

# Adult Teaching Resources

September 8, 2024



## Some Things Never Change

September 1, 2024—Psalm 15—Who Gets Close to God?

**September 8, 2024—Psalm 125—Presuppositions and Prayer**

September 15, 2024—Psalm 116 (RCL 16:1-9)—When the Answer Is Yes

September 22, 2024—Psalm 54—Same Old Same Old?

September 29, 2024—Esther 7:1-10, 9:20-22—Celebrating Vengeance?

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# Presuppositions and Prayer

*Psalm 125*

## FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Key Verse

*As the mountains surround Jerusalem,  
so the LORD surrounds his people,  
from this time on and forevermore. (Ps. 125:2)*

### Opening

After everyone arrives, remain in the large group. Ask everyone to share their favorite mountain or mountain range.

What mountain, or range of mountains, do you like the most?

Why is that your favorite?

What significance does that mountain, or range, have in your life?

How do you feel when you are on (or near) that mountain?

Is there a story you are willing to share about the mountain that has made a difference in your life?

Give the group time to share and listen before moving on the Bible.

### Reading the Bible

What are those who trust in the Lord like? (They are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever)

How is the Lord like the mountains that surround Jerusalem? (The Lord surrounds his people from this time on and forevermore)

What will the scepter of wickedness do? (It shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, so that the righteous might not stretch out their hands to do wrong.)

Who does the psalmist want the Lord to do good to? (to those who are good and to those who are upright in their hearts)

What will happen to those who turn aside to their own crooked ways? (the Lord will lead away with evildoers)

## Making Connections

What is the furthest distance you have travelled for a religious festival, gathering, retreat, or event? What was the event? Why was it so important for you to travel that far? How did that event affect your faith journey?

How much time have you spent in the mountains? How do you describe the feeling you have in the mountains? How is being in the mountains different than being other places?

“Going up” has theological significance in scripture. What significance does “going up” have for you?

Our Lesson Writer tells us, “Those who put their trust in God, the poet believed, possessed an inner stability that enabled them to stand firm through any of life’s circumstances, fully confident in God’s care: “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time on and forevermore” (v. 2).” If you were to describe your faith and stability to stand firm in any circumstance, with what mountain, or mountain range would you use? Why do you say that?

How do you interpret the “scepter of wickedness” in today’s culture? How can the mountains keep you strong from the scepter’s wickedness?

Our Lesson Writer reminds us, “The text does not guarantee that the righteous could never be harmed or suffer loss. Indeed, the psalm suggests hope that the people might emerge from a precarious time. Still the author believed the faithful could persevere, trusting that God was with them and would ultimately vindicate them.” What have you endured, even while remaining faithful, where God was with you and ultimately vindicated you?

What do you hope God does for the good? Why do you say that? What do you hope God does for the wicked? Why do you say that?

How is it that those who trust in God shall not be moved, like the mountains? How does God help us have unshakable, unmovable faith? When have you felt that kind of power in your faith life?

## So What?

Remain in the large group. Share with your class that the mountains around Jerusalem was a place where the faithful could sense the nearness and the presence of the divine.

Ask these questions for conversation and discussion:

If anyone in your class has been to Jerusalem, what can you share about the mountains you saw there? What can you share about your experience?

Where do you most often sense God’s presence and the nearness of the divine?

What can you share about your most recent “mountaintop experience?” (A time when you felt significantly closer to God)

What have you done to help firm your faith and your foundation so that you, like the mountain, will not be moved?

Spend time in conversation and discussion.

## The Challenge

This week, pay attention to the “high points” of your week. They might not be full-blown mountain experiences, but they might be times God was revealed to you in significant ways.

## Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the mountains in our lives and for the mountains around Jerusalem. There is a beauty and majesty in the mountains that is indescribable and wonderful, much like you. We pray that you continue to work in our lives so that when we are tempted, we shall not be moved. Amen.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.



**Songs of Ascent**—Fifteen of the psalms, located together (Psalms 120-134) are known as the “Songs of Ascent.” Scholars have advanced a variety of conjectures about what the title means, but none have been conclusive.

Some believe the songs would have been sung by priests as they climbed stairs toward the temple or altar, but most think of them as pilgrim songs typically chanted by those who came to Jerusalem during the three annual feasts, or at other times.

In addition to being physically elevated, Jerusalem was the religious, political, and economic heart of the nation, so in biblical language, one always “went up” to it.

Perhaps we can imagine a group of suffering pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem, intending to bring their case before God and plead for vindication. Like slaves who sing haunting but hopeful spirituals as they work, pilgrims may have sung these songs as they climbed into the city where God was thought to dwell.

The ancient steps in the picture above, from the Second Temple period, were uncovered below the southern wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. From here, first century pilgrims ascended to one of several gates that led to stairways accessing the temple courts.

**Scepter, rod, or tribe?**—The word commonly translated as “scepter” in v. 3’s “scepter of wickedness” renders the word *shēvet*, which was more commonly translated as “rod,” “staff,” or even “tribe.” When translated as “rod,” it is commonly in texts that indicate an instrument for hitting (Exod. 21:20, Mic. 4:14, Isa. 10:15). It could also be used to indicate punishment: “Folly is bound up in the heart of a boy, but the rod of discipline drives it away” (Prov. 22:15, see also Prov. 10:13, 29:15). While modern versions routinely translate it as “scepter,” the KJV has “rod.”

Since the expression is in the context of resting over “land allotted to the righteous,” employing vocabulary that recalls the tradition of Joshua dividing the land among the tribes, it is possible to imagine that the psalmist was saying a “tribe of wickedness” would not be allowed an allotment among the righteous.

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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### Can anyone be sure they can't be moved?

The author of Psalm 125 was not the only poet to express confidence that someone or something would “not be moved,” but sometimes they were disappointed.

Psalm 10 is a lament against the wicked, who have prospered to the point that they feel invulnerable: “They think in their heart, ‘We shall not be moved; throughout all generations we shall not meet adversity’” (Ps. 10:6). The psalmist prayed that God would show them the error of their ways and the misguided nature of their smug confidence.

Psalm 16 is a prayer from one who seeks God’s protection, believing that constant trust will bring constant care: “I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Ps. 16:8). The fact that he was praying for protection suggests that things weren’t always as rosy as he let on.

Psalm 21 is a prayer of thanks for victory and in praise of a king whose faithfulness, the psalmist believed, had contributed to military success. “For the king trusts in the LORD,” the poet wrote, “and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved” (Ps. 21:7). The psalm claims to be “of David”—and we know that David was moved when his lust overcame his trust.

Psalm 46 celebrates a belief that God’s presence in Jerusalem was a sure defense against all enemies: “God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns” (Ps. 46:5). Yet, Micah saw its destruction (Mic. 3:11-12), and Jeremiah railed against prophets and priests who believed that the presence of the temple guaranteed security (see Jeremiah 7).

Confidence can be overdone. Kings can be moved and cities can fall, a hard lesson learned when Judah’s last king was carried into exile as both the city and the temple were destroyed by the Babylonians.

The same lesson applies on a personal level. Psalm 30 is the testimony of one whose success gave rise to overconfidence. “As for me,” the psalmist wrote, “I said in my prosperity, ‘I shall never be moved.’ By your favor, O LORD, you had established me as a strong mountain ...” But the verse doesn’t stop there, because the immovable man found everything moving: “you hid your face; I was dismayed” (Ps. 30:6-7). He went on to plead with God for deliverance, and ultimately believed that God had turned his mourning into dancing—but he had learned an important lesson through the trial.