

PSALM 132: 1-5, 8-16

A Song of Ascents.

- ¹ O LORD, remember in David's favour
all the hardships he endured;
² how he swore to the LORD
and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
³ 'I will not enter my house
or get into 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.'
- ⁸ Rise up, O LORD, and go to your resting-place,
you and the ark of your might.
- ⁹ Let your priests be clothed with righteousness,
and let your faithful shout for joy.
¹⁰ For your servant David's sake
do not turn away the face of your anointed one.
- ¹¹ The LORD swore to David a sure oath
from which God will not turn back:
'One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.
¹² If your sons keep my covenant
and my decrees that I shall teach them,
their sons also, for evermore,
shall sit on your throne.'
- ¹³ For the LORD has chosen Zion;
God has desired it for God's habitation:
¹⁴ 'This is my resting-place for ever;
here I will reside, for I have desired it.
¹⁵ I will abundantly bless its provisions;
I will satisfy its poor with bread.
¹⁶ Its priests I will clothe with salvation,
and its faithful will shout for joy.

David was the greatest king Israel ever had. Not only was he successful in leading the nation to expand, grow stronger and safe from enemies, but he was also faithful to God and sought to follow all of God's ways. But how does any ruler become faithful to God when they must use violence against their enemies and negotiate the use of power not only to protect the

vulnerable, but also to enforce order and deal with conflicting agendas of those around? How does any ruler avoid getting corrupted by power in some way at some point? The truth is: David failed, and not only once, but many times. He betrayed people and hurt them to fulfill his own desires. David also fell into grief repeatedly as his wives (the times allowed it, patriarchal as they were) and children came to blows, and often with tragic consequences. A few times some also turned against him, necessitating actions that also broke his heart. These stories are captured in the first and second biblical books of Samuel.

But how does this relate to us here and now? One of the things David promised at the height of his power and prosperity, was that he would build a house for God, a temple if you will. How could he, David, live in a beautiful palace while God's house containing the most sacred ark of the covenant (the tablets of stone containing the 10 commandments) was a tent easily taken down and moved? God deserved a house too, as God was the source of all David's and Israel's success (this account is found in 2 Samuel 7).

But God says no, not yet. Building a house for God is also a way of pinning God down. God does not serve us and our agendas like some puppet-master we can control to fulfill our bidding. But how do we know God cares for us if there's nothing tangible about God we can focus on? Where do we find God if God is not located in some place that is concrete?

This psalm is calling on God to remember God's vow to David and the people throughout the generations. Things have clearly not gone well since David's time. The psalmist is not only calling/praying that God "remember" (vs.1) David and the promise to David, but also that God "rise up" (vs.8) and return to the temple, the land and the people, because the Lord "swore" an oath" (vs.11) and made a promise to be there for the people. God "chose" (vs. 13) them, to live among them and bless them forever.

Clearly the psalmist knows God cannot be controlled. Many of the psalms try to interpret God's ways. Is God's presence or absence tied to the people's faithfulness? Is God willing and able to forgive? Is the people's ongoing suffering a result of God's anger or abandonment? Is that the way God works? Or is God to be found in other ways? Does God's faithfulness to God's vows also involve discipline? Must the people grow through struggle and even hardship as they have clearly broken their vows and been faithless?

The temptation for the Hebrews as much as for us, is the desire to create an image of God we pray to who is supposed to be responsive to our every bidding, ensure our success, safety, health and happiness, and in exchange we will build God a house, thank God and do deeds we invent that express our loyalty and faithfulness. But real inner growth begins when we discover God cannot be used that way. We are not specially protected from the vicissitudes of life. We offer God our prayers and confess our sins because we have been grasped by a desire to love as we are loved, and every new challenge in life is an opportunity to grow deeper in that love, figuring out how best to serve it in every situation.

Regardless of how we may experience external, material blessings (health, prosperity, security, family and friends), sometimes the bad things that come our way challenge us to purify what matters to us and why. To love is its own gift and its own reward, and sometimes, it will bring hardships into our lives. How many of us love family members and friends and are there for them even when we suffer hurt, disappointment or lack of appreciation? We must find our own “Zion” within our souls where God lives, and those places and spaces where we go in order to connect with God, places and spaces that feed us spiritually, refresh and renew us, and remind us that we are called to love for no other reason in the end than it is good and right so to do. May God be found in your Zion, your heart, your relations and the spaces that feed your soul when you feel lost and disconnected.

PRAYER: You seek us, O God, even as we seek you. And even though we can never pin you down to serve our wants and our agendas, you are always seeking our good, our healing and our flourishing... Sometimes it's hard to find you, O God... We are swallowed up by our wants and needs, our frustrations, our petty irritations with many things that disappoint us in others and in ourselves... Even as we can feel inadequate we take it out on others... Even as we can lose our purpose we are agitated and restless... Even as we want to find home and have a home, we feel lost and forgotten... Come to us afresh, O God... Make a home within us... Help us find you in us and help us find our spiritual belonging and home again... In Jesus' name; Amen.