesus. Opposition may come from our closest loved ones, from the tents of those nearest to us. It may be that many relationships all around you have gone bad simultaneously. You may feel like a tire that has multiple holes in it.

Opposition may come for a season, but the Lord can change situations and He can change hearts. The Apostle Paul was once known as Saul. He was a man of war who hated the Prince of Peace. Yet, the Lord’s mercy prevailed in the life of Paul. When the angry mob was stoning Stephen to death, he prayed that the Lord would not hold their sins against them. Paul was in that angry mob. Stephen’s prayers for Paul were answered.

The Lord did not hold Paul’s sins against him. Jesus appeared to him and saved him. Jesus has saved us also. We are now pursuing the presence of Jesus, walking by grace. There is nothing good within us. In our flesh dwells no good thing. Jesus is perfectly good and righteous. By God’s grace, He attributes to us the goodness and righteousness of Christ.

We end where we began at the top of this psalm. The psalmist sang. No, he cried to the Lord and the Lord answered. Hallelujah, we serve a prayer-answering God. Jesus taught us:

Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (Luke 11:11-13)

It is now time to call on the Lord. Our journey awaits us. Let us set out together to pursue the presence of the Lord. It is a joyful journey because Jesus is with us.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. Are we ready to set our feet on a spiritual pilgrimage with Jesus? What is holding us back?
2. Lying and deception are all around us. How has this infected us also? Shall we not repent of dishonesty and commit ourselves to honesty in our relationship to the Lord and with others? What do we need to confess to the Lord?
3. Are we experiencing pain in our relationships? How so? Have we failed to invite the Lord into our troubles? Have we tried to solve these problems and carry these burdens ourselves? How can we now invite the Lord into these situations?

Psalm 121

*I will lift up my eyes to the mountains;
From where shall my help come?
 ² My help comes from the LORD,
 Who made heaven and earth.
³ He will not allow your foot to slip;
He who keeps you will not slumber.
 ⁴ Behold, He who keeps Israel
 Will neither slumber nor sleep.
 ⁵ The LORD is your keeper;
The LORD is your shade on your right hand.
 ⁶ The sun will not smite you by day,
 Nor the moon by night.
⁷ The LORD will protect you from all evil;
 He will keep your soul.
⁸ The LORD will guard your going out
 and your coming in
 From this time forth and forever.*

As we have noted, the Temple sat on the mountains of Judea. This is where the presence of God resided in Old Testament times. The psalmist here lifts up his eyes to the mountains. He knows his help comes from the Lord.

We are leaving the house of war and sin. We have left behind Islam. We have left behind the old nature. We are moving on to a spiritual pilgrimage with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we serve the God who helps. The Holy Spirit is known as the “*Paraclete*,” the One who comes alongside us to help and to comfort. We will not be able to fulfill our spiritual journey in our own strength. The Lord Jesus Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to fill our lives and help us on this journey. Let thanksgiving and celebration fill our hearts!

Our journey is complicated by slipping, sleeping, and uncomfortable weather. The psalmist testifies in verse 3 that the Lord will not allow our feet to slip. Journeys over hills are not easy. If there is any rain, dew, or moisture, our path may become slippery. Sometimes our path is made slippery by our own tears, but there is encouragement from the Lord.

Isaiah had the vision of the coming of Christ. He described his vision as follows:

*A voice is calling,
“Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness;
Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.
Let every valley be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill be made low;
And let the rough ground become a plain,
And the rugged terrain a broad valley; Then the glory of
the Lord will be revealed,
And all flesh will see it together;
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”* (Isaiah 40:3-6)

Dear friends, your journey may seem nearly impossible. The Holy Spirit will comfort you and help you. Just take the next step forward. We may shuffle. We may even crawl, but the Lord will help us to not slip backward. We may see high mountains and deep valleys ahead on this journey. Do not worry about the distant future. Just take the next step. Later we will realize that the Lord, by His grace, has smoothed the way for us.

We may already be weary on the journey! People need sleep. Have your troubles kept you awake at night? Me, too! We can take comfort that our God never sleeps, as is stated in verse 4. We do not need to bear our burdens alone. It is time to cast our cares on Him, for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

Spiritually, we were in a deep sleep—a slumber. When the Holy Spirit convicted us of our sins and revealed Christ to us, we awoke from our sleep. We were sleepwalking through this life until the grace of God came to us. Praise His name!

In verse 6, the psalmist is thinking about the weather. The pilgrims are walking, not taking a bus. The sun may scorch by day, and chill may seep into the bones during the moonlit nights. As humans, we are vulnerable to changes in the weather.

The conclusion of this beautiful psalm testifies how the Lord is a shade to us. The Muslim thinker, Sayyid Qutb, wrote a book, *In the Shade of the Quran*. This shade of the Qur'an led him into *jihad*. He did not embrace the shade of Jesus. Jesus is the only one who can shade us from evil. First John 3:8 tells us that the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil. Hallelujah!

Dear friends, the Lord will protect us from evil, as verse 7 states. No magic can prevail against us. At the name of Jesus every demon flees. The same verse tells us that the Lord will keep our soul. Satan cannot take it away. The Lord is not like us. We lose things and we cannot find them. The Lord keeps our souls because He paid for them with the blood of Christ. We are purchased by the Lord and redeemed by the Lord.

Verse 8 tells us the Lord will guard our going out and coming in, now and forever. We are on a spiritual journey, but we are not like the man who was found by the Good Samaritan. That man traveled alone and fell into the hands of robbers. We travel with an armed guard: The Lord of Hosts is His name!

If you have found yourself struggling in your journey, you are not alone. No one is perfect, except our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus journeyed to earth to save us. He was tempted in all ways and passed every test without sinning. You and I are walking this journey together with Jesus. We are pursuing the presence of God with the people of God. Let us lift up our eyes to the mountains again.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. Do we find our eyes lifted up to the mountain of the Lord or cast down upon the difficulties of the road?
2. What cares are we carrying that keep us up at night and worried by day? How can we share those burdens with the One who never slumbers or sleeps?
3. Are we confident that the Lord will protect us from evil? Or are we afraid that we are walking this spiritual pilgrimage without an armed guard? Let us put our trust in the Lord today.

