

Psalm 121 | “Help on Life’s Journey”
Preached on November 17, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 121 today. *[pause]*

Just last week, I began a new sermon series on the songs of ascents. *[pause]*

These are the psalms in the psalter that were sung as the Israelites traveled up to Jerusalem for the annual feasts.

And it prepared their minds for worship, and equipped their hearts with faith. *[pauseeee]*

In the previous psalm, it’s like the psalmist was in a far away land and longing to be in Jerusalem.

And now in this psalm, it’s like the psalmist has begun his long journey to the Temple. *[pause]*

There’s a lot of dangers along the way, so where will his help come from as he makes this arduous trek?

The answer is found in this psalm. *[pauseeee]*

If you think about it, life for us as Christians is like an arduous journey, too. *[pause]*

We are making our way to the *new Jerusalem*, and we find that the answer and help for the psalmist’s journey is the same for our’s...

The answer is in this psalm, so look down at Psalm 121 and read along in your mind. *[READ]*

When I was younger, I took some trips to Canada where we would canoe, hike, and camp out in a park. *[pause]*

It was a long, strenuous journey as we took a week to canoe across large lakes and then carry backpacks and canoes over miles of land. *[pause]*

Your arms got weak and tired, the bugs bit like crazy, and the end of the trail or lake always seemed to not arrive soon enough. *[pause]*

There were difficult, long paths, changes in weather, and wild animals roaming around.

That’s a little like the Israelites traveling to Jerusalem. *[pause]*

They had to leave the safety and comfort of their home to travel 3 times a year to Jerusalem for the required, annual feasts.

And if you lived far away from Jerusalem, this would be a hard and risky thing to do. *[pauseee]*

There was the long journey, of course, and all that comes along with traveling far: the fatigue, the effort, and the perseverance.

But there were also wild animals along the way, and the threat of robbers constantly on your mind. *[pause]*

Who knows what hardship you could meet on your way? *[pause]*

It's not like today where we just jump into our car and zoom off to some far away place...

The dangers ahead and the resulting fear within could easily overwhelm them.

But this is what they could hope in—the Lord, who called them to make this journey, would help them on their way. *[pauseeee]*

Whatever the Lord calls us to do, He helps us to do — do you believe that? *[pauseeee]*

It's in this psalm that we find this help that's available, and so we need to...

I. Look up, help is there! (1–2)

There's a question that we sometimes hear from others, and it's, "Do you need help?" *[pause]*

Maybe it's while you're shopping and the employee asks you, "Do you need help with something?"

Or maybe it's a friend or family member, who sees you struggling with a project. *[pauseeee]*

How do you respond to that question? *[pause]*

Some people are quick to admit that they need help, but others don't answer in the affirmative, even though they need help.

And one reason for this is that we don't always like to admit that we need help. *[pause]*

Sometimes it's a pride thing, or an attitude of self-reliance.

We want to be able to do everything ourselves, and to say, "I did that myself." *[pause]*

But self-sufficiency and faith cannot coexist – they are diametrically opposed to each other.

For just look at verses 1 and 2, and consider what the posture of the psalmist is. *[pause]*

Does he consider himself self-sufficient? *[pause]*

No way, for in verses 1 and 2 the psalmist admitted his need and said, "From where does my help come?" *[pause]*

He understood that he needed *help*.

And before we can look up, we must first recognize our need. *[pauseee]*

You see, the great comfort of this psalm can only come *after* you acknowledge your need for help.

You must be willing to say, “I need help!” *[pauseeee]*

Are you willing to say that, or is your pride in the way?

Is everything about just you mustering up the courage and ability to do things, or are you humbly willing to admit, “I’m needy”? *[pauseeee]*

Now there are two kinds of help. *[pause]*

Sometimes when we think of help, we think of the help of a helping hand.

This is the kind of help that you could do without, if it came down to it. *[pause]*

You have to wash the car, so you go to your 8 year old son and say, “Did you want to *help me* wash the car?” *[pause]*

Your son’s help is nice, and it may make the car washing go faster and easier, but it isn’t *essential*...

