

Psalm 121

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[0 : 0 0] Friends, I'm truly grateful for this opportunity to just open God's word with you all this morning. Pastor Daniel and Christine have been friends of my wife Abby and I for many years. And actually quite a few of you all over here, we've journeyed together through young adults.

And it's been really cool to see how God in his mercy and his kindness has brought you all together to be in ministry, caring for the people in Kanata, West Area. And so truly, it's an honor and a privilege to open God's word this morning.

And so we'll be looking at Psalm 121 that Miss Lynn just read for us this morning. And we're going to unpack that together. So allow me to pray for our time together, if that's all right.

And then we'll go right into our message in Psalm 121. So Father, we come before you just truly grateful for just this wonderful Sunday morning, this opportunity to breathe in new mercies, breathe in this opportunity of just your grace in our lives.

And Father, we truly are grateful that we can gather and worship you truly and in spirit and in truth and be exhorted by your word. And so Father, help us to just not be just listeners and hearers of this word, but be doers of it as well.

[1 : 0 6] So allow us to be molded, to be shaped by the psalmist and his encouragement to us when we are looking for help. And so Father, thank you so much.

And we pray this in your name. Amen. Amen. Well, as Sam mentioned, it was up until April, Ottawa was home for my wife and I. And just this past July was when we made our big move to southern Ontario.

And we now reside in Hamilton, but I work in a Christian nonprofit called Hope Story that's based in Cambridge. And so what used to be a five-minute commute from my home to the Met has now become a 45-minute commute.

And it's actually been quite enjoyable because I didn't realize how much I liked driving and listening to different podcasts, sometimes just even driving in quiet. And so it was one of those commutes where one time I was driving and I spotted somebody on the shoulder, hazards on, hood popped open, and they were clearly in trouble.

As I was, unfortunately, I couldn't pull over and be the good Samaritan, you know, in that context because I had to rush to work. But that recalled a memory of mine when I was stuck on Merrillville Road.

[2 : 1 2] This was a situation where my battery had entirely fried, so I couldn't even, like, put my four-ways on. My phone was about to die, so, like, I was about to call Abby, and unfortunately, that didn't happen either.

And it was quite stressful. It was one of the worst things that I was feeling, like, just this feeling of, like, not knowing where I can turn to for help. You know, now, that was just for a car.

What about when our life circumstances changes down and life breaks down? What about when, like, our financial struggles and the pressures of it keep mounting upon us? Or medical news that come back to us and are not in favor and seem confusing?

What about the people that you counted on ended up letting you down? In our passage this morning, Psalm 121 asked that exact question of us, where does my help come from?

And I truly believe that it is a good question for us to wrestle with, because this question is not just for people who are in crisis. It's actually a question for every one of us to wrestle with, because sooner or later, we know our path will get rough.

[3 : 17] Our path, like, leading to our eternal home where God has called us to, is not always going to be smooth. It's an uphill path. It's uncertain. And sometimes it's dangerous as well.

And so thousands of years ago, when the psalm was written, it was a psalm that was begging this question to be asked quite regularly. You know, Psalm 121 is one of those questions that's a psalm that was a song of ascent that the pilgrims used to sing at least three times a year during their pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

You know, these songs that were from Psalm 120 all the way to 150 were a compilation of these psalms that were meant for God's people to be singing as they were traveling to worship God himself.

And, you know, while this trip that they were embarking on was a dangerous one, and so this was an opportunity for them to just keep their eyes fixated upon him as they ride or walk for kilometers upon kilometers.

There were no real roads, right? And so, because roads came later on, but they were just these well-worn path across the valleys. And these pilgrims who were going on this pilgrimage often were quite uncertain of this journey to Jerusalem.

[4 : 31] They often used to have this opportunity where they were uncertain if somebody was going to jump in or not. But this pilgrimage that was called for them to do was actually mandated by God himself that can be found in 1 Kings chapter 8.

In verses 10 and 11, God actually told the Israelites for them to go, to come where his presence was. And that was because the road was uncertain, and he wanted them to rely on God as well.

You know, Marshall Siegel is a guy, he's a CEO and president of Desiring God, and he wrote this article that has really stuck out with me about this pilgrimage that the Israelites used to do.

And he wrote in this little blog of his, he said, insight into the type of pilgrimage that was required of them.

And this got me thinking, like, you know, Jesus himself would have done this pilgrimage himself as well in his 30-odd years. You know, this, so the song that was meant for the Israelites, that was meant to be sung on rough roads, then can also be sung by us when life is tough as well.

[6 : 03] And not just life when it's tough, can be sung by us as we continue to journey in faith together. And so our psalm, if you, we're going to unpack this together, and verse 1 actually starts with a question that the psalmist is asking of himself.

He's starting in verse 1 by saying, I lift my eyes up to the hill, from where does my help come? You know, on the surface, this might seem like an absurd question, because it's quite rhetorical in some ways.

But in the context of what the psalm is, this is a good question that's being asked. You know, it's possible that the psalmist is looking to the hills in fear, scared of the robbers that might be lurking there.