Psalm 122

*I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD.”
 ² Our feet are standing
 Within your gates, O Jerusalem,
 ³ Jerusalem, that is built
 As a city that is compact together;
⁴ To which the tribes go up, even the tribes of the LORD—
 An ordinance for Israel—
 To give thanks to the name of the LORD.
⁵ For there thrones were set for judgment,
 The thrones of the house of David.
 ⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
 “May they prosper who love you.
 ⁷ “May peace be within your walls,
 And prosperity within your palaces.”
⁸ For the sake of my brothers and my friends,
 I will now say, “May peace be within you.”
⁹ For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
 I will seek your good.*

This song of joy rings from the heart of the psalmist David. He urgently desired the presence of God. Verse 1 captures the spirit of our journey through the Psalms of Ascent. David rejoiced at the invitation to join others on a spiritual pilgrimage to the house of the Lord.

We can all identify with David in many ways. He was a sinner, but God describes him as “*a man after My heart*” (Acts 13:22). Though David committed both murder and adultery, he trusted in God’s mercy. We should not attempt to come to God based on our own good deeds. This is merely an illusion. We should come to God only through the grace and forgiveness that is in Christ.

Our relationship to God can be illustrated by a magnet. Magnets stick to metal objects. However, magnets have polarity. One side will stick to a metal object. The other side will repel it. No matter how hard you try to push it, the repelling side will not stick to the metal object.

Likewise, we were made to stick to God, to cleave to Him in worship, but our sins cause us to repel away from the presence of God. Our sins cause a barrier, which is like a force field. God seeks us, but we run away. The good news is that when Christ saves us, He flips the polarity of our magnet by taking our sins away.

That which blocked us from receiving the love of God is taken away. Now we can stick to the Lord like a magnet sticks to a metal object. Have no doubt: this is what the Lord has done!

Though the psalmist-king David wanted to build the first great temple to the Lord, the Lord did not allow him to do so since he was a man of bloodshed and warfare. His son Solomon would have that honor, but David made every preparation he could to facilitate the worship of God. He appointed worshippers and musicians to lead the people into the presence of God (1 Chronicles 15:16 and chapters 16 and 25). He started to store up materials for the construction of the Temple (1 Chronicles 22:1-5). He would not see it with his own eyes, however. Like David, we are setting out on a path. Our desire is to see millions of

Muslims turn to Christ. We do not know how much of this the Lord will allow us to see with our own eyes. Nevertheless, we must press on as David did.

Verses 3 and 4 speak of God's ordinance commanding the tribes of Israel to come to Jerusalem. Moses gave those instructions centuries earlier:

Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me. You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed. Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord God. (Exodus 23:14-17)

As former Muslims, we are familiar with commandments and things we must do. The Bible also has commandments. This is not a journey in which everyone can just do whatever is right in his or her own eyes. Yet two key differences must be made in comparing the Islamic journey to the biblical journey. First, in Islam, we previously sought to earn God's approval through keeping commandments. In the biblical faith, God's approval rests upon Christ alone. By faith, we are "*in Christ.*" The New Testament explains what God has done through Christ: "*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Second, coming into the presence of the Lord is unique to the biblical journey. We can rejoice in this great invitation. In Islam, God is impersonal, and He cannot be approached by humans.

The second half of this wonderful psalm provides a soothing melody of the peace of God. In God's presence, we can truly find peace. Storms may rage around us. Persecution may come and go. Yet, Paul states, "*Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Romans 5:1). No other peace exists as permanent as the spiritual rest we find in our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, the journey continues. David rejoices that a traveling band is forming, and he has been invited to be part of it. You, too, are invited to join us on this journey with Christ!

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. What is our reaction to the thought of coming into the presence of God? Is our heart filled with shame and fear? Or joy and thanksgiving? Do we realize Christ has flipped our magnet around?
2. How do we feel about journeying with brothers and sisters in this spiritual pilgrimage? Do we find it easier to do it alone or as part of a group? Why is that?
3. What is the difference between what we *must* do and what we *get* to do? How do we react in each of these situations?

Psalm 123

To You I lift up my eyes,

O You who are enthroned in the heavens!

² *Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,
As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,
So our eyes look to the LORD our God,
Until He is gracious to us.*

³ *Be gracious to us, O LORD, be gracious to us,
For we are greatly filled with contempt.*

⁴ *Our soul is greatly filled
With the scoffing of those who are at ease,
And with the contempt of the proud.*

Here again the worshippers have lifted up their eyes, not only to the mountains, but to God who is enthroned in the heavens. Let us always lift up our gaze, brothers and sisters.

Verse 2 describes a personal relationship between the worshippers and our Lord. As young servants would spring into action simply on the basis of the hand motion of their master or mistress, so the psalmist here has his eyes fixed upon God, awaiting His grace. The word “gracious” is used three times in verses 2 and 3. The psalmist believed that God is gracious. That grace has truly been revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The main usage of “grace” in the Bible is “unmerited favor,” which is when God gives us something we do not deserve. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

In some other cases, grace in the Bible can be defined as “divine enablement.” This application of grace describes the power to do something we could never do in our own strength. Paul testifies to this grace in 1 Corinthians 15:10: *“By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”*

Finally, grace can also mean “graciousness,” which is kindness: *“Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person”* (Colossians 4:6). Each of these applications of grace indicates something given from the heart and character of God.

Everything in our life in Christ flows from relationship. God has initiated this relationship by seeking us. His love has come to us in Christ. It is not simply a testimony of conversion. Any good relationship must continually be pursued. The love of a husband and wife may grow cold if they do not tend to that relationship. Some Muslim background Christians have a beautiful testimony of how Jesus saved them, yet that love for Jesus has grown cold.

In the book of Revelation, the church at Ephesus, which was a strong church, was corrected for leaving their first love (Revelation 2:4). We are on a spiritual journey but let us not drift away from God. As it is written, *“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it”* (Hebrews 2:1).

Negative experiences in our lives may tempt us to drift away from God. As followers of Christ, you may face scoffing. Hopefully, that will not be the case, but verse 4 warns us to be aware of it. We may also face the contempt of the proud. Those who seek to justify themselves before God may be filled with pride and contempt, but the result is something we can consider to be spiritually repulsive. It is not pleasant in God's sight. Let us rejoice in the grace of God. Likewise, let us also remember to be gracious to others.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. How does this Psalm encourage you in your personal relationship to God?
2. How do you understand the grace of God?
3. If you have had to face scoffing or contempt, personally or as a group of Christians, how have you dealt with it?