You could still wash the car without him. *[pauseeee]*

Sometimes we view God’s help in that way, as like a helping hand. *[pause]*

We think of His help as just a little nice side benefit that’s helpful, when we need it, but otherwise, we act like we can do life on our own.

That’s not the kind of help that the psalmist is talking about, for there’s another kind of help.

There’s *saving help*. *[pause]*

This is the kind of help that you absolutely need, or else you won’t make it. *[pauseeee]*

When someone is drowning, what do they cry out? They cry out, “Help!” *[pause]*

They need help, or else they will die.

That’s the type of help that God provides and that we need...

We *need* God’s help—it’s not an optional thing, like a helping hand—but necessary, like saving help. *[pauseeee]*

So do you recognize your need for help in life? *[pause]*

The psalmist, on his journey to Jerusalem, knew that he needed protective help.

For there were dangers looming around every corner, over every hill, and in every valley.

[pause]

The terrain, elements, wild animals, robbers, or hunger and thirst all posed as possible dangers for the journeying Israelite. *[pause]*

There was also uncertainty ahead, and tiredness within—no wonder he looked for help! *[pause]*

Likewise, as Christians living in this world, we are on a journey.

We face a lot of trials, dangers, and hardships along the way. *[pauseeee]*

There's, of course, the physical dangers and trials that we face...

We get sick, hurt, or exposed to something dangerous. *[pause]*

Then there's the threat of other people, who may be against us. *[pause]*

We also encounter certain things because of our natural human limitations...

We don't know everything, so uncertainty looms ahead.

We get weak and we become tired in life. *[pause]*

Anyone ever felt worn out and tired? *[pauseeee]*

And then you add onto all of this the spiritual dangers that we face as the world tries to conform us into its mold...¹

... We are tempted to give into our sinful passions, and Satan prowls around like a lion, seeking people to devour.² *[pauseeee]*

We are people who need help.

And this psalm shows us not only *that* help is available for our journey in life, but it also shows us *where* this help is found. *[paueeese]*

So where's it found? Look up! *[pause]*

Not to the ceiling, or to some generic higher being, but to the Lord. *[pause]*

These verses teach us that the Lord is the help we need.

The psalmist says, "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." *[pauseeee]*

¹ Romans 12:2.

² A reference to 1 Peter 5:8.

Now why does he talk about looking to the hills?

Well the word for ‘hills’ here can also mean ‘mountains’. [pause]

It was mountains that were seen as the place of deities, and we see that it was at mountains that God often met His people in the Old Testament. [pauseeee]

Mountains were sort of seen as the place where heaven met earth, and the Temple was sometimes called God’s “holy mountain”. [pauseeee]

So the psalmist seems to be on his journey, and as fear starts to arise from all of the possible dangers ahead, he says, “I lift up my eyes to the hills.” [pause]

He focuses His eyes on the place of help, God’s holy mountain.

It’s the place that represents God and His presence, so he focuses His eyes on hope. [pauseeeee]

Where do *you* look for help and hope? [pause]

Your true and ultimate help doesn’t come from within, it doesn’t come from politicians, psychologists, or physicians.

It comes from the Heavens, so look up! [pauseeee]

We often look *around us* in fear, as we see all of the swirling perils around us.

We tend to *look in*, trying to come up with a solution, but we come back lacking.

We sometimes even *look down* in despair.

But we must look *up*—not around, in, or down—but up! [pauseeee]

The one who is up, is high up, for He’s the One who made Heaven and Earth, and that’s why the psalmist points out that his help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. [pauseeee]

What else could be more encouraging to hear!?! [pause]

If the Creator is my help, then who higher or better is there? [pauseeee]

The Creator God is *all-powerful*.

Just look all around you in Creation and marvel at His power...

The One who made the sun and moon, the one who made our bodies, the one who made the mountains and the valleys, the one who made everything is our help. [pauseeee]

Since He made everything that exists, then without a shadow of a doubt, He can help you now in your circumstances. [pause]

His power is unparalleled and unlimited, and God can use that immeasurable power in any circumstances that He wants...

