

Youth 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

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Tyler Johnson

This youth 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.

Gathering

As your group comes together, ask students how they are doing and what their week looks like. Reflect on the previous week's challenge.

Opening Activity

Do you enjoy hiking in the mountains? It's a lot of work. The climbing, the weather, the bears, the bugs, being hungry, and having to use the bathroom at the worst time. Can you relate? What is the payoff of hiking in the mountains? It's not a trick question. It's the view, the peak or summit where you can see for miles the overwhelming beauty of the Earth. Some people spend weeks and months hiking peaks and valleys along our country and around the world. In today's scripture, a mountain is named Mount Zion. In actuality, it is not really much of a mountain in comparison to others in the world, but it carries great significance for many. So when people talk about Mount Zion, they usually aren't talking about the sheer height and beauty of it, rather, what it symbolizes in the hearts of those who follow God.

Listening to the Scripture

Read Aloud Psalm 125.

- Verse one tells us that those who trust in God are like a mountain that cannot be moved. The average mountain weight (it's a real thing to look up) in pounds is in the trillions. It is difficult to comprehend something so heavy. Imagine being rooted so deep into your trust of God that you are virtually unmovable regardless of circumstance. Does your relationship with God feel that solid, or are you coming up a little light?
- The scripture tells us that we are surrounded by God's presence, which is equated to mountains. Does that bring a sense of comfort to you, or does that even feel real? Picture yourself in the bottom of a valley, surrounded by mountains on every side and think that this is how God's presence is described. What images are drawn in your head about God's presence in your life?
- If you had to describe God's presence in your life to someone, what would you say or draw to help illustrate how you feel?
- What are some ways we can strengthen ourselves in God's presence to be that mountain that cannot be moved? Do you think it is even possible?

Listening to the Scripture *continued*

If you would like to continue the discussion, consider *Digging Deeper*.

- Psalms 120 through 134 are called the songs of ascent. There are many interpretations as to what this means, with very little consensus. One of the ways it was interpreted is that these psalms were read during the physical act of climbing the stairs up the mountain to the temple. Acting out what we read or hear is one way for the scripture to come alive. I would imagine it to be quite powerful as they are hiking up a mountain to recite verses that give depth to meaning around the mountain they are climbing. Do we do this today in our own culture?

If the group is up for a challenge, discuss what Tony poses as *The Hardest Question*: Can anyone be sure they cannot be moved?

- We often feel less than a mountain and can be shaken quite easily by the events life brings to us. If we read this passage dualistically then how could one not feel guilt and shame around falling short of this mountain standard. Is our trust not enough as it is? However, what if we read this passage as the goal and not the standard? What if we deepened our trust on a daily basis that we are more anchored to who God calls us to be. When we seek this mountain as our goal, we offer grace to ourselves that Christ offered to us first.

Application

Find ways this week to strengthen your trust in who God calls you to be. Be intentional and think of ways God has allowed you to be more trusting this week.

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.