Psalm 124

“Had it not been the LORD who was on our side,”

Let Israel now say,

² *“Had it not been the LORD who was on our side*

When men rose up against us,

³ *Then they would have swallowed us alive,*

When their anger was kindled against us;

⁴ *Then the waters would have engulfed us,*

The stream would have swept over our soul;

⁵ *Then the raging waters would have swept over our soul.”*

⁶ *Blessed be the LORD,*

Who has not given us to be torn by their teeth.

⁷ *Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper;*

The snare is broken and we have escaped.

⁸ *Our help is in the name of the LORD,*

Who made heaven and earth.

David sings out inspirational Psalm 124. The theme is God’s help in the midst of persecution. This psalm begins with a repetition, centered on the exhortation, “Let Israel now say.” The repeated phrase serves as a point of emphasis that the Lord is on our side. We can always hold this promise dear to our hearts: The Lord is on our side!

We understand there may be spiritual powers behind the confrontations we face in this world. People are not our enemies. Our real enemies are unseen demons, powers, and principalities.

Though fierce, they cannot compare to the power of God. The Lord always has the victory through Christ, and we are in Christ.

Some of David's psalms include introductory notes stating the occasion, but Psalm 124 does not include any such note. David was a leader who frequently experienced persecution and opposition. Notice how David describes the opposition he faced:

- *“when men rose against us”* (verse 2)
- *“they would have swallowed us alive”* (verse 3)
- *“when their anger was kindled against us”* (verse 3)
- *“the raging waters would have swept over our soul”* (verse 5)

David's life provides encouragement to Christians of Muslim background. God led Samuel to anoint David as the future king, even though David was the youngest of eight sons. The king at that time, Saul, was going insane because of his disobedience to God. The royal court sought a soothing musician to bring a peaceful attitude to the palace. They found David, who had worshipped on his harp in the meadows as he tended sheep. Now he was in the king's palace, but it was a dangerous place. King Saul was prone to outbursts of wrath as well as raging jealousy. He imagined that David was trying to take his throne. Therefore, he chased David to the farthest parts of the kingdom. He mobilized the nation to chase a humble worshipper who had already been anointed to be king.

David confided to his friend, Prince Jonathan, *“There is only a step between me and death”* (1 Samuel 20:3). And things would only get worse before they would get better. Saul would pursue David as he hid in faraway caves. David always extended forgiveness and mercy to Saul, twice sparing the king's life. When they came face to face, David lamented, *“After whom has*

the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea” (1 Samuel 24:14)? At this time, David was greatly discouraged and hopeless. Sometimes, we, as former Muslims, may feel the same way on our spiritual journey.

Yet, David knew one truth that would sustain him and his people, *“The Lord is on our side!”* What does the Lord’s victory look like? The conclusion of the psalm sheds light on this. *“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”* David knew that the Creator God was more powerful than any foe. God would later visit the earth, born of a virgin named Mary. She was a direct descendant of David himself. This long-awaited son of David, born through Mary, was the Lord Jesus. Jesus is the *“name of the Lord”* who brings us that help.

David describes the experience of the Lord’s deliverance as the feeling of a bird that has escaped from a snare. Sometimes our own sins ensnare us. Other times it is external opposition—persecution for the stand we have taken for the Lord Jesus. The New Testament instructs us: *“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it”* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The Lord’s way of escape is to turn any situation and make it a learning experience for us that will make us more like Jesus. Later we will be able to help those on their journey who are going through similar difficulties. Growth, strength, deliverance, and perseverance are all possible results of the Lord helping us in times of difficulty.

Though David could outrun Saul, we cannot outrun our sins. We do well to confess those sins to God. John instructs us, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our*

sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Jesus Christ paid for our sins on the cross. There is no other way. Let the name of Jesus be praised. Our journey continues.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. As we look at our lives, what seems greater: our problems or our God?
2. When we face opposition from people, how can we gain the perspective that our enemies are actually spiritual?
3. Let us give thanks to Jesus, our deliverer. He is the *“name of the Lord,”* and He is on our side!

Psalm 125

*Those who trust in the LORD
Are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved
but abides forever.*

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

*³ For the scepter of wickedness shall not
rest upon the land of the righteous,
So that the righteous will not put forth
their hands to do wrong.*

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

*⁵ But as for those who turn aside to their crooked ways,
The LORD will lead them away with the doers of iniquity.
Peace be upon Israel.*

The pilgrims head toward Jerusalem. They are pursuing the presence of God. Soon enough they can see the mountains of Judah rising up in the distance. In this attitude of worship, a beautiful psalm is born.

In the same way that the mighty and immovable mountains surround Jerusalem, our mighty and immovable Lord surrounds us. What a great revelation! This is not a temporary fix: “*The Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever*” (verse 2).

The challenge to us as believers on our pilgrimage is not about doing something for the Lord. It is about trusting the Lord (verse 1). Faith in Jesus should give birth to trust. Yet sometimes we fail to trust Him. I acknowledge that I am prone to worry, which is the opposite of trust.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, our spiritual pilgrimage is primarily an exercise in building trust in Jesus. God desires that our faith and trust in Christ grow throughout this life. Soon we will reach our eternal home of rest and celebration. At the resurrection, no fears, tears, or worries will exist, since we will see Him face to face. John writes,

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

Jesus is coming back again! The first time He came as the suffering servant. The next time He will come in His glory as King of kings and Lord of lords.

For us living in this present age, let us lift up our eyes on our journey. The mountains of Judah rise directly ahead of us. As Jerusalem sits on the strong shoulders of those mountains, we are carried on the strong shoulders of the Lord Jesus. Isaiah prophesied that the government of the Kingdom of God would rest on Jesus' shoulders:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

As we walk, let us sing. As we sing, let us rejoice. As we rejoice, let us trust in the Lord.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. In what ways are we prone to fear and worry rather than to trust in the Lord?
2. Is our focus solely on our current situation? How can we keep the perspective that eternity is our goal?

Psalm 126

*When the LORD brought back the captive ones of Zion,
We were like those who dream.*

*² Then our mouth was filled with laughter
And our tongue with joyful shouting;
Then they said among the nations,*

“The LORD has done great things for them.”

*³ The LORD has done great things for us;
We are glad.*

*⁴ Restore our captivity, O LORD,
As the streams in the South.*

⁵ Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting.

