

## **Psalm 121 -- God will guard and protect you**

Where is the first place you look when you are in trouble or don't know what to do? Do you look to friends, family or the medical profession? There is nothing wrong in looking for help in all these directions. But the first place the psalmist looks is upwards.

Regret looks back. Fear looks around. Worry looks in. Faith looks up.

The psalmist looks up, 'I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from?' (v.1). Your help, strength and protection come from the maker of the universe: 'My strength comes from God, who made heaven, and earth, and mountains' (v.2, MSG). 'He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will not slumber' (v.3).

This beautiful psalm speaks of the Lord's love for you and his protection over your life.

'God's your Guardian,  
right at your side to protect you...

God guards you from every evil,

he guards your very life.

He guards you when you leave and when you return,  
he guards you now, he guards you always' (vv.5–8,  
MSG).

I have sometimes used this psalm as a prayer for our family or friends who are facing difficulties in their lives.

The promise of this psalm is that the Lord will protect you from all ultimate harm. The psalmist could not have known that this is made possible through the 'once for all' sacrifice of Jesus, which means that one day he will come 'to bring salvation for those who are waiting for him' (Hebrews 9:28).

Prayer

Lord, thank you that you watch over me day and night.  
Thank you that you watch over my coming and going  
both now and for evermore.

<https://bible.alpha.org/en/classic/313/index.html>

### **John 3: 1-17 -- Confront people lovingly**

Confronting those who are in a position of weakness is relatively easy and sometimes cowardly. Confronting

those in positions of power over us, through their job, status or wealth, takes great courage.

Jesus was the master at confrontation. He never shied away from it. On the other hand, he never acted out of any motive but love.

Nicodemus was a very powerful man; a moral and upright Pharisee and 'a member of the Jewish ruling council' (v.1). Jesus was undaunted by his position. He lovingly confronts Nicodemus with his need to be 'born again' (v.3) – to start anew, leave behind past hurts, habits and old ways. The message of Jesus is about transformation.

Nicodemus needs to be born again of water and the Spirit (v.5). The outward washing must be accompanied by the inward dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

We do not see God physically now. But we see evidence of God. Like the wind, we cannot see it but we can see its effect on the trees and the leaves – 'the invisible moving the visible' (v.5, MSG).

Likewise, Jesus says you cannot see the Holy Spirit but you can see the impact on people's lives: 'The person

who takes shape within is formed by something you can't see and touch – the Spirit – and becomes a living spirit' (v.6, MSG).

Jesus lovingly challenges Nicodemus about his beliefs. Using the image of the snake in the desert (from Numbers 21), Jesus predicts that he himself will be lifted up on the cross so 'that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life' (v.15).

'Believes' means 'trusts'. Every time we enter a relationship we take a risk. All relationships require trust. Trust in a dynamic relationship grows and endures.

Jesus teaches about God's love. The Greek word used for 'love' in verse 16, agape, appears forty-four times in John's Gospel alone. This verse sums up John's Gospel and, indeed, the whole of the New Testament: 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (v.16).

There is a God and his love is wide enough to embrace all humankind without distinction or exception. It is not a vague or sentimental love. God's love is of immeasurable

intensity, demonstrated by his willingness to sacrifice his only son for you and me.

The world is in such a mess. People often ask, 'Why doesn't God do something?' The answer is that he has. He came in the person of his Son, Jesus, to die on a cross and rise again for you. Jesus understands about suffering. He suffered for us and he suffers alongside us.

Many people have ceased to believe in life after death. But Jesus promised that we would 'have eternal life and [actually] live for ever!' (v.15, AMP). This life is not the end. There is hope beyond the grave. Jesus offers you eternal life.

There is a big difference between confrontation and condemnation. Jesus confronted people, but he did not condemn them. Jesus did not come to condemn you but to save you from condemnation (vv.17). Like Jesus, you and I need to bring a message – not of condemnation, but the good news of salvation. To save means to pull a person out of danger, to liberate, to open the doors of a prison, to heal, to make whole.

We do not want people to see the shadow areas in us. We hide all the dark inside us behind our apparent

goodness. Sin hates light. When we sin, we want to avoid the light of Jesus. We do not want our evil deeds to be exposed. But Jesus came to confront the darkness. We may be afraid or ashamed. It may be extremely difficult for us. But we too must confront darkness in our lives and seek to live in the light of Christ – who loves you just as you are.

Martin Luther King said, 'Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.'

Lord, thank you for the example of Jesus. Help me to live in the light and to have the courage to speak the truth in love.

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