

Sunday September 12 2021 Psalm 121 Look Up

Picture on Amanda's wall from Psalm 121:1-2. It's a daily reminder to the family of God's providential care.

Psalm 121 is a psalm about trusting in God's providential care. It's a travel Psalm. Many families read this Psalm out loud together before heading out on a trip.

If you need help this morning, then this psalm is for you. This is a great Psalm to memorize. Psalm 121 teaches us three big truths about God's help and care for us.

- 1) The Creator is our helper.**
- 2) The God of Israel is our protector. And then finally,**
- 3) The LORD will keep us from evil/harm.**

Let's look at all three of these as we learn to put our trust in God's providence and care for our lives.

First of all, the Creator is our helper. *"I lift up my eyes to the mountains – where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."* These are beautiful verses of Scripture that have brought much comfort to God's people over the years. I know many of you have quoted these verses in times of need. They tell us several things about God and the help that He provides.

First of all, they encourage us to look beyond the mountains to the God who created them. Mountains are symbols of strength and stability. They're great in size, long-lasting and unchanging. They reflect their divine Creator. The God who made the mountains is even greater in power and strength.

The mountains are also upward in direction. We tend to look down when we're in trouble. Right? Our faces are downcast. Our focus is on our troubles and all our problems down here. **But don't look down. That's the wrong direction!** The mountains are a reminder that we're to look up. Lift your eyes to look at a mountain. But don't stop there. Are you looking high enough? **Look beyond the mountains to the God who created them because God is higher than all.**

Kids and travel singing!

In our text, these psalms were sung by travellers on their way to Jerusalem, and it's possible they may have sung this Psalm as they were nearing the mountains that surrounded Jerusalem. In that case they were not only looking up at the mountains, but they would also have been looking up towards Jerusalem and the temple, the dwelling place of God.

We read in Psalm 90:2: *"Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."* (Psalm 90:2)

God is bigger than the mountains and God is before the mountains.

So don't just look to the mountains but look to the one who made the mountains.

Look past the creation to the creator.

In verse one the psalmist asks “Where does my help come from?” And in verse two we get the answer: **“My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”** (Psalm 121:2) Where does your help come from? Your help comes from the Maker of heaven and earth. God not only made the mountains. He made everything!

We read in Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Jeremiah 10:12 says: “God made the earth by his power; He founded the world by His wisdom and stretched out the heavens by His understanding.” In other words the Maker of heaven and the earth has unlimited power, wisdom and understanding. He has all the resources and more to meet your every need. **He's got the whole world in his hands. And He's your helper.**

God is not only the Creator, but He's involved in His creation. The Scriptures teach us that God is involved in every aspect of His creation and that includes you. We call God's power over all creation His providence.

The Westminster Confession of Faith gives us a beautiful description of God's providence: “God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.” (Westminster Confession, V, 1)

What a difference it makes to know that the Creator of the universe is your helper and your friend! How big is your problem today? **Now compare it to the Maker of heaven and earth.** I think it's safe to say, “God's got this.”

Gerald Williamson writes: “Because God controls the universe, chance is ruled out, and because it's God who controls the universe, fate is ruled out also.” We live in a world neither of chance nor fate. **This is God's world,** and God's providence means that nothing can happen to you outside of God's will and providential care.

A husband was leaving on a trip and prayed with his wife before he left: “Dear Lord, please protect my wife and children while I'm gone.” **When he finished praying his wife said, “Who do you think protects us when you're here?” Good question!**

What is the source of your help? Psalm 121 tells us it's the Maker of heaven and earth. That's the first truth we learn from this psalm. The Creator is our helper.

The second truth is this: the God of Israel is our protector. Look at verses 3-6: *“He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you – the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.”* These verses teach us that God is not only the creator of the world but He is our protector as well!

When you read the Old Testament and see how God watched out for Israel and took care of them, we can rest assured that He will do the same for us.

The key word in these verses is the word “watches.” It means **“to watch over, to guard or to protect.”** If you’re in Christ, then He who watches over Israel watches over your life as well. The God of Israel is your protector. He’s your body guard. And here in verses 3-6 the psalmist tells us some of the various ways that God watches over you.

First of all, as verse 3 puts it: *“He will not let your foot slip.”* When you build your life on God and his word, you’re on solid ground. You have a firm foundation for your feet and for your life.

We read in Psalm 37: *“The LORD makes firm the steps of the one who delights in Him; though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with His hand.”* There are no accidents for those who put their faith in Christ. Everything that happens in your life takes place under God’s providential care.

Look at verses 3-4: *“He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”*

This is in contrast to the pagan gods we meet in Scripture. For example in 1 Kings 18 we read about the prophets of Baal trying to reach their god. When Baal didn’t respond, Elijah teased them: “Shout louder! Surely he’s a god! Perhaps he’s deep in thought, or busy, or travelling.

Maybe he’s sleeping and must be awakened.” The implication here is if your god is sleeping when you need him, then you don’t have much of a god, do you?

But our God is always awake. He never falls asleep on the watch. He never dozes or nods off. He never even gets distracted. You can pray to Him at any time and He always focuses on you and hears you.

And because God never slumbers nor sleeps – that means that you can!

Because God is awake, you can sleep. It’s like a child who can’t sleep until their parent promises to stay by their bedside. Then the child trustfully falls asleep knowing their parent is there to watch over them.