*⁶ He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed,
Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.*

Psalm 126 describes the rise and fall of emotions that we commonly experience as Muslim background Christians. Truly, as verse 2 states, our *“mouth is filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting. ... The Lord has done great things for us.”* Jesus has died to take away all our sins. Now the Holy Spirit is leading us on a spiritual pilgrimage marked by His own presence. Indeed, there is much joy in this journey! We are glad!

Yet we also carry sadness. Most of us have unsaved Muslim family members. We carry a great burden of concern for their

souls. Our efforts to share the gospel with them may not bear immediate fruit. Sometimes we are sowing in tears. We carry the Bible in our arms, our bag of seed. Holding it, we sow seeds from it, and we weep for the lost souls.

Perhaps the worshippers on their way to Jerusalem were likewise concerned about unbelievers in their own families who did not make the pilgrimage. Maybe they knew our pain and concerns. It seems the writer of this psalm knew something about pain.

Farmers understand that sowing of seed is an investment. Any seed used for the next season's crop could not be ground into grain for eating. Sometimes the future takes precedent over the present. Let us plant seeds in the garden of eternity.

Like these Old Testament believers, we Muslim background believers also have a dream. Our dream is that the gospel will grow in our families and communities. Our vision is that the Lord Jesus Christ would be exalted among Muslims. Though we sow in tears today, this psalm encourages us that a harvest will come in the Lord's timing.

We can be encouraged that the Lord is known to turn situations around "*as the streams in the South*" (verse 4). The southern part of Judah is known as the Negev. It is a dry, barren, and hilly area. When rains finally come to the south, the waters form raging torrents in those once-dry *wadis*. Such is the refreshing we experience as the people of the Lord.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. What emotional highs and lows have we experienced as Muslim background Christians?

2. How can we pray for and trust the Lord for the souls of family members whom we love so dearly?
3. What aspect of Psalm 126, not mentioned above, can we apply to “body life” in the family of God, which is the church?

Psalm 127

*Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman keeps awake in vain.*

*² It is vain for you to rise up early,
To retire late,*

*To eat the bread of painful labors;
For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.*

*³ Behold, children are a gift of the LORD,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.*

*⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.*

*⁵ How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them;
They will not be ashamed
When they speak with their enemies in the gate.*

This psalm was written by Solomon, who built the Temple of God. Solomon knew about building. Yet, he also knew that only the things God builds will stand the test of time.

The House of Islam, or *Dar ul-Islam*, is built by people. It is an earthly kingdom. The Kingdom of Jesus is built by the Lord. Salvation has also been bought and paid for by the Lord through the blood of Christ. We cannot earn salvation by our good deeds, as we may have tried to do in Islam. But praise God, He is

building a house and He is inviting us to praise Him and seek His presence.

Our eternal destiny is to be in heaven with Jesus, the Master Builder, who has prepared a place for us. He told His disciples:

In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:2-3)

Until the Lord calls us to our eternal home, we are called to the work of the Lord, which we call ministry. Ministry means serving others. Jesus has set us free from ourselves to do that. As Paul states:

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

All of us who are in Christ are called to service. If the work gets too burdensome, like “*the bread of painful labors*” (verse 2), then we need to reflect upon the fact that it is His work. He will bring it to pass. God, who never sleeps, gives to His beloved in their sleep. Even the pilgrims heading to Jerusalem needed to stop every night to sleep. Our strength is limited. If you are experiencing “burn out,” you may need to take some extra rest. Slowing down can provide perspective when the path ahead seems difficult. A worship pilgrimage through the Psalms of Ascent may provide you some refreshment.

The second half of this precious psalm pivots again to family matters. This time the focus is children. I believe God made little people so cute that it would give parents extra energy to care for

them. There is nothing as wonderful as seeing a baby smile. It is a smile that God put there; no evil eye can erase it. Children are a blessing from the Lord!

As children grow, their lives become more complicated. Their needs multiply. However, we can trust the Word of God that a family unit in Christ is stronger than one who stands alone: “*They will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate*” (verse 5).

Job provides an example of a man of God who loved his children. Job was involved in a spiritual battle between the Lord and a spiritual “adversary” commonly understood to be Satan. It is obvious from reading the Book of Job that Job was not fully aware of the spiritual warfare going on.

To help understand a book of the Bible, we should consider the author, the audience, and the time in which it was written. For most books of the Bible, these details are well-known. The context of the Book of Job is less clear. Job is thought to have lived in a very early period of biblical history. Certainly, Job lived before Christ walked this earth. He knew that even from the times of Cain and Abel, people offered sacrifices to the Lord.

Job 1:5 explains that Job was concerned for the spiritual well-being of his children:

When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, ‘Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’ Thus Job did continually.

Perhaps the greatest challenge humans must face is the problem of pain. Primarily this is internal pain. Often it is caused by painful relationships with those closest to us. Job became well-acquainted with both physical and internal pain.

Satan was given permission by God to afflict Job. I believe that even more painful to Job than his terrible skin condition or his unhelpful friends, was the experience of his children dying suddenly. Job's greatest fear was that his children would die "in sin," without atonement. In his physical misery, Job was left also to contemplate whether his children may have cursed God in their hearts, and then died suddenly when the great wind struck the house in which they were eating (Job 1:19). It was a question to which Job would never get an answer.

However, the story does not conclude with unending misery. The Lord restores Job's health and possessions. His wife bears additional children. Certainly, we can look to Job as an example of a man who loved his children greatly and was praying for their spiritual blessing. Even in the midst of pain, we can pursue the presence of God.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. Are you experiencing "burn out"? Can you pinpoint the reasons why?
2. Let us take an inventory of our family life. If we have children, how are our children doing?
3. If this snapshot in time looks bleak, how can taking a longer and higher view help our perspective?

Psalm 128

*How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
Who walks in His ways.*

*² When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands,
You will be happy and it will be well with you.*

*³ Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
Within your house,
Your children like olive plants
Around your table.*

*⁴ Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed
Who fears the LORD.*

*⁵ The LORD bless you from Zion,
And may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.*

*⁶ Indeed, may you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!*

Psalm 128 continues the theme of Psalm 127: building strong families. Most likely the pilgrims had temporarily left their families at home as they traveled to Jerusalem. They missed the ones they loved the most.

