

HOPE  
BECAUSE GOD IS WITH US

HOPE IN THE VALLEY

Psalm 84.5-7

### Key Points :

- At Christmas time, we celebrate again the great truth that Emmanuel, God is with us. **God is with us in the valleys, at the low points in our lives.**
- Although we meet Zechariah at the point when his dreams are about to be fulfilled, we reflected on the fact that he and his wife Elizabeth had lived with many years of disappointment, longing for a child they could not have.
- All of us have life narratives that consist of what happens to us and how we respond to that - How we respond when we face problems matters.
- In Psalm 84, the Valley of Baka is used as a symbol for the place of sadness and desolation we all face at times in our lives. For those who find strength in God, the Valley of Baka can be transformed into a place of creativity and growth.
- 5 ways to pass through the valley: **1. Being honest** (often with ourselves) about how we are feeling, **2. Expressing our feelings**, **3. Inviting God** to be with us, **4. Declaring who God is**, **5. Being thankful**
- It is not easy to walk through the Valley of Baka, and it can take time with challenges along the way, but God will lead us out to new places. **When God is with us, we find hope in the Valley.**

### Questions:

#### Conversation Starter

1. What are you looking forward to most this Christmas?

#### Start Thinking & Sharing

2. "Emmanuel, God is with us" is a very familiar Christmas message. Have a moment of quiet to let the group reflect on those words. (This could be part of opening worship or a finishing reflection)

3. Think about the idea of 'life narratives'. Why does the way we respond to what happens to us matter?

4. Read verses 5-7 of Psalm 84. Ask each member of the group to say what word or short phrase strikes them the most and why.

5. What is the balance of your prayer life? Is it focussed on problems or does it include time to declare who God is, and time to give thanks?

6. Discuss how you can build a greater sense of thankfulness into the pattern of your life. Are there times when your thankfulness is formulaic rather than genuinely appreciative? How do you guard against this?

**Start praying. Be bold, and pray specifically.**

6. Father, thank You that, even in the valleys You are still with us. Would You give us a supernatural hope even amongst the sadness and disappointment, and the courage to open up to You. Amen.

**Start doing. Commit to a step, and live it out this week.**

7. Set aside some time to be thankful to God this week and be creative! You could write a letter to God, go for a walk and ask God to prompt you to thankfulness in and through the things you see, or simply worship.