

Cultivate – PSALMS 126-150 by Tommy Lee

PSALM 126:

We now come to the seventh of the "*Songs of Ascent*," a lovely group of Psalms that God's people would sing and pray together as they journeyed up to Jerusalem. Here in this Psalm they are praying for the day when the Lord would "*restore the fortunes*" of God's people (vs.1,4).

126 is a prayer for spiritual revival and reawakening. The first half is all happiness and joy, remembering how God answered this prayer once. But now that's just a memory... like a dream. They need to be renewed again. So they call out to God once more: transform, restore, deliver us again.

Don't you think this is a prayer that God's people could stand to sing and pray today? Pray it this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. God is here inviting such prayer; he's even putting the very words in our mouths.

PSALM 127:

This is now the eighth of the "*Songs of Ascent*," which God's people would sing on their procession up to the temple. We've seen that *Zion / Jerusalem / The House of the Lord* are all common themes in these Psalms. But the "*house*" that Psalm 127 refers to (in v.1) is that of a dwelling for a family.

127 speaks plainly and clearly to our anxiety-ridden thirst for success. How can anything be strong or successful or sufficient or secure... if it does not come from the Lord?

Without the blessing of the Lord, our lives will come to nothing. Let this Psalm teach you how to pray that truth more deeply into your life this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. May your heart be full of the gospel, and may your lips be full of God's praise.

PSALM 128:

Another "pilgrim psalm," another "*Song of Ascent*," enjoyed by God's people as they traveled in big groups of friends and family, on their way to Jerusalem for worship and feasting. Last week Psalm 127 had us praying about our families a good bit; here that theme is continued.

128 teaches us to pray for and understand the Lord's gifts of blessing and prosperity and peace—from the center of life, outward.

Do you want to have a well-ordered life? Pray this Psalm up and down, in and out, all week

long. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Let's join our praise and prayers with the faithful saints who have "gone up" (Psalm 122.4) before us, trusting in the promise of the Messiah.

PSALM 129:

Ever since Psalm 120 (when Cultivate started), we've been in the midst of these "*Songs of Ascent*," which run from 120-134. This is the tenth one; there are five more to go, and I hope you've grown to enjoy praying them. God's people have been praying these Psalms together—during their pilgrimage in this world—for a long time.

129 is reminding us of the need for perseverance while following God in the midst of this rebellious, idolatrous, sinful world. For there are times when we will be persecuted.

If this Psalm doesn't seem to fit your experience right now, be assured that there are many Christians around the world for whom it does fit. Pray it for them. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Go to this website: <http://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/> and pray Psalm 129 for your brothers and sisters / mothers and fathers all across the far-flung expanse of Christ's earthly kingdom.

PSALM 130:

We now enter into the 11th of the 15 "*Songs of Ascent*" in the Psalter, which were first used as a traveling hymnbook / prayerbook / worship book, while the Israelites were on their way to the temple together (like Jesus' family did with all "*their relatives and acquaintances*" in Luke 2:41-45).

130 is itself a steep climb (like the climb up to the temple)... or, at least, it feels that way to me. It begins in "*the depths*" (v.1), but it ends with "*hope... steadfast love... plentiful redemption*" (v.7). You might need that kind of encouragement this week!

In addition to being a "pilgrim Psalm," 130 is also a "penitential Psalm," assuring us that the Lord doesn't keep count of our sins, if we repent (v.3). Pray it deeply, as a repenting pilgrim this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember, the Psalter is all about Jesus and the gospel! See Acts 13.32-39!

PSALM 131:

This is the 12th of the 15 "*Songs of Ascent*," which are specifically designed to help God's people keep our focus on our great God and his great promises, even in the midst of the various trials and distresses of being a pilgrim in a land that is no longer the world for which we were made.

131 is a reflection on and celebration of what might be called "the simple life"—a life of childlike (*not childish!*) faith and trust and rest and hope in God. It reminds us of Jesus' words in Matthew 18: *"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

Note that it's a prayer of David, who was a man's man. But he prayed as a child to his Father; pray like that this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Perhaps one day we'll even find ourselves *"addressing one another in psalms"* (Ephesians 5.19).

PSALM 132:

The last three of the *"Songs of Ascent"* in the Psalter (Psalms 132, 133, & 134) can be seen as celebrating the idea of "arrival"—the pilgrimage is past, the journey is complete, we are now home. Here in this Psalm, the Lord has chosen Zion as his resting place; there he meets with his people.

132 celebrates the climax of the journey that the ark of God traveled, starting at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 37. It was a journey that spanned centuries and many hardships (v.1), but everywhere displayed the faithfulness of the Lord to be with his people.

