

Where Does My Help Come From?

~Psalm 121

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Hi everyone. Glad to see you made it through another week. By the grace of God, we carry on. Amidst the ongoing pandemic, it's easy to forget some of the regular dates that come up on the calendar. Today is Palm Sunday. So this is normally the day we commemorate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. Crowds of people hailed Him as king and cried out "Hosanna" meaning Lord save us. They also cut off palm off leaves and spread them on the road. Crowds commonly did this when their king arrived in their city.

Some of the crowd that day had travelled to Jerusalem for the upcoming Passover Sacrifice and Festival. Jews from all over the world came for this feast. Ancient travel was way different than it is today. Most people walked. So it took a lot longer to get from point A to point B. Some rode an animal or rode in a cart pulled by an animal. But they were often accompanied by others who walked. So travelers didn't move very fast.

This made them vulnerable to robbers and wild animals. On top of this, Jerusalem is surrounded on 3 sides by hills or mountains. Traveling through hills presents more places to hide or corners to turn. Robbers could attack travelers from behind or wait in ambush at a spot where the road narrowed. So traveling could involve a lot of danger.

But over the centuries, it appears that a collection of songs developed for pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. They were likely composed by previous travelers who experienced the same fears and anxieties of later travelers. So the pilgrims could sing or pray these songs on their way. They were collected and put into the Psalter or collection of Psalms. We now know them as Psalms 120-134. Each Psalm contains the title "A song of Ascents." We think this refers to the journey that would ultimately end with ascending or climbing to the temple mount in Jerusalem.

So I want to invite you to take in this Psalm with 2 sets of ears today. First, imagine that you are a traveler on your way to Jerusalem for the Passover. Imagine that you look at the mountains surrounding the city. You will have to walk through them. You don't know what awaits. You're concerned about the safety of your family. Try listening from that perspective.

Second, listen to this Psalm from your current circumstances. Bring all your worries, fears, anxieties and concerns that you carry with you today. Let this Psalm bring God's word to you. So listen to Psalm 121 and see if this might have encouraged you on your way.

Psalm 121 (ESV)

A Song of Ascents.

121 I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come?

² My help comes from the LORD,

who made heaven and earth.

³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵ The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.

⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

⁸ The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

The Psalmist begins by looking up to the hills or mountains. But we're not sure if he feels good or bad about them. He might see threat and danger by the hills. He might think about stories that he's heard of assaulted travelers or robberies. But he may look at the hills with hope. Maybe they signal that his journey is almost over. Maybe they remind him of the one who rules from high.

His looking up generates the question that governs this Psalm. **Where does my help come from? (1)** He looks for help. But what kind of help? Help is assistance, support, aid or relief. In this context, he likely asks for help in the form of protection and guidance. He desires to safely reach the end of his journey. Where is he going to get this help? He can't afford personal guards. He can't fly over the mountains. He can't avoid going through them. Where will he get help?

We can use this question for our lives today. One writer puts it like this. *The psalm was written because the long and lonely road to Jerusalem was dangerous — and because the long and often lonely road to heaven is also dangerous. The vulnerability and fragility in these verses describe the world we live in today, the world in which Satan prowls and sin tempts and death lurks. We still feel our need to be kept.*¹

After 3 weeks of isolation, shut down, layoffs and cancellations, we might be asking a similar question. Where does our help come from? The rest of the Psalm answers this question for us.

Where does our help come from?

First we see that our help comes from **The maker of heaven and earth**. Verse 2 – My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.” In just one phrase, we gain massive encouragement. Instead of going forward alone, we have someone who will help us. But he's not just anyone. He's not just a person willing to help with good intentions but no

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-lord-can-and-will-keep-you>

resources. He's greater than the richest person on earth. He's greater than the most powerful king on earth. Hills and mountains don't threaten Him.

He *made* the mountains. He *made* the heavens and the earth. He created the whole universe. This helper is not just another human companion who will join us for this journey. This helper holds the creative power of the Almighty God. If there is anyone who can help at all, then it is God. Trust in God will set this traveler on the way. When we remember that our helper is maker of heaven and earth, we gain strength to keep going in the face of everything. The Lord has unlimited power with which to help us. Maybe this is why we gain peace or strength as we travel through the mountains, or watch the power of the ocean. So remember first that your help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth.

Next, the Psalm gives us another picture of our helper. He is **The shepherd who doesn't sleep (3-4)**. This comes from verses 3 and 4. I know that the word shepherd does not appear in these verses. But the activities described match up well with a shepherd's duties. Verse 3 begins by saying "he will not let your foot be moved" or "He will not let your foot slip." It was the shepherd's job to ensure that he or she chose paths that sheep could manage. If they had to go on a steeper path, the shepherd might stand at the riskiest spot and actually hold the animal's foot from falling or slipping. This is a comforting image of the Lord's care for us. When we travel life's path, unseen dangers and threats await us. But the Lord can see all. So He can guide and direct us away from those dangers and keep us from slipping.

Verse 3 and 4 then continue – "He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." Shepherds needed to stay awake through the night to protect their sheep from predators. Ideally, they would get their sheep into a sheep pen or fold which was an enclosure surrounded by a rock wall. Then the shepherd would sleep or stay in the doorway so no predator would enter. But even then, a predator might try to get into the fold through a crack in the wall or by jumping the wall. So shepherds would take turns to maintain watch through the night.

We can't comprehend someone who never sleeps or falls asleep on the job. But this is part of the greatness of God. He has the supernatural ability to never fall asleep. He doesn't even doze off. If there is a difference between slumber and sleep then slumber is the dozing part and sleep is the completely unconscious state. But the Lord falls into neither of these. He remains ever watchful.