It’s the same way with God. It doesn’t matter what problem you’re dealing with, you can leave it in God’s hands and go to sleep at night knowing that God never slumbers nor sleeps, and He will take care of it. He will take care of you.

God never slumbers nor sleeps.

And then thirdly, he is close beside you.

Look at verse 5: *“The LORD watches over you – the LORD is your shade at your right hand.”*

That means God accompanies you every step of the way. He’s close beside you.

He never slumbers nor sleeps. He's close beside you. And then fourthly, He protects you at all times. Look at verse 6: *"The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night."*

The travellers to Jerusalem faced many dangers along the way. Sunstroke was a real danger during the day, and there were often extreme changes of temperature between day and night. The moon was associated with lunacy, also called "moonstroke."

And of course there was also the danger of bandits and wild animals at night. There were dangers both day and night on the road, but verse six assured the traveller: *"The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night."*

When we read that the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night, **what this is really saying is that God protects you at all times – both day and night**, and everything in between. God is present to help you with every problem in your life.

The Creator is your helper. The God of Israel is your protector. Then finally, the LORD will keep you from harm. Look at verses 7-8: *"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."*

Verses 1-6 are all in the present tense, describing what God does for us. **Now in verses 7-8 we are given promises for the future**, telling us what God will do for us.

First of all, God watches over every aspect of your life. That's what verse 7 says: *"The LORD will keep you from all harm – He will watch over your life."* **The word "harm" here is a word that can mean "harm or evil."** Jesus taught us to pray something similar in the Lord's Prayer where we ask our heavenly Father: *"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."*

One of the daily prayers I pray for my family is: "Lord, I pray that you will protect my family today from all evil, danger, sickness and harm." Now that's not the only thing I pray for them. I also pray for their spiritual growth, that God would grant them victory in their fight against sin, that they would know and follow God's will for their lives.

But this prayer for protection is one of the big ones I pray for them each day. And why do I pray this way? I'm praying according to Christ's model in the Lord's Prayer and God's promise here in Psalm 121.

This is one of the verses that people love to be able to quote. They love the idea that God is watching over them and will not allow any evil to come to them.

Throughout the years, however, many people have walked away from God because of being disillusioned. They're told that God will never allow them to be hurt, then something painful happens in their life, a sickness, or death, or accident, and they're now confused. They were under the belief that nothing bad could happen in their life, that would appear to hurt them.

The challenge is in how a person views what harm is. Most people view the temporary things of this life as things that can harm them. While sickness, pain and death are painful to the body in this life, none of them can harm the soul for eternity.

In the light of other scriptures, to be kept from all harm or evil doesn't imply a cushioned life, but a well-armed one. **See Psalm 23:4**, which expects the dark valley but can face it.

God watches over every aspect of your life. He doesn't say you will never have problems, **but He promises to be with you in your problems, and to turn all your problems to good.** We have a whole string of beautiful promises in Romans 8 that assure us God is directly involved in your life and that He is for you, not against you.

*“What then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)
“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”*

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Once again these verses don't teach us that we'll never have problems or trouble in our lives, but rather that evil will never win out, that nothing can thwart God's purpose for your life, that nothing can separate you from God's love for you in Christ.

God is for you, and therefore no permanent evil/harm can befall the believer in Christ. You can trust God's providential care, because God watches over every aspect of your life.

And in these verses, God watches over every transition in our lives. Look at verse 8: *“The LORD will watch over your coming and going.”* This is one of the verses that devout Jews recite when they leave or enter their homes.

It's usually the transitions in life that trip us up, isn't it? Once we're safe in our routines things usually go pretty smoothly, but it's the in-between times – the commute, the move, the change of jobs, the change of health, the change of relationships – it's in the in-between times that we usually struggle.

Whether at home or school or work or away, whatever you do, wherever you go, you're safe because God is with you.

And then we have the wonderful promise at the end of verse 8: *“The LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”* God is watching over you now, and he will continue to watch over you forever.

Both of those promises are encouraging! If you had to choose one or the other, which would you choose?

Now or forevermore? It's a tough choice. But praise God you don't have to choose. **They are both true for the believer in Christ!**

Jesus said in Matthew 28:20: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Hebrews 13:8 says that: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” **And so God’s promise to watch over you in Christ is true today; it’s true tomorrow; it’s true forevermore.**

The Creator is your helper. The God of Israel is your protector. The LORD will keep you from evil. And so we move from God as Creator of heaven and earth, to God as protector of Israel, to God as your personal Lord and Saviour who protects you from evil and harm.

We’re all on a journey to God, and Psalm 121 is a wonderful song for the journey. The Maker of heaven and earth watches over every aspect of our lives. He protects us. There are no accidents for those who belong to Him.

And that means you don’t need to worry or to be afraid of anything. Nothing can happen to you without God’s knowledge. Even the worst things that happen to you – whether illness, loss, or even death. **Nothing can harm you under His protective care.**

God is for you, not against you. He’s committed to your good, and you can trust Him in all things. **So take comfort in this.** Learn to trust God in all things and to look for the good in all the details of life. God cares for you. He will provide for you. He is there to help you.

“I lift up my eyes to the mountains – where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, we thank You for Your word, and we thank You for its many encouragements and promises. And we pray especially this morning for one another, and for those especially whose hearts are heavy and burdened.

Help us to know that peace that passes all understanding as we put our faith and trust and confidence in You and in Your love, and in the way that You keep us and will not let us go. Hear us, O Lord, for Jesus’ sake. **Amen.**