

Psalm 121 – Trusting in God’s Providential Care

“My help comes from the LORD.” (Psalm 121:2)

INTRODUCTION: This psalm, among others, were sung by those traveling to Jerusalem for the three great feasts. And so these are travel songs, songs for the road, and songs for the journey of life.

It is called a Psalm of Ascent not only because the people were going up to Jerusalem, but because the psalm itself lead us upwards to God in our own personal walk with the Lord.

We all need help at times in life. Where do you go when you need help? Do you call on family? Friends? Dial 911?

- Many during Covid are feeling they need to talk to someone, get counseling, marriages and all forms of relationships are strained due to the pressure of social distancing and all the changes from the normal flow of life.

It’s good to have a support system in place: but most important that your support system be based on what will truly help you in your time of need.

Jesus said: Matt. 7:24-27 “Whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: the rains came, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded on a rock. And everyone that hears these sayings and does not do them is likened to a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: the rains came, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

- History and experience teach us that no safety plan, no insurance policy, no security system can keep you absolutely safe in this life. You can follow all the safety rules, take every precaution, exercise and eat well, and things can still go wrong.
- That’s why we need to look to God for our help.
- Ben Franklin said, “God helps those who help themselves,” but the Scriptures teach us that God helps those who seek His help.
- None of us are safe until we take refuge in God.

Psalm 121 is a psalm about trusting in God’s providential care.

Do you need help this morning? Then this psalm is for you. This is a good one to memorize and have handy for the journey of life.

Psalm 121 teaches us three truths about God's help and care for you.

- 1) The Creator is your helper.
- 2) The God of Israel is your protector.
- 3) The LORD will keep you from all harm.

I. The Creator is your helper (1-2)

Verses 1-2: "I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."

- This expresses the **desire** for the Lord's help and also the **expectation** of His help.

Look beyond the mountains to the God who created them

Psalm 46:1-2 "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and the mountains slip into the heart of the sea."

We are encouraged to look beyond the mountains [obstacles as Jesus expressed] to the God who created them.

Mountains are symbols of **strength and stability** – also called obstacles by Jesus – Matt. 21:21 "...and also you shall say to this mountain, be removed and be cast into the seas, it shall be done."

The hills are also upward in direction. We tend to look down when we're in trouble.

- Our faces are downcast. Our focus is on our troubles and all our problems down here, which tend to drag us down further.
- That's the wrong direction! The hills are a reminder that we are to look up.
- Are you looking high enough? You must look beyond the mountains to the God who created them because God is higher than all.

These psalms were sung by travelers on their way to Jerusalem, and it is possible they may have sung this Psalm as they were nearing the hills 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.

God is bigger than the mountains. We don't look to the mountains for our strength, we lift up our eyes towards God who can help us in our times of need.

Your help comes from the Maker of heaven and earth

Jeremiah 10:12 “It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens.”

- The Maker of heaven and the earth has unlimited power, wisdom and understanding. He has all the resources to meet your every need. He's got the whole world in his hands. And He is your helper.

“Where does your help come from?”

“Your help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

This description of God as the Maker of heaven and earth appears three times in the Psalms of Ascent:

- In the beginning Psalm 121:2, once in the middle Psalm 124:8 and then again at the end Psalm 134:4.
- Here in Psalm 121 and in 124 it designates the source of your help, and in Psalm 134 it designates the source of your blessing.

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?
- I invite you to compare it to the Maker of heaven and earth.
- “God's got this.” Gerald Williamson writes: “Because God rules the universe, chance is ruled out, and because it is God who rules the universe, fate is ruled out also.”
- We live in a world neither of chance nor fate.

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!

II. The God of Israel is your protector (3-6)

2. The God of Israel is your protector.

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 the protector of Israel.

The name for God is used in all fifteen of the Psalms of Ascent.

- He is “the LORD.”
- When you see “**LORD**” spelled out in all capital letters like that, the Hebrew word is “**Yahweh**,” which is God’s covenant name.
- It is a name that speaks of God’s covenant relationship with His people and His faithfulness to them.

