

Psalm 120
A Pilgrim's Prayer
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Immanuel: <http://www.immanuelchurch.com/>

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*See next page for preaching outline.

Introduction:

1. Have you ever been hurt by a lie?
2. I've grown up in a Christian bubble, so I've avoided being hurt by many lies.
3. But when I was a teenage boy I learned the pain of being lied to.
4. We used to host homeschooling classes in our house and two girls came who were enamored with me.
5. The two girls could not stop laughing at my jokes, smiling at me, and in general flirting with me.
6. Makes sense—I was an incredibly confident and cool homeschooled boy.
7. Until one day my best friend told me they were just acting.
8. Apparently they didn't like that I flirted with one of them and then the other—this lie crushed me.
9. Lies hurt, not matter how silly; they hurt our reputations, our happiness, our careers.
10. How are we to respond when people hurt us with lies?
11. The world says to get back at those liars, but God tells us to do something different. (*Read Psalm 120)

I. When people lie, pilgrims pray. (Intro - v. 1)

A. This Psalm is a pilgrim song, “A song of ascents.” (Intro)

1. The Jewish calendar is filled with festivals when people would travel to Jerusalem.
2. These songs were sung by pilgrims and processions going to the temple mount.
3. Jesus would have sung the Psalms of ascent (120-134) as a boy and man.
4. Psalm 122:1–2 (NIV) says, “I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord. Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem.”
5. You would expect the first song to be a happy “road trip” Psalm, but it's a sad complaint.

B. Have you ever been so hurt you just needed to get away on a hike, run, or walk?

1. Some of you are in the military and I bet you don't know that I actually tried to join the Marines.
2. When I went through the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) the truth came out.
3. I had listened to others who had encouraged me to submit an incomplete medical history.
4. And now when this lie, which had become my own lie, was exposed, I was hurt.
5. I was so mad I drove three hours in the snow and went for an angry run on our NordicTrack.
6. The pilgrims traveled to the sanctuary looking for peace, for stress relief, and we do too.
7. We come here into God's presence looking for deliverance from hurts, lies, disappointments.

(What does our opening verse tell us about how pilgrims respond to life's hurts, especially lies?)

C. When people lie, pilgrims pray. (v. 1)

1. V. 1 says, “I called to Yahweh in my distress, and he answered me.”
2. A pilgrim is anyone who follows after Jesus through life's ups and downs.
3. A pilgrim is anyone who realizes they can't deliver themselves.
4. We realize we can't save ourselves from life's anxieties and threats.
5. Life is a pilgrimage to our heavenly sanctuary and home.

(What should we pray when people lie and hurt us?)

(Verses 2-7 are the content of the prayer.)

II. Pilgrims pray for God's justice. (v. 2-4)

A. Pilgrims pray for God's justice. (v. 2-4)

1. A better translation of "save me" is "rescue my soul."
2. The Hebrew word "nephesh" means "soul" or "life" or "throat."
3. The word for "save" is a type of "snatching away" from a hungry animal.
4. Not only do we pray for salvation, we pray for justice—punishment matches the crime.
5. Psalm 64:3 "They sharpen their tongues like sword and aim cruel words like deadly arrows."
6. Psalm 18:8 "Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it."

B. Praying that God would judge our enemies is a thoroughly Biblical concept.

1. In 1st Samuel, Hannah is chastised by her husband's other wife for not having sons.
2. When God gives Hannah Samuel, Hannah prays judgment against those who hurt her.
3. 1 Sam 2:1 (NIV) "My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance."
4. In Psalm 109 David prays that God will judge his enemies (King Saul, son Absalom).

Psalm 109:4–15 (NIV) — 4 In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer. 5 They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship. 6 Appoint someone evil to oppose my enemy; let an accuser stand at his right hand. 7 When he is tried, let him be found guilty, and may his prayers condemn him. 8 May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership. 9 May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. 10 May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes. 11 May a creditor seize all he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor. 12 May no one extend kindness to him or take pity on his fatherless children. 13 May his descendants be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation. 14 May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord; may the sin of his mother never be blotted out. 15 May their sins always remain before the Lord, that he may blot out their name from the earth.

5. We pray imperfectly for justice as pilgrims, but that's okay.
6. The key is not taking justice into our own hands, but placing justice in God's hands.
7. We pray to get all of our anger and hurt outside, so we don't stay bitter (honest with God).
8. 1 John 3:15 "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him."
9. Pilgrims pray for God's justice.

(Why do we pray for God's justice?)

(So that one day we can pray for God's peace.)

III. Pilgrims pray for God's peace. (v. 5-7)

A. We pray for peace because it feels so far away. (v. 5)

1. The pilgrim symbolically feels like he's an alien in a far off land among God's enemies.
2. Meshech is in the far north by the black sea and Kedar was in the south-east Syro-Arabian desert.
3. Both are sons of Ishmael, the enemy of Israel, and Meshech is a subordinate to Gog (Ezek 38:2).
4. The pilgrims would have prayed as they headed to Jerusalem from far away (diaspora, NT).

5. We pray for peace today because bitterness makes us feel far away from God.

B. We pray that God will help us let it go. (v. 6-7)

1. A message on Psalm 120 by Sinclair Ferguson helped me prepare this week.
2. Notice the change in focus from v. 4-5 from a desire for vengeance to a desire for peace.
3. V. 6 literally says “I am peace” or “I am shalom”—holistic whole-being peace.
4. To release our bitterness, we need to take our eyes off the hurt and place them on God.
5. I think the pilgrim’s sang these songs to reorient their focus.

C. Before I tried out for the Marines, my brother and I would go for runs and sing cadence.

1. Cadences are songs sung by the military as they run to help them breathe.
2. The Marines chant, “Here We Go. On the Run. One mile, No good. Two miles, No way. Three miles, Orraaahhh! Feelin good. Orraaahhh!”
3. My brother had me sing them to help me keep my focus off myself.
4. The pilgrims sang these song to focus on God and find peace. (we can too)
5. This is a peace we can only have through trusting in God. (pray out, pray up)
6. This peace is found by recognizing we’re all liars before God.

(There’s one thing we missed in this Psalm, the most important part, go back to verse one.)

IV. When people lie, pilgrims pray, and God answers. (v. 1b)

A. When people lie, pilgrims pray, and God answers.

1. Notice verse one tells us “he answers me.”
2. We believe in a God who really answers our hurt and suffering.
3. The songs of ascent begin in sadness but they end in joy (120-134).
4. Psalm 134:2, “Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord.”
5. Your pilgrimage may be painful right now, but if you trust God, it can end in joy.

Conclusion:

1. Maybe some of you have been so hurt you’re overwhelmed with bitterness.
2. It’s time to renew your pilgrimage to Christ.
3. We first pray out all the hurt and judgment.
4. And then we pray for God’s all-encompassing peace.
5. If you need to break your routine or go on vacation to do this, go for it.
6. Pilgrims pray for God’s justice and peace.
7. Pilgrims expect God to show up with healing.
8. When people lie, pilgrims pray, and God answers.

Psalm 121:7-8 (NIV) The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.