But the term lift up my eyes is generally a positive one throughout the psalms. You know, Psalm 123, just a couple psalms later in verse 1, it says, To you I lift my eyes, O you who are enthroned in heavens.

You know, you can get a glimpse that it is the psalmist asking to be looking up to the heavens. You know, as such, in Psalm 121, it's definitely possible that the pilgrim is approaching Jerusalem, and he's asking himself this question as he's getting closer, closer to God, asking him, Where does my help come from?

[7 : 15] And that's why this is an important question for us to answer. Where does our help come from? You know, in other ways, we can ask this question, Where do you go get help when you're traveling on a dangerous path?

Where are you turning to help when things are getting rough on your way to your eternal home? Because the reason I'm asking these questions for us to be thinking about is because we need to do an honesty check in our life here.

I read a quote from a family therapist, Jay Haley, who told one of his clients something that has stuck with me, and he said, I don't address problems. I address attempted solutions.

And so for us here this morning, what are the attempted solutions that we are turning to for help? What friends or coping mechanisms are we applying in our lives?

What strategies do we lean on and rely on when things get difficult? This question is worth pondering on is because the answer, how you answer this question, will really ultimately matter.

[8 : 15] And so the truth is, when we get into trouble, our first response, unfortunately, I don't know if it's for you, but for me quite often, I tend to rely on my own self because I'm confident in terms of what I can do.

And so when things get tough, it's easy for me to first try and figure out how to turn and do things my own way. Rather, what I should be doing is turning, kneeling, and praying, and seeking God himself, right?

But unfortunately, that's not our normal posture. We have all kinds of places that we turn to when our life falls apart, when we feel discouraged and disheartened, or even when a problem that we face can't just be solved on our own.

And so in our psalm for this morning, the psalmist is actually answering this question quite simply. He says that my help comes from the Lord. And that's our typical Sunday school answer, isn't it? It's a good answer.

And I wish that that's how we could go to. But what I appreciate about our psalm is that he doesn't just stop by saying that my help comes from the Lord. He actually goes on and continues in the rest of psalm and explains to us why he's the best source of our help.

[9 : 17] Why we should actually go to him for anything, that is. And so he unpacks this idea that Jesus is our helper of his people now and for eternity. But then he goes on to explain why is that the case.

And he gives us three wonderful reasons why God is our best qualified helper in our time of need. So our first one, the first reason why God is our qualified helper is actually found in verse two, where he's showing that God is our best helper because he is the creator.

You know, verse two says, my help comes from the Lord who made the heaven and the earth. Allow me to illustrate this for you because to help you understand what the psalmist is getting at. Have you ever tried calling a customer service call center?

I recently had to do that to transfer my internet service and everything. And it was actually not an easy process because I kept getting transferred over from one department to the other.

Well, it happened three times in total. But by the time the third time happened, it was frustrating because all I wanted was I wanted to get to somebody who was qualified to help me just transfer my service. I wasn't even looking to cancel it.

[10 : 24] You know, and that's what's happening here. The psalmist is trying to help us see what qualifies the Lord to be a good helper. And he's showing us that he's made the heaven and the earth. Like, pause and let that sink in.

The God that you pray to, the God who walks with you, the God who is along with you in life's journey, is the one who spoke galaxies into existence.

You know, scientists have now estimated that the observable universe spans over 90 billion light years, and it continues to grow. And God made all of that effortlessly.

Like, that's amazing. Like, the Milky Way galaxy and the other galaxies around, our own DNA, even the trees and the nature, the hummingbirds, which is one of my favorite birds, he thought of it all up.

And he continues to hold it all together. And so when we cry out to help, we're not just calling a technician or a call center agent. We're actually going straight to the CEO, who's the architect of the existence of our entire universe.

[11 : 27] The one who carved the path of the journey that we're walking on. That's who we have. You know, it's almost like when little kids get afraid and they instinctively call out for mom and dad.

Why? Because for children, mom and dad can do anything and everything in their eyes. That childlike instinct is a good picture of what Psalm 121 calls us to do when life gets confusing, when life gets frightening, or even when it's overwhelming.

God wants us to lift our eyes up to him and cry out to him because he can do anything. There's no problem too small or too big for our creator of our universe.

God can help us in every aspect of our life since he's the creator of everything and he's in everything that we can see. The creator is more than able to help us and the Israelites back then knew that really well because that's what inspired Isaiah to even jot down in Isaiah 40, 28 to 29.

And he puts it this way. It's really, really encouraging. Read this. I mean, hear this. Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

[12 : 36] He does not faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might, he increases strength.

You know, this is why the Israelites could trust God and this is why we can also trust in him as well. He's our creator. We can rely on the one who has the power to meet all our needs in every aspect of our life.

The first reason is that he's our good, he's a good helper because he's our creator. But the second reason is because he has been watchful in our life. He's a good helper because he's watchful.

Verses three and four say that he will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. One of the main themes in our psalm this morning is that God is a watchful God or like God is our keeper.