Here we observe God's great design for prosperity. Some preachers state that prosperity is about money and possessions. That approach misses God's emphasis regarding this subject. Here we see the pilgrims singing about prosperous, healthy relationships. The place this is most evident and most needed is in our families. Verse 3 pictures the wife as fruitful as a vine. The

children are compared to olive shoots. Olives produce oil, which is emblematic of the Holy Spirit. Truly this is God's prosperity!

We see in our movement of Muslim background Christians challenges emerging which seek to thwart God's prosperity in our families and closest relationships. The first challenge arises in the form of divisions over faith. Not all family members may be following the Lord. This can be painful, but we can turn this into an opportunity for prayer.

Another major challenge in our day arises because many families are simply separated by wars, migration, and refugee status. Many of these factors remain outside the worshipper's control. Perhaps it is the grief of war or relocation that caused you to cry out to the Lord Jesus in the first place.

Verse 4 encourages us with the words, *"Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord."* The promise extends to the woman of prayer who desires that her family serve the Lord. The Lord's blessing is His good word, His good intention, His affirmation, and His faithful help. Paul notes, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"* (Ephesians 1:3). The blessing of Christ is with us here on our earthly journey. It will carry us to His presence in heaven.

Joshua challenged the Israelites:

If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)

Joshua's testimony as the leader of his family and the nation was firm and committed. We can likewise take our stand on

Christ. Yet, there is a choice to be made. Not all choose to follow Christ—at least not all spiritual pilgrims set out on that pilgrimage at the same time.

We can be encouraged by the lesson of Jesus' own half-brothers—those born naturally of Joseph and Mary. They initially rejected Him as being Messiah. Perhaps the problem was sibling rivalry against the older brother. Maybe the younger brothers were annoyed that their older brother Jesus never did anything wrong. Remember that Jesus did not start His public ministry until He was thirty years old. Before that, He was a “normal” person, probably a carpenter or builder by trade.

John 7:5 tells us that Jesus' natural brothers did not even believe in Him. Others were following Jesus, but His brothers, at this point, were not doing so. Later, they would come to faith. James would become the leader of the church at Jerusalem, and Jude would later write a short epistle to the Early Church. So, we can have hope that family members may one day follow Christ even if they are not doing so at present. Again, making this a matter of prayer strengthens us and blesses them.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. Which prosperity do we seek more: prosperity of possessions or prosperity of relationships?
2. If hopelessness has crept into our family relationships, which specific points can become areas of prayer emphasis?
3. Take a moment to give thanks that every spiritual blessing is ours in Christ.

Psalm 129

“Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up,”

Let Israel now say,

² *“Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up;*

Yet they have not prevailed against me.

³ *“The plowers plowed upon my back;*

They lengthened their furrows.”

⁴ *The LORD is righteous;*

He has cut in two the cords of the wicked.

⁵ *May all who hate Zion*

Be put to shame and turned backward;

⁶ *Let them be like grass upon the housetops,*

Which withers before it grows up;

⁷ *With which the reaper does not fill his hand,*

Or the binder of sheaves his bosom;

⁸ *Nor do those who pass by say,*

“The blessing of the LORD be upon you;

We bless you in the name of the LORD.”

Psalm 129 begins with the worship leader commanding the worshippers to repeat—*“Let Israel now say.”* This reminds us of the beginning of Psalm 124 which was attributed to King David. This psalm bears no naming credit, but the theme of persecution was one with which David was greatly familiar.

This psalm paints a horrible picture of persecution: *“The plowers plowed upon my back; they lengthened their furrows”* (verse 3). Some Muslim background believers have been whipped and tortured in prison. Jesus knows this well. Our Lord was himself whipped and beaten before He went to the cross. Jesus told His disciples, *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you”* (Matthew 5:11-12). Like Master, like servants.

Later, Jesus’ disciples would experience this kind of persecution. Acts of the Apostles chapters 3 through 5 narrate a great healing in the name of Jesus performed at the hands of Peter and John at the Beautiful Gate. The religious leaders, filled with jealousy, continually interrogated these apostles. Finally, they flogged them by hitting them with whips or rods. Then they let them go. The narration concludes:

So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:41-42)

It should not escape our notice that the apostles did not stop their spiritual pilgrimage because of persecution. They kept going, and so should we.

Verse 5 mentions the important topic of “shame.” In a perfect world, we could bring honor to our families and our communities, as well as to God. Sometimes we need to make a choice between community approval and honoring God. In Acts 5:29, Peter told the religious leaders who were trying to silence the apostolic witness, *“We must obey God rather than men.”*

Sometimes following Christ means accepting the same shame that Jesus readily embraced. The Bible tells us that Jesus did not worry about shame:

*Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, **despising the shame**, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Jesus kept His eyes on the goal. He knew He was just passing through this world. He would return to Heaven, where His throne is located. Brothers and sisters, let us keep our gaze on Christ as we walk this journey. *“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God”* (Colossians 3:1). These Old Testament believers were looking up to the mountains of Jerusalem. We are looking up to Christ.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. Are there occasions in which fear of persecution caused us to take our eyes off Christ? Where and when did this happen?
2. To what extent are we concerned with the honor of our own name, rather than focusing on honoring and exalting the Lord Jesus Christ?
3. Have we fully considered the blessing of God that comes from being persecuted for His name’s sake?

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD.

² *Lord, hear my voice!*

Let Your ears be attentive

To the voice of my supplications.

³ *If You, LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?*

⁴ *But there is forgiveness with You,
That You may be feared.*

⁵ *I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait,
And in His word do I hope.*

⁶ *My soul waits for the Lord
More than the watchmen for the morning;
Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning.*

⁷ *O Israel, hope in the LORD;
For with the LORD there is lovingkindness,
And with Him is abundant redemption.*

⁸ *And He will redeem Israel
From all his iniquities.*

Truly there is gold to be mined from this psalm. The theme of redemption bursts forth. In verse 3, the worshippers acknowledge their sinfulness: “*If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*” In the journey of this life, we walk as sinners who commit sins. There is no point in denying it.

Redemption is God's solution to human sinfulness. Islam denies human sinfulness. According to the Qur'an, a person simply needs to work to pay off his or her sins. This, however, insults God because this is not based on the reality of how God sees our spiritual condition. Our main need is not for God to count our good deeds as outweighing our bad deeds. Rather, our crucial need is for God's forgiveness.

The psalmist here beautifully exhorts the pilgrims in verse 7: *"O Israel, hope in the Lord; For with the Lord there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption."* Verse 8 strongly testifies that the Lord will redeem us from all our sins.