The all-powerful Creator is your help. *[pauseeee]*

Creation also shows us His *wisdom*. *[pause]*

Look at the intricate details of everything, look at the way that He has made the world to be orderly and to continue functioning. *[pause]*

The things we make break down and are thrown away, but His creation was made with wisdom, and even though it is now under a curse, it continues to function. *[pause]*

He made the creation in wisdom, and His wisdom is available for you. *[pauseeee]*

Being the Creator also shows us His *love*. *[pause]*

We see His love in that He made us and chose to have a relationship with us. *[pause]*

We see His love in that He has provided us with good things in this world...

He has given us each other, marriage, children, the ability to work hard, the ability to create, food, water, animals, beautiful sunsets, and brains to learn...

Every good thing in this world is evidence of His love. *[pause]*

Don't you think His help then will be *loving* help? *[pause]*

He won't help us begrudgingly. *[pause]*

He won't be stingy with His help.

He won't stomp His feet and say, "Fine, here you go."

There's no rolling of the eyes, or huffing in frustration...

No, the loving Creator comes to us with loving help. *[pauseeee]*

Being the Creator also reminds us that He is *all-glorious*. *[pause]*

Just look at the glory of the Creation around us, and you can't help but be pointed to the glory of the Creator. *[pause]*

The splendor of a sunset, the grandeur of a mountain, the magnificence of the sea, the beauty of the skies, the intricacies of the human body, and so on...

...All display the Creator's immeasurable glory that those things are only small glimpses of. *[pauseeeee]*

Just think: that glorious Creator brings help to little us. *[pause]*

He's so high up, amazing, glorious, powerful, and wise — and yet He has chosen to *come* to help us. *[pause]*

Our help must *come* to us from the Maker, and praise Him, He lovingly came to help us, most wonderfully in the person and work of Jesus Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Our help comes from the Maker of Heaven and Earth.

His power, wisdom, love, and glory will all be used as He comes to help us. *[pause]*

He is and has all of these things, and He can utilize any or all of these things in aiding you.

So now don't those dangers, fears, worries, and circumstances all seem a lot smaller now when you bring the Creator into the equation? *[pauseeeee]*

Where's your focus? *[pause]*

What are your eyes on? *[pause]*

Are you looking around in fear, inward in self-reliance, or even down in despair?

No longer put your gaze there, but look up! *[pause]*

Repeat to yourself, "Where does my help come from?" and answer it to yourself time and time again with: "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."! *[pause]*

Say it, say it, say it again to yourself.

Sing it, if you want.

But no matter which way you do it, do it—quiet your raging fears with the calming power of this truth. *[pause]*

Help is available, help is ready, it's waiting to bring your amazing peace, if only you would *look up*. *[pauseeeeeee]*

After saying where his help is found, the psalmist expands upon what this help looks like in verses 3–8.

And so through these verses, you can...

II. Look at the help from your Keeper. (3–8)

Look down at your Bible, and just take a quick scan over verses 3–8. *[pauseeee]*

Do you notice how many times it says the word 'keep' or 'keeper'? *[pause]*

Now maybe your version says “watch” or “protect”—it’s the same idea. *[pause]*

Six times the word ‘keep’ is used, and it’s all the same Hebrew word — so what does that tell us? *[pause]*

Well if you repeat something 6 times in a short amount of time, then you really want to get a point across, don’t you?

And the psalmist really wants us to know that God is our keeper, who keeps us. *[pauseeee]*

Now it’s important to know what this word ‘keep’ means in the original language, and it has the meaning of: protecting, watching, preserving, and guarding. *[pause]*

So it’s the idea of keeping something safe. *[pauseeee]*

In soccer, a goalie is sometimes called a “keeper”, and their mission is to guard and protect that goal. *[pause]*

They are in charge of it, and so must not let the ball go into it. *[pause]*

That’s the idea here in this psalm—God is our keeper.

He protects, guards, and watches over us. *[pauseeee]*

Isn’t that so comforting to know? *[pause]*

The truth is that God guards and protects His people, and that means that if you are one His people, He guards and protects you. *[pause]*

He cares about His own.

We are not insignificant to Him.

He doesn’t ignore us, nor neglect us.

Rather, He is our Keeper. *[pauseeee]*

But what does this *keeping* look like?...