One thing we can absorb in this Psalm is a deep and holy passion for the Lord's church. Pray for that this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... singing psalms"* (Colossians 3.16).

PSALM 133:

We said last week that these last three *"pilgrim Psalms"* of the *"Songs of Ascent"* have a sense of "arrival" about them. Here in this Psalm, we are enjoying the blessing of being home, with our true family.

133 is a beautiful and poetically rich celebration of the heaven-sent gift of fellowship and unity among God's people.

Do you know this *"good and pleasant... blessing"* (vs.1,3)? Give God thanks for it and pray for a fuller experience of it in your life this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Interesting historical note: *The Bay Psalm Book* was the first book printed in the American colonies (*in 1640, just 20 years after the pilgrims came ashore at Plymouth*). They counted the subject matter of this Psalm as precious indeed.

PSALM 134:

We now come to the last of the 15 "*Songs of Ascent*" in the Psalter. They began with 120, and they end with 134. They began with a sense of distress (120.1); they end with hands uplifted in praise and blessing (134:1-3).

134 has the pilgrim at last standing in the very presence of the Lord himself, in his sanctuary, under the fulness of his blessing.

We may begin our pilgrimage as far away as Meshech and Kedar (120.5), but we end "*in the house of the Lord*" (134.1). Consider God's faithfulness to you in your journey as you pray this Psalm. We'll pray it together on Sunday. And as we hear of Plymouth Rock pilgrims this week, remember what I mentioned here last week: the first thing they created and published on these shores was a Psalter, so that the American church could worship God with these prayers and songs.

PSALM 135:

Okay! The "*Songs of Ascent*" have now ended! What do we pray next?... Well, still in the general theme of the great "pilgrimage" of 120-134, this next Psalm traces the steps of the great pilgrimage God's people made in days of old... from Egypt to the Promised Land.

135 is a wonderful Psalm for times of trouble. It's both a confession of faith and a call to prayer; still very relevant for God's people today.

It's also a call to worship and a celebration of The One True Sovereign King of the Universe; pray it with gusto this week! We'll pray it together on Sunday. "*Sing to him, sing praises to him!*" (Psalm 105.2)

PSALM 136:

There is one abiding reality in the nature of God, from which all of his grace towards us flows. And that reality is that "*his steadfast love endures forever.*" From this point everything originates and to this point everything returns.

136 again retraces the great pilgrimage from Egypt to Canaan (like last week's Psalm did), but this one is designed to do so in the context of responsive worship.

In a worship service, this responsive reading and prayer could be cumbersome and tedious... *or it could be swift and glorious!* Pray it with a heart full of "eventful" praise this week; we'll pray it together on Sunday. Learning to embrace the Psalter is learning to embrace the praises of your God... on his terms.

PSALM 137:

Does your mind ever wander back to a miserable time in your life? Look at the verb tenses of vs.1-3. Here the psalmist is looking back and remembering what it was like when God's people were in exile, in Babylon.

137 is a "*Psalm of exile*," and—in a way—a prayer for revival. It's full of passion and pain, and it grows into an intense prayer for the enemies of the Lord to meet justice.

This kind of prayer is a stark reminder that *we* are not the judge of the earth... but that there is, indeed, a Righteous and Holy Judge of the earth. Pray it this week. There is a "me"-centered form of worship, and there is a God-centered form of worship. Sometimes the latter form meets us with a shock. This is one part of the shock and "otherness"... of holiness.

PSALM 138:

Do you ever experience a whole new appreciation for the nature of God? Do you ever wonder (or despair) about where the story of human history is leading? Does your faith ever need to be strengthened, in the face of your worries and anxieties about your own personal sense of security? Then this Psalm is for you... vs.1-3... vs.4-6... & vs.7&8, respectively.

138 is a "*Psalm of Revival*," assuring us of the Lord's faithfulness to his promises—promises about himself, promises about his world, promises about you and your purpose.

This is a prayer we need to return to often, since we "*walk in the midst of trouble*" (v.7). Pray it purposefully this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. There are divine glories in the Psalter that God calls his church to read, pray, sing, live, and "embody" together.

PSALM 139:

I love this Psalm. It's a favorite of most Christians who bathe themselves in the Psalter. God completely knows you (vs.1-6) and God is with you everywhere you go (vs.7-12). Why is this true? Because he literally made you (vs.13-18). And he also very much wants you to be like him in holiness (vs.19-24).

139 is a "*Wisdom Psalm*," and if we have any foolish, small-minded, petty thoughts about who our God is, we will find great remedy and beautiful correction right here.