As we walk, we can sing of God's *"abundant redemption"* in Christ. He has paid for all our sins! He nailed them to the cross and has given us a new nature. God has opened the door to relationship with himself. From the time of Adam and Eve, we have hidden from God, but now Christ has opened the door to the presence of God.

These worshippers approach Jerusalem as they sing the Psalms of Ascent. They only had a foreshadowing of the forgiveness and redemption that has now been fully revealed in Christ. Earlier, David had burst forth in worship, *"How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit"* (Psalm 32:1-2)!

Jesus Christ is that great Son of David. We are blessed in Christ, for the Lord does not hold our sins against us! This is the great redemption described in this psalm. Jesus has paid for our sins by His blood. Now we are His possession.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. In what ways can we thank Jesus for forgiving our sins?
2. In what ways do we, like Adam and Eve, hide from God because of our sins?
3. How can we apply the unfailing and unconditional love of God to life in the body of Christ?

Psalm 131

*O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty;
Nor do I involve myself in great matters,
Or in things too difficult for me.
² Surely I have composed and quieted my soul;
Like a weaned child rests against his mother,
My soul is like a weaned child within me.
³ O Israel, hope in the LORD
From this time forth and forever.*

Psalm 131 brings the spiritual pilgrims ever closer to God's Temple. Perhaps they can sense that presence. Two themes fill their song. The first great theme here is humility. This theme provides a contrast to Islam, which is a religion of pride. We must be honest about this. If a person can save himself by his good deeds, then this will only breed a gruesome self-righteousness. This is not a picture the Lord wants to see.

The human problem of pride is not limited to Islam. In the New Testament, Jesus addressed the problem of pride. Pride forms the opposite character of the "beatitude" character Jesus wanted to instill in His disciples in the Sermon of the Mount. To confront the problem of pride, Jesus told this parable as narrated by Luke:

He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a

Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.'" (Luke 18:9-11)

As Muslim background Christians, we must not give place to pride and self-righteousness. This must be a key focus of our repentance. The Christian writer Leonard Ravenhill in his classic book, *Revival Praying*, wrote: "No one who prays, struts." Verse 11 above describes the Pharisee as praying to himself, not to God. We ought not strut around before God like peacocks, impressed with our own feathers. I believe the more humble we become, the more our movement will thrive.

In all things, our example is the Lord Jesus Christ. Here begins that great passage describing how Christ emptied himself of some of His divine privileges when He came to earth. That "emptying" is known in Greek as the "*kenosis*" of Christ, from that word in verse 7:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking on the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:3-8)

The Virgin Mary provides a great example of walking in Christ-like humility. She received the greatest call God has ever given a human being—to be the mother of Jesus himself. Instead

of bragging and boasting, she magnified the Lord with her message called “The Magnificat.” The Holy Spirit led her to emphasize human humility:

And Mary said:

“My soul exalts the Lord,

And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

*“For He has had regard for the humble state of
His bondservant;*

*For behold, from this time on all generations will count
me blessed.*

“For the Mighty One has done great things for me;

And holy is His name.

*“AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION
TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.*

“He has done mighty deeds with His arm;

*He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of
their heart.*

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones,

And has exalted those who were humble.” (Luke 1:46-52)

Indeed, the Lord exalts the humble!

The second great theme of Psalm 131 is childlike trust. A baby in the arms of his or her mother forms the ultimate picture of contentment. After nursing, a baby usually falls fast asleep. There is no safer place in the world than in the arms of a loving mother.

This psalm concludes with the exhortation for us to put our hope in the Lord both now and forevermore. The Bible describes hope as a favorable and confident expectation. Human nature is to fear that something bad will happen to good people. God’s story is that something good will happen to bad people. We are indeed bad people—sinners. The good thing that has happened to us is that our loving God has redeemed us. The invitation is open to all

people. In our days, many Muslims are joyfully receiving the free gift of salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. Now they are joining us on a spiritual pilgrimage through this life. Together, we are pursuing the presence of God with the people of God.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. In what areas of our heart has pride crept in? Now is the time to confess that to God, to repent, and ask forgiveness.
2. What can be learned about contentment and trust from the relationship of mother and baby?

Psalm 132

*Remember, O LORD, on David's behalf,
All his affliction;
 ² How he swore to the LORD
And vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
 ³ "Surely I will not enter my house,
 Nor lie on my bed;
 ⁴ I will not give sleep to my eyes
 Or slumber to my eyelids,
 ⁵ Until I find a place for the LORD,
A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."
Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah,
We found it in the field of Jaar.
 ⁷ Let us go into His dwelling place;
 Let us worship at His footstool.
 ⁸ Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place,
 You and the ark of Your strength.
 ⁹ Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness,
 And let Your godly ones sing for joy.
 ¹⁰ For the sake of David Your servant,
Do not turn away the face of Your anointed.
 ¹¹ The LORD has sworn to David
 A truth from which He will not turn back:
"Of the fruit of your body I will set upon your throne.
 ¹² "If your sons will keep My covenant
 And My testimony which I will teach them,
Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forever."*

- 13 For the LORD has chosen Zion;
He has desired it for His habitation.*
- 14 "This is My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.*
- 15 "I will abundantly bless her provision;
I will satisfy her needy with bread.*
- 16 "Her priests also I will clothe with salvation,
And her godly ones will sing aloud for joy.*
- 17 "There I will cause the horn of David to spring forth;
I have prepared a lamp for Mine anointed.*
- 18 "His enemies I will clothe with shame,
But upon himself his crown shall shine."*

Psalm 132 is the longest Psalm of Ascent. Either it was composed by David or by another person describing David's great quest to build a temple in which God would be worshipped. He sought to provide a "resting place" for the Lord. As stated earlier, David would make the preparations for the great temple that his son Solomon would later build.

Even though God is not confined to one physical location, the same principle applies today. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on all believers in Christ throughout the world. God wants that *resting place* to be our own hearts. For the Lord to find our heart as a resting place, we must rest in Him.

Brothers and sisters, you may feel like Noah when he went through the flood. Except for his immediate family, everything else and everyone else disappeared. But God wanted to do a new thing. Genesis 8 indicates that when the flood was over, the ark perched on the mountains of Ararat. Noah did not know if it was safe to go out. He sent out a raven, but it simply flew around.

Then, Noah sent out a dove, which is a symbol of peace and the Holy Spirit. It could not find a place to perch because there was not yet green growth on the earth.