You are part of God’s covenant people, and you can trust God’s faithfulness to you in Christ. When you see how God watched out for Israel and took care of them, you can rest assured that He will do the same for you.

- The key word in these next verses is the word “**watches**.” It comes from the Hebrew word “**Shamar**” which means “**to watch over, to guard or to protect.**”
- If you are in Christ, then He who watches over Israel watches over your life as well. The God of Israel is your protector. He is your body guard.

Verses 3-6 the psalmist tells us some of the various ways that God promises to watch over you:

A. He protects you from accidents

– Psalm 37:23-24

1. “He will not let your foot slip.” (Psalm 121:3) When you build your life on God and His word, you are 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.

B. He never slumbers nor sleeps

1 Kings 18:27

2. God never slumbers nor sleeps. 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 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 is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” (1 Kings 18:27)

The implication here is if your god is sleeping when you need him, then you don't have much of a god, do you?

Your 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.

Because God never slumbers nor sleeps – that means that you can!

Because God is awake, you can sleep.

- Psa. 127:2 “It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so He gives His beloved sleep.”
- Prov. 3:24 “When you lie down, you shall not be afraid: you shall lie down and your sleep shall be sweet.”

C. He is close beside you

– Genesis 28:15; Psalm 16:8

3. God is with you at all times.

Verse 5: “The LORD watches over you – the LORD is your shade at your right hand.” (Psalm 121:5)

- God is the shade at your right hand. He is close beside you. David wrote in Psalm 16:8: “I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.” (Psalm 16:8) God told Jacob in Genesis 28:15: “I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.”

The Lord is your shade at your right hand. That means God accompanies you every step of the way. He is close beside you.

D. He protects you at all times

– Psalm 91:5-6

4. God protects you from accidents.

Verse 6: “The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.” (Psalm 121:6)

The travelers 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.

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 traveler: “The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.” We read something similar in Psalm 91: “You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.”

The Hebrew language often uses pairs of opposite words to signify totality (called a “merism”). In other words the phrase using the opposites includes both extremes and everything in between.

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 God of Israel is your protector.

III. The LORD will keep you from all harm (7-8)

The Creator is your helper. The God of Israel is your protector. And then finally, the LORD will keep you from all harm. Look at verses 7-8: “The LORD will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life; 8 the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.” (Psalm 121:7-8)

Verses 1-6 are all in the present tense, describing what God does for you.

In verses 7-8 we are given promises for the future, telling us what God will do for you. The LORD will keep you from all harm. And there are several things we learn from these verses:

A. He watches over every aspect of your life

– Matthew 6:13; Luke 21:16-19; Romans 8:28, 31, 37-39

1. God watches over every aspect of your life. Verse 7 says: “The LORD will keep you from all **harm** – He will watch over your life.” (Psalm 121:7) The word “**harm**” here is a word that can mean “harm or evil.” Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord’s Prayer where we ask our heavenly Father: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matthew 6:13)

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.”

This prayer for protection is one of the big things I pray for each day.

I am praying according to Christ’s model in the Lord’s Prayer and God’s promise here in Psalm 121.

God 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 lot of beautiful promises in

Romans 8 that assure us God is directly involved in our lives and that He is for us, not against us.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) “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.” (Romans 8:37-39)

In Luke Jesus tells His disciples: “You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.” (Luke 21:16-19) In other words even in betrayal or death the believer still comes out on top.

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

We are 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 your life.

He protects you from all harm. There are no accidents for those who belong to God.

And that means you do not need to worry or to be afraid of anything.

Nothing can happen to you without God’s knowledge. Nothing can harm you under His protective care. Even the worst things that happen to you – whether illness, loss or even death – all these things take place under God’s providential care.

God is for you, not against you. He is committed to your good, and you can trust Him in all things.

So take comfort.

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 hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121:1-2)