This prayer will stretch you to our limits of understanding the heights and depths of God's majesty and transcendence, and yet it is also deeply personal, from the first verse to the last. Revel in praying it repeatedly this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. One of the very

best gifts you could give yourself is the time to grow deeper and deeper in your understanding of the Psalter.

PSALM 140:

Do you remember when King Saul was insanely slandering and attacking David? There are two parts to this Psalm. First, a prayer for protection from evil men in vs.1-7. And second, a prayer for God to judge the evildoer and his plots, in vs.8-13. Both sections end with beautiful affirmations of faith (vs.6,7 & 12,13).

140 is an "*Imprecatory Psalm*," a plea for God to intervene and set this world to rights.

Do we really believe that God has promised to judge all wickedness? He has. It will either be upon the head of Christ (in place of the penitent sinner) or upon the head of the impenitent sinner. Boldly pray for evil to be destroyed this week. One way God destroys his enemies, by the way, is to turn them into friends. It happened to us, didn't it? We'll pray it together on Sunday. Behold the Psalms. Ponder them. Fall in love with God through them.

PSALM 141:

Last week's Psalm was greatly concerned with slanderous accusations. This week's Psalm is greatly concerned with careful, guarded speech (v.3). May we ourselves not fall into the evil described in the previous Psalm. May we cultivate a voice of prayer and a love for pleasant words (v.6).

141 is "*A Psalm For Times Of Trouble*," a Psalm to pray when we need the Lord's protection.

A most important thing we need the Lord's protection against is the formation of an insincere and compromised heart, when we feel ourselves falling into such temptations. Pray this Psalm for your own heart this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. This kind of prayer is a vital part of the beauty and wisdom and glory and genius of our divinely-given prayerbook.

PSALM 142:

Christian, have you ever felt like you've been forsaken by man? That may be so at times, but you're never forsaken by God. David's prayer here moves from great personal distress and helplessness and a spirit of fainting and danger and loneliness... to strong prayer for deliverance... to confidence in God's goodness.

142, like last week's Psalm, is another "*Psalm For Times Of Trouble*." It is a prayer for the afflicted and the lonely.

This is David when he is hated and hunted and his faith is being stretched. But in praying this Psalm, his faith proved undefeated. Pray it yourself this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Praying the Psalter is a powerful way to grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus... the Greater David.

PSALM 143:

This is a desperate Psalm. It seems as if the Psalmist is not just at the end of his rope; he's actually run out of rope completely and his hands are empty. The center of the Psalm is v.7. And with v.7 there begins a crescendo of several petitions that he begs of God. Count the petitions and consider each of them.

143 is one of the seven traditional "*Penitential Psalms*," along with 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, & 130. It's probably included in that list because of v.2's confession of universal guilt. But the sense of this Psalm is perhaps more accurately represented in v.11: "*For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life!*"

This is a prayer for those in dire straits. It begins immersed in troubles, but it ends with a servant's heart to trust and follow the Lord. Pray it with that servant's heart this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. If your heart hasn't been trained and formed well by the Psalter up to this point in your life, make sure this treasure is not neglected in the remainder of your days. You will be richly rewarded.

PSALM 144:

There was a shadow of suffering and persecution in Psalms 140-143; we've been praying in that shadow for four solid weeks. But now a new day is dawning! This is a Psalm for a jubilant and triumphant heart. The Lord has come (v.5)! It's time for a new song (v.9)!

144 is a "*Messianic Psalm*," prophetically looking forward to the coming of the True King, who will set this world to rights. This Psalm is full of energy and heart, of hope and power. It is bursting with praise and flowing with intercession for the people of God.

I especially love how this Psalm directs us to pray for our sons and daughters in v.12: that they may be well-rooted and ready to grow strong and beautiful lives, adding to the security and stability of whatever "*structure*" they inhabit. Let's pray in this way for the children of DPC this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Is there a verse in this Psalm that you may even want to memorize this week?

PSALM 145:

This is an acrostic Psalm, meaning that the first letter of each lines goes A-Z through the 22

letters of the Hebrew alphabet, speaking the praise of the Lord (see v.21). Except that it isn't fully an acrostic, because the line for the Hebrew letter "nun" (n) is missing. (Later copyists simply added it; see your Bible's footnote for the second half of v.13.) But its absence actually carries a meaning: it reminds us that the human mind can never fully and exhaustibly describe the praise of our eternal God.

145 is a "*Psalm of Wonderment*," pouring out an alphabet of praise to our "*God and King*" (v.1). Nearly a whole alphabet, anyway.