Well the psalmist says that “He will not let your foot be moved.” *[pauseeee]*

The Lord keeps us by making sure that we do not slip and fall. *[pause]*

Now sometimes when we hear of our foot slipping, we sometimes think of a little slip as we walk on a hike, where nothing bad even happens. *[pause]*

That doesn’t seem to be what the psalmist is talking about.

Rather, this slipping seems to be a *major* slip that leads to disaster. *[pause]*

It's like the slipping of a hiker, who slips off of a high rock, and tumbles down to his death.
[pause]

God is saying that He guards us to our destination, we will not slip and never make it.

God gives us sure footing on life's journey. [pauseeee]

For those who believe in Christ, they will not slip and fall eternally. [pause]

Jesus says in John 17, "While I was with them, I *kept* them in your name, which you have given me. I have *guarded them*, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."³ [pauseee]

The Bible tells us that true believers are kept safe in the Father's hand,⁴ and guarded by His power through faith for salvation.⁵

And that's why the psalmist can say that it's the Lord who "keeps your life". [pause]

He preserves our life, the eternal life that we have because of Christ, the life that truly matters, the life that *lasts*.

This is why Paul can say, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."⁶ [pauseeee]

The Lord guards our eternal life, He makes sure that we do not slip and fall away from Him.

In fact, the psalmist even calls Him our *shade*. [pauseeee]

His protective shade shields us and refreshes us. [pause]

He's on our right hand, and so He's not going anywhere, but wherever you go, He goes, and there you can find shade. [pauseeee]

We don't have to fear!

Jesus has promised to always be with us. [pause]

He has promised God's Fatherly care for us, for we are more valuable than the birds of the air.
[pause]

God has promised to supply our needs, and to keep us from stumbling and to present us blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.⁷ [pauseeee]

³ John 17:12 (italics is mine).

⁴ A reference to John 10:29.

⁵ A reference to 1 Peter 1:5.

⁶ Romans 8:38–39.

⁷ See Matt. 28:20, Matt. 6:25–34, Phil. 4:19, & Jude 24 (in that order).

We can rest in the fact that our eternal life cannot be touched by anything, and we can also rest in the knowledge that even our physical life is in His hands. *[pause]*

God will not let anything happen to us that is outside of His knowledge, control, and will. *[pause]*

Our days are written in His book, the number of our months is with the Lord, and our times are in His hand.⁸ *[pauseeee]*

You can trust God with your life. *[pauseeee]*

He will never be guilty of negligence, carelessness, or inattentiveness.

In fact, that's why the psalmist says, "He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." *[pauseeee]*

God doesn't sleep! *[pause]*

Our keeper is not off taking a nap somewhere.

He's not snoozing away, He's not too tired to help you, He's not dozing off in a recliner. *[pause]*

It doesn't matter what time of day—He's watching, keeping, guarding you! *[pauseeeee]*

There is a special comfort that comes from knowing that our God never sleeps. *[pause]*

It means that He will always be faithful, no matter what time or what day it is. *[pause]*

It means that He's never caught off guard, for even in the night, He's the ever awake, ever alert Night Watchman. *[pauseeee]*

When you are sleeping, He's guarding. *[pause]*

When you are slumbering, snoozing, or even snoring—He's awake. *[pause]*

He needs no rest, He needs no sleep, He never gets tired. *[pause]*

His eyelids are not drooping.

And that means that even when you are awake at 3 in the morning laying in bed, can't sleep, struggling over something that feels so unbearable, and no one else is awake...

...You can know without a shadow of a doubt that God's awake and He's with you. *[pauseeee]*

When I was a teenager, we had a certain man who drove our school van to and from sports games. *[pause]*

⁸ See Psalm 139:16, Job 14:5, & Psalm 31:15 (in that order).

Well this guy was notorious for his eyelids drooping, as he drove us home from games. *[pause]*

I would sit behind him and watch as his eyelids started to close, and I was worried for my life!
[pause]

Sometimes when I sat behind him and I saw his eyes starting to close, I would try to make some sort of noise, or start talking to try to wake him up. *[pause]*

He was not a good guard of our lives, for his tiredness would start to overcome him.