Noah's family and all the animals on the ark were probably restless and cramped—perhaps like being on a lockdown. Yet, Noah waited seven more days to send the dove out again. This time the dove found a place to perch. She came back that night with a freshly-picked olive leaf. Then Noah knew the earth had dried up and it was safe to go out. The dove had found a resting place, but she came back with the olive leaf to serve Noah and all those on the ark.

Christ is the ark that saves us from the flood of our sins. This is a beautiful analogy. The waters of judgment may rage all around us, but we are safe and dry in Christ.

Christ provides us a resting place. Sometimes we fly around like a raven, trying to please God with our own good works. Some describe this as “performance-based Christianity.” We may feel that just being busy for the Lord is good enough. However, this usually leads to burn out. Christ is that resting place. Are our hearts settled enough to find that rest in Him?

New Testament believers needed to learn to enter that rest. The Book of Hebrews tells us:

So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:9-11)

Christ is our Savior, the One who gives us rest from our works. Our journey through this life, therefore, is not a good work to be accomplished, but rather a journey with Jesus and with all His servants.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. In what ways do we seek God's approval through "performance-based Christianity?"
2. Do I become restless in the Lord's presence, or can I find my resting place in Him?

Psalm 133

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together in unity!*

²*It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Coming down upon the beard,
Even Aaron's beard,*

Coming down upon the edge of his robes.

³*It is like the dew of Hermon*

Coming down upon the mountains of Zion;

For there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forever.

Now the worshippers are near the temple gates. They sing David's wonderful hymn on the theme of unity. Perhaps by this stage of the pilgrimage they are weary. Sometimes on our journey we can become annoyed with others and have a breakdown in unity. When the brothers of Joseph were getting ready to return home from their trip to Egypt, Joseph warned them: "*Do not quarrel on the journey*" (Genesis 45:24)!

Verse 3 explains that God bestows a blessing where there is unity. Therefore, Christian unity is a great ideal. Even if the ideal is difficult to attain, there is great value in pursuing it.

David had experienced the pain of brothers not living in unity. He was the youngest of eight brothers, the baby of the family. His older brothers despised him. When Goliath was taunting the armies of Israel, three of David's older brothers were serving in

Saul's army. None of them had the courage to face Goliath. David's father, Jesse, sent him to take provisions to his brothers on the front line. In doing so, David heard the taunts and challenges made by Goliath. When David heard Goliath's taunts, he felt the Lord's honor was at stake. He believed the Lord could use him to bring victory. Notice how his oldest brother Eliab responded:

Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger burned against David and he said, 'Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order to see the battle.' (1 Samuel 17:28)

Eliab was filled with anger. Perhaps he was projecting upon his brother, David, his own frustration at not being able to answer Goliath's challenge. He was unable to see how God was about to use his own brother, David.

Wisely, David did not let his brother's sin influence him. He pressed forward and conquered Goliath. Through him, God won a great victory that day.

On this journey, we may have a bad experience with a brother, sister, or group. We may become uncomfortable walking in unity. Like David, we should not receive into our hearts the words of others that come from a wrong spirit. It is not easy, but this is necessary to keep walking on our pilgrimage.

Christians need to exercise discernment regarding the spiritual principles which are most important. Some things are worth standing for and separating over. The key doctrines of Christian orthodoxy are:

- The sinfulness of humanity;

- God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
- Salvation comes by faith in what Christ accomplished on the Cross; and
- The Bible is the authority for doctrine and practice of Christians.

Christians throughout the ages have stood on these key doctrines. Anything spiritual is important, and everything in the Bible is important. However, not all doctrines or practices are equal in weight.

Brothers and sisters, as we go on our spiritual pilgrimage, we need to learn to worship together and walk together. James 3:8-9 tells us that we should not curse men with the same tongue we use to praise God. For Christ's sake, let Muslims see the true unity that Jesus prayed for His disciples in what is known as the High Priestly Prayer. Jesus prayed to His Father:

The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:22-23)

Here we see that our Christian unity can be a witness to the world, even the Muslim world, and such unity will make our spiritual pilgrimage much more enjoyable!

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. Have negative experiences in the past kept us from walking in unity with brothers and sisters in the present? How so?
2. What are some of the benefits of Christian unity?

3. How can we apply this principle of unity in our own circle of believers?

Psalm 134

*Behold, bless the LORD, all servants of the LORD,
Who serve by night in the house of the LORD!*

*²Lift up your hands to the sanctuary
And bless the LORD.*

*³May the LORD bless you from Zion,
He who made heaven and earth.*

Brothers and sisters, our journey has reached its destination! We have arrived at the sanctuary, the temple of God. We can lift up our hands and praise the Lord! We have arrived at Mount Zion. The people of God have pursued the presence of God, and they have come to their spiritual home.

The pilgrims have sung completely through the Psalms of Ascent. They have arrived in God's sanctuary in Jerusalem. There they praise the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. What a celebration. Whether the feast was Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles, it was a time for rejoicing in God.

In this life, sometimes it seems that we are going nowhere. It does not look like we are making progress. We can be encouraged that if we keep putting one foot in front of the other, we will reach our destination. Jesus is the One who sustains us on the journey. He is also our destination!

How good it is to arrive at a destination with Jesus! This is a marathon race. The key is to finish well. It is not so important how fast we run the race. Paul tells us that God himself is in charge of both the beginning and the completion of our journey: *“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 1:6). What the Lord begins, He is well able to finish. Again, it is written: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10).

At the end of his life, Paul wrote his final letter. This one was addressed to Timothy. In it, Paul reflected on the faithfulness of God:

For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. (2 Timothy 2:10-13)

If you are discouraged and feel like giving up, let these words encourage you. Christ is carrying you to the finish line. Let us keep our focus on heaven. Christ is faithful and He will not allow our foot to slip.

Let us continue walking, brothers and sisters. This is our spiritual pilgrimage. The destination is to be with Christ in heaven. Jesus has paid the price for our admission to heaven. Even now, He is preparing the place for our arrival. The Apostle John described a “New Jerusalem.” What a glorious place, with the Lord at the center. The problem of human pain will be

finished by the One who underwent the pain of the Cross to bring us to a place without pain.

I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4)

The Bible concludes with one more glimpse of eternity. That is where we will be with our Lord Jesus forever.