Note how vs.1,2 and v.21 bookend the whole purpose of this Psalm. Let this alphabet of praise lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. God preserved this Psalm for generations so that today, right now, we might know him better by praying it with hearts full of his worship.

PSALM 146:

The final five Psalms in the Psalter all start (and end!) with the exact same words: "*Praise the Lord!*" And these final five Psalms are indeed perfect praise. You won't find references to personal distress. You won't find petitions. You won't find much by way of historical allusions. But what you do find is a very focused celebration of the Living God.

146 is a "*Psalm of Pure Praise*," joyously praying and singing, in unbroken delight, the glories of our God.

The robust hymn "*Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah, O My Soul, Jehovah Praise*" (#57 in the Red Trinity Hymnal) is based on this Psalm, and I recommend it to you strongly. Let the bright praise of our Lord lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. In many ways God intended the Psalter to be the glue that binds the church's worship together, across all times and all lands.

PSALM 147:

Three times this Psalm calls us to give voice to the praise of our great God (vs.1, 7, 12). The other 17 verses tell us *why* our God is worthy of such vigorous praise; reflect carefully on those 17 reasons for why "*a song of praise is fitting*" (v.1). You'll find yourself really wishing you had a lyre handy (v.7)!

147 is another "*Psalm of Pure Praise*," drawing our attention to the wonders of creation, to the wisdom of providence, and to the glories of grace.

It's a lovely thing that we are coming to this Psalm as we near the Lord's challenges to Job, for

there those challenges will be turned into the stuff of worship. Let the "good" and "pleasant" (v.1) praise of the Lord lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. What a wonderful intro this will be into a morning of God-centered, gospel-driven, Word-saturated worship!

PSALM 148:

We've said that these last five Psalms in the Psalter are full of the unbroken, pure praise of God. There is, however, a sense of progression. 146 began with strong references to the individual ("*my soul*," "*I ...I ...I ...I*," see 146.1,2). 147 then began to speak of the community of praise ("*our God*," "*O Jerusalem*," "*O Zion*," see 147.1,12). But here in 148, this call to praise now extends to all of heaven (v.1) and all of earth (v.7).

148 is the third "*Psalm of Pure Praise*" of these five. In vs.1-6 the order of this call to worship moves down, from the angelic hosts to sun & moon & stars. In vs.7-14 the order of this call to worship moves up, from the deeps, to the stuff of weather & terrain, to animals, to the kingdoms of humanity. EVERYTHING must praise its Creator. Even the "*stormy wind*" (v.8) can only fulfill his Word.

It is God's praise that truly unites the whole of creation. Let these endless hallelujahs of creation lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. In doing so we actually join with this Psalm, along with all Christians in all ages and all nations, giving glory to God alone.

PSALM 149:

148.13 declared that the Lord alone is worthy of having his name and majesty exalted above earth and heaven. Therefore, Psalm 149 speaks of the Lord's purpose to bring THE WHOLE WORLD (not just Israel) under his influence... and therefore into the song, gladness, joy, dance, salvation, and glory of his people. True, the metaphors used for this are militaristic. However, the Scriptures sometimes use this metaphor to speak of the extension of the kingdom of peace, through the gospel of the Victorious Savior, the Messiah King (see Isaiah 9.4,5,7, for example).

149 is the fourth "*Psalm of Pure Praise*," and there's still one more to go. The praise here rises out of Israel's calling to be a people of mission, a people who have been delivered—and who are now called to declare that deliverance to all the nations.

This very same calling has now been given to the church! This is our Psalm. May we joyfully enter into the battle, taking every thought captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10.5; Ephesians 6.12; Hebrews 4.12). Let this battle-song lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on

Sunday. This Psalm was written down *"for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope"* (Romans 15.4).

PSALM 150:

We have now come to the very end of the Psalter. In Psalm 149 we saw that THE WHOLE WORLD has been brought into submission to God... and now, in 150, the singing begins! Every instrument is tuned up and ready to go for this final Psalm—which gives us a small taste of the great joy of Old Testament worship, looking forward to Christ.

150 is the final of these *"Psalms of Pure Praise."* It is brief, but it is festive and stimulating, hearty and rousing. Let it stir your praise! Consider this word on praise from C.S. Lewis: *"I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation."*

Verse 1 gives us the "where" of praise; verse 2 gives us the "why" of praise; verses 3-5 give us the "how" of praise, and verse 6 gives us the "who" of praise. Let God's praise lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Greek word for Psalms ("Psalmoi") is a translation of the Hebrew word "Tehillim," which simply means "Praises."