So think about that in your life over the past 3 weeks. The Lord was present when you've gotten every bit of news that has affected your life. The Lord kept guiding you through every step you needed to take – whether you needed to completely change your travel plans, or work from home. The Lord kept watching and was present during every mental meltdown or stressful time. Sometimes, we just need to breathe and remind ourselves "my shepherd never sleeps."

So where does our help come from? The Lord who is the maker of heaven and earth; the shepherd who never sleeps and **The keeper who constantly guards. (5-8)** The word translated "keep" shows up four times in verses 5-8. Keep means to guard, watch over, attend to carefully. Notice how the Lord's protection spreads out further with every

verse. So it starts in verse 5. “The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand.” So a keeper was someone who watched over something or someone valuable. The Lord not only observes. He actively protects. His protection is a very present and practical help. He is our shade on our right hand. Why would we need shade on or at our right hand? The right hand represented power and activity. Remember ancient Israel had a hot climate. If you were not shaded during the scorching middle eastern daylight sun, you could be weakened or inactive. But the Lord is our shade at our right hand to keep us going through the day.

Then verse 6 – “The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.” Now we understand how a hot sun can weaken us during the day. But we don’t really get the moon reference in our culture. I have never gone out at night and wondered if the moon is going to strike me down. But some ancient people associated the moon with disease. If you got caught in moonlight you might get struck with disease. Or some believed that when the moon was out, all the powers of darkness were more active. So people felt vulnerable to their attacks. Moon struck – which refers to going mad or insane. But whatever this moon reference specifically meant, notice the expansion of the Lord’s protection. It moves from shade at our right hand to protection day & night.

Then comes verse 7. “The Lord will keep you from all evil or all harm. He will keep your life.” So first notice the further spread of God’s protection. He will not only protect from daytime sun strikes or night time moon strikes. He will protect from all evil or harm.

But doesn’t this verse overpromise? We *do* face evil and harm in life. We struggle against the “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” We *have experienced* the devastating impact of evil and harm in our lives. So either the Lord failed to keep us from harm or the verse overpromises. Or are there other possibilities.

One commentator notes that in light of other scriptures, to be kept from all evil does not imply a cushioned life but a well-armed one. Psalm 23 expects the dark valley but can face it. Yet I think the key is in our understanding of the word “life.” “The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.” We usually think of life as our physical existence on the earth. So the time between the day we’re born and the day we die is our lives. But life can mean more than our time on earth. A part of us that never dies – our souls. If we see life in verse 7 as our souls, then it remains accurate. Yes, we can suffer from harm from evil during our lives on earth. But once we come to Christ, the Lord has our souls. He will never let us go. We will never be outside His protection. He will see our souls even through death to life eternal with Him. So in this sense He keeps our souls from evil & harm overwhelming them.

So the Lord’s keeping and ever watchful care moves from shade at our right hand, to day and night protection to ultimate protection over our souls from evil. Then in verse 8, the protection expands even further. “The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever more.” This basically says the Lord will watch over

everything you do, all the time for all of eternity. The Lord will watch over you when you go out and when you come home. The Lord will watch over you every moment of every day.

So where does our help come from? The Lord – the maker of heaven and earth; the shepherd who never sleeps; the keeper who constantly guards. Jesus demonstrated His help and concern by coming and being with us. Then He sent us the Helper, the Holy Spirit. So God has already demonstrated His ongoing help and concern for us. He will continue to do so through the rest of this crisis and the rest of our earthly lives into eternity.

Since we have the Lord's great help, we must constantly ask for His help. So ask for your family's protection. Ask God to bring to mind people who could use a call or a letter. Pray about your current employment situation. If you've been laid off, offer up your frustration or disappointment with that. Then ask for the Lord to direct you to where and what He has for you next. If you're a business owner and wondering about your business' survival, talk to the Lord about it. Remind yourself of His promises. Lift up your frustrations or losses. Be honest with God.

Since we're all spending much more time at home, ask for help to be more tolerant and patient with those you live with. Pray for them. Kids, pray for your parents as they navigate this. Take the church directory and pray through it, even if you don't know the people.

Husbands pray for your wives – especially if they have to adjust to you being home more. Wives pray for your husbands. Pray for single parents who fulfill the role of Dad and Mom for their kids. Pray for young people who are limited from hanging out with friends and participating in a face to face school community. Ask for the Lord to provide for them and give them a sense of His presence in moments of loneliness. Ask the Lord to provide summer jobs for those who thought they already had that arranged. Ask him for help. Pray for our seniors who may feel more isolated and lonely. If you have extra time, why not use it to fervently pray your lost family members or friends. Ask the Lord to use this extraordinary time to break through their heart hardness.

Maybe you're listening or watching today and have never asked for help from the Lord. Maybe you thought you needed to have your life together or you had to reach a certain level of goodness or that you had to learn the right phrases before you could pray. But the Lord knows our weaknesses and failings. He has reached out to us in His great mercy. He wants to bring us under His protective care. He is willing to forgive us for the wrong we've done. He even sent His own Son to pay for our wrongdoing on the cross. But He won't force anyone to come to Him.

He simply knocks on the door of your heart. He asks if He can come in. If you say yes to that or say "I'm putting the trust of my life onto you Lord rather than myself and my own way," God will immediately act and bring you into His family and under His protection. You can begin praying without ceasing today. So if you have never received God into your life, you can pray something like this. "Lord God, I need you. I confess living my life without you. I now see how much I need

you. I put the trust of my life upon Christ and all He has done. I ask you to save me and bring me into your family." God will come in and bring you into His family as His child.

When we need help, we must call out to the Lord. So let's do that now.