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:3-5)

Though we have been pursuing God's presence, we will look back at the end of the journey and, with thanksgiving, realize that it was God who was pursuing us all along.

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. How do you picture your destination in this life and the life to come?
2. Are you walking this journey alone? Or do you notice other pilgrims who are lonely and isolated? How can we join with others and invite them to join this pilgrimage? What would that look like in practical terms of meeting together?

3. If you have become weary on the journey, God can strengthen you today. Wherever you are, lift up your hands in His presence and thank Him for His faithfulness.

Concluding Thoughts

We have reached the end of our journey. It has been a spiritual pilgrimage with Jesus and to Jesus! We have pursued the presence of God with God's people in the way our spiritual forefathers did as they sang the Psalms of Ascent. I pray this devotional and the meditations have encouraged you.

Let us invite many Muslims to Christ that they, too, may leave behind Islam and journey with us. This is a great movement in our time. God is doing something wonderful in our midst. To Him be the glory!

Resources Available through Global Initiative

Global Initiative: *Reaching Muslims Peoples* is a resource center for equipping believers to effectively reach Muslim people with the Good News about Jesus. We provide written resources as well as trainings in local churches and Christian colleges and universities to prepare people to share Jesus with Muslims.

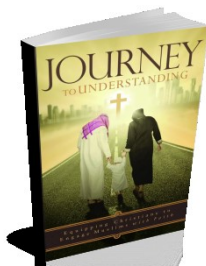
Global Initiative also calls people to pray for the salvation of Muslims through its Jumaa Prayer Fellowship. Every Friday, over 60,000 Christians around the world join to pray for the salvation of Muslims. As believers intercede, Muslims are coming to faith in Jesus Christ. We invite you to join Jumaa Prayer Fellowship.

Check the Global Initiative website for access to various resources: www.reachingmuslimpeoples.com

Books

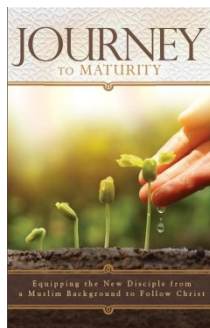
Journey to Understanding: Equipping Christians to Engage Muslims with Faith*

This book equips Christians with a biblical perspective toward Muslims and helps believers express God's loving heart toward them. The goal is to equip you to share the Truth about Jesus with Muslims. This easy-read accommodates both personal use as well as small group settings. **Also available in Spanish and on Kindle*



Journey to Maturity: Equipping the New Disciple from a Muslim Background to Follow Christ**

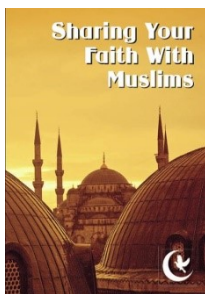
This book is uniquely geared to disciple a new Christian from a Muslim background. Part 1 addresses some of the theological differences between Christianity and Islam. Part 2 provides ten discipleship lessons focused on basic biblical teachings that will help the new believer grow in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ. The workbook style is conducive for individual use or small group settings. **Also available on Kindle*



Booklets

(Hard copy for purchase or free downloads in English and Spanish on the website)

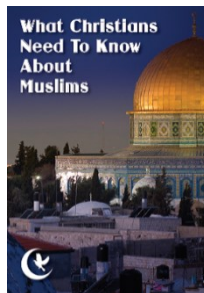
Sharing Your Faith with Muslims



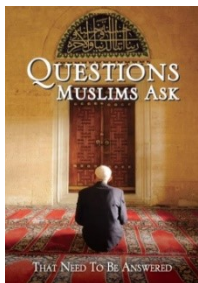
This booklet helps the reader understand Muslims and how to share the Christian faith with them. It encourages believers to realize that Muslims are people—just like you—who have great spiritual hunger but are lost without the hope that Jesus gives. It addresses several key things you can do to share Jesus with the Muslim people in your neighborhood, workplace, or community.

What Christians Need to Know about Muslims

This resource provides a short overview of how Islam began, what Muslims believe, and what most Muslims practice. It also addresses basic Muslim beliefs about Christ and Christianity, how to witness to Muslims, and what to do when a Muslim decides to follow Jesus Christ. It also discusses the challenge before us, and what we are doing to reach Muslims with the Truth about Jesus.



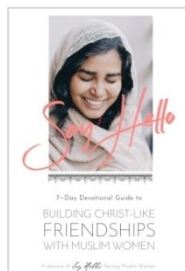
Questions Muslims Ask



This booklet answers seven key questions that Muslims ask about Christianity. It addresses items such as their concern regarding the corruption of the Bible, their misunderstanding about the Trinity, in general, and Jesus Christ, specifically. It addresses the Holy Spirit, the necessity of the crucifixion, and the unholy lifestyle of people who Muslims think are Christians. The content of this resource will prepare you with answers to these deep questions Muslims ask.

Say Hello: 7-Day Devotional Guide to Building Christ-like Friendships with Muslim Women

This one-week challenge will prepare you to build a Christ-like friendship that shares the Holy Spirit's transformational power with a Muslim woman. This guide presents some basic information to help you understand your Muslim friend and begin the conversation that could change her life for eternity.



Jumaa Prayer Fellowship

Download the app

<https://subsplash.com/jumaaprayer/app>

Intercede Magazine

This bi-monthly magazine provides an article related to ministry to Muslims as well as the prayer requests for Jumaa Prayer Fellowship.

- Sign up on our website to receive an electronic copy.
- Available in English, Spanish, French, and Arabic

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**Every Muslim needs to know
the Truth about Jesus!**

About The Author

Dr. Fred Farrokh and his wife, Annette, are International Trainers with Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples. Fred is an ordained missionary with Elim Fellowship. Before joining *Global Initiative*, Fred served as Executive Director of Jesus for Muslims Network in Metro New York, and Special Projects Officer with SAT-7 in Cyprus. A Christian of Muslim-background, he completed his PhD in Intercultural Studies through the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in 2014, with a dissertation on Muslim Identity. He has ministered in over 30 countries.





Dr. Fred Farrokh, a Muslim-background Christian and ordained missionary with Elim Fellowship, serves as an international trainer with Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples. He has ministered in over 30 countries.

Growing numbers of Muslims worldwide have left Islam to embark on a journey with the Lord Jesus Christ. Journey with Jesus is a devotional through Psalms 120 - 134 with the intent of encouraging Christians from a Muslim background as they pursue the presence of God with the people of God.



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