Well know this, fellow brother or sister in Christ—the Lord is not like that! *[pause]*

You don't have to try to keep Him awake, as His eyelids get heavy.

You don't have to worry about His guard being down, as He drifts off to sleep.

He *never* sleeps, so you *never* have to worry that you won't be kept safe by Him! *[pauseeeee]*

Not only does the all-powerful Creator guard us, but this all-powerful Creator never sleeps...

His guarding, protecting, keeping work is always potent and it's always "on".

And that's why the psalmist ends by saying in verse 8, "The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore." *[pauseeeee]*

In Biblical times, the people would leave the walled city to go work in the fields, and then they would come back to rest and sleep.

And that's why they could talk about their "going out" and their "coming in". *[pause]*

So basically, the psalmist is saying that God's keeping power is with them everywhere they go, and at every moment of the day. *[pause]*

From sunup to sundown, God keeps you. *[pause]*

As you go off to work, and when you return home. *[pause]*

When you take a trip and when you come back...

No matter what you are doing (and when), God is there and He's guarding you.

And He will do this "from this time forth and forevermore". *[pauseeeee]*

So what are we to do in light of all of this?...

Look to the Lord, who is your great help on life's journey!

Life's journey is hard. *[pause]*

There are a lot of dangers and adversities.

It's difficult, strenuous, and taxing. *[pause]*

Fears could easily overtake us on the way, and despair could consume us. *[pause]*

Our faith is tested and tried—it's stretched thin at times. *[pause]*

We feel our need, we feel our weakness, we feel our incapability, and we look for help, but *where* do you look for help? *[pause]*

Do you look inward, and try to muster up the strength, courage, and answers?

Know that this will not do, for you are limited and weak at times. *[pause]*

Do you look around you, and try to find the solution in the world?

That's a fool errand, for the world proves time and time again that it doesn't have the key, for just look at how many problems there still continue to be. *[pauseeee]*

So what should you do instead?...

Look up, help is *there*. *[pause]*

The Lord is our Help—He is our Keeper.

And our Keeper is the all-powerful, all loving Creator, who never sleeps.

He guards and keeps us always, everywhere, forever. *[pauseee]*

We never have to worry and wonder, “Where does my help come from?”

But we can confidently say to ourselves, “From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”! *[pauseeee]*

You are kept by the Keeper; you are kept safe in the Lord's care.

What a comfort! What encouragement! What peace we can have knowing this!

And that means that you can face *right now* with the Lord's help, and you can face *the future* with the Lord's help, and every moment in between. *[pauseeeee]*

As we think about the Lord's help, how can we be so confident in it? *[pause]*

Certainly because He's the Creator, who never sleeps, but also because He has already helped us in the greatest way possible. *[pause]*

His help came to us in the form of a baby, as He sent His only Son, Jesus, who took on flesh. *[pause]*

He was born in this world, lived the perfect life that we couldn't live, died in our place, and then rose again, and ascended back to Heaven. *[pause]*

He accomplished the work of redemption for us—now I'd say that's *help*...

It's saving, redeeming, life-giving, forgiveness-extending, hope-providing help. *[pauseeee]*

In and through Christ, we, who were rebels and enemies of God, and who were guilty before the holy God—have now been forgiven, reconciled back to Him, and given eternal life. *[pauseeee]*

Because we have simply repented of our sins and trusted in Jesus Christ's work on our behalf...

Our position as beloved children can never be moved. *[pause]*

We are kept from the power of the evil one, and eternal death cannot strike us, for our eternal life is kept in His hands. *[pauseeee]*

If you have never repented of your sins and trusted that it's Jesus, who saves you, then do that today, do it right now.

And if you have trusted in Christ alone, then know and remember that your eternal life is secure.

It cannot be touched, and your physical life is guarded by His will, until He says, "Come home." *[pauseeeee]*

Will you look to your Lord and Savior always? *[pause]*

Look up with faith, look up with love, and look up with hope. *[pauseeee]*

For the psalmist, he lifted up his eyes to the hills, and we lift our eyes to the hill of Calvary, where we see the cross. *[pause]*

We lift our eyes to the tomb and see it empty. *[pause]*

And we lift our eyes to the skies, eagerly awaiting His return.