In some translations, that word keeps repeating. And so the word for guarding, for watching, for protecting occurs six times in the eight verses. And there's never a time that God is not watching his people.

[13 : 43] He pays very careful attention to them. In verses three and four, the psalmist actually contrasts God to the gods of the ancient Near East. In the ancient world, the people believed that gods also needed sleep and rest.

You know, in one Babylonian story, one of the gods got so angry that one of the humans woke them up that he ended up punishing the people by cutting their food supply. But you know, when we approach the God of the Bible and the Hebrew God, he's not like that.

He never sleeps. He never stops watching. You know, it's almost like one of my heroes are night shift nurses, you know. It's almost like that.

Just before we moved down to Hamilton, you start knowing that you're getting older when out of the blue, the Civic calls for a sleep test. You know, that's what happened for me just mid-May. And I had to spend a night at the Civic, hooked up to a machine with a bunch of wires and probes and different things.

And I always knew our nurses were amazing, but that last outing at Civic affirmed that opinion of mine. You know, one of the quiet heroes in our world are the night shift nurses.

[14 : 54] Because while me and other patients were sleeping and the rest of the world was sleeping, they were awake, making sure that my vitals and documenting all my irregular rhythms and all that.

And they were doing that for my sleep as well as for two others. And now magnify that a billion folds. You know, God never clocks out.

He's always watching over you when you're awake or when you're asleep. And the beautiful thing about this is that whether you know it or not, he is going to do that and he's continuing to do that.

And that's why in verse five, he goes on to write, the Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade and your right hand. This isn't general now anymore. It's getting personal.

And you can start seeing that God doesn't care about the abstract, but it's getting intimate. You're not lost in the crowd to him. And that's why he goes on to continue in verse six, where he says, the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

[15 : 53] This is poetic language really to say that God protects you from all kinds of dangers, whether they are visible, invisible, emotional or physical, or even during the day or the night.

He's not just watchful over his people. He is watchful over you personally. You know, he watches over you day and night so that nothing can happen to you outside of his purposes, which are good.

Now hear me, you know, like this doesn't mean that like bad things will never happen because history is full of bad things happening to God's people. But this does mean that God will never stop watching, never stop caring for you.

He'll never stop providing for you according to his will and what you need to walk through this journey of faith. Nobody will ever be able to take away from you what matters most to you because God is faithful to his people.

You know, one of the ways I appreciate why this whole context is Heidelberg Catechism puts it really beautifully. It reads, Providence is the almighty and ever-present powers of God by which He upholds as with His hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty, all things in fact, come to us not by the chance but from His fatherly hand.

[17 : 22] And so why is the Lord a good helper? Because He's the creator. He's watchful over His people. And the third reason the psalmist shows us He's a good helper is because His care extends into eternity.

The final two verses take us beyond our current immediate context and circumstances and reminds us that God will watch over you into the future. The Lord will keep you from all evil.

This is verse 7. The Lord will keep you from all evil. He will keep you, He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

This is not just about now. This is about our entire journey all the way home. God is not just a short-term helper like where He'll help us through the rest of today, tomorrow and Tuesday.

No, He's going to take us all the way through eternity. And the final verse where it says that you're going out and you're coming in is a Hebrew way of saying everything you do all the time.

[18 : 28] This is a blanket promise that God cares. Now, again, this doesn't mean that bad things will not happen. Christians will suffer and sometimes even deeply.

But this means that no evil will ever have the final word in your life. Nothing can snatch you away from God's hand. You know, Psalm 121 describes God as a personal God who's also your personal doctor as well as your counselor, as well as your father.

You know, He's the God who never leaves your side even when the lights can go out, even when everyone else is gone. Psalm 121 describes that this is a God who's there with you every time.

And so as we wrap up, like where will you turn? Let's go back to the very original question that was being asked of us in verse one, from where does my help come? If you're in a place today where you're painfully aware that you need help, you're not alone.

You're in the exact position that the psalmist was in when he was writing this down. And there's only one helper who is powerful enough, attentive enough, and faithful enough to carry you all the way through.

[19 : 43] And His name is Jesus. He's the creator. He's the watcher. He's the keeper. He's the savior. And He didn't just do this from far afar to help us.

He actually entered that dangerous road for us. He took the worst of it. He took the worst of it. And what I mean by that is our sin and our sorrow and even death. But then He didn't pause there.

He actually continued on by raising up and actually guaranteeing our ultimate safety by resurrecting. So if you are not a follower of Jesus, today is a day to turn to Him.

He is more than able. He's more than willing. And if you already know Him, then this psalm is a renewed opportunity for courage. You're not alone.

You're never unprotected. And you're not unforgotten. And so friends, this morning, take courage from this psalm because the road may be hard, you know, but God in His kindness has given us a helper who will walk along with you.

[20 : 41] He is somebody who will not fall asleep and He is somebody who will not give up on us. And He is somebody who will walk with us all the way home. And so let me pray for us as we continue our time in service this morning.

Lord, we come before You. We lift our eyes to You as this psalm starts. We confess how easily it is for us to look elsewhere for help. We confess how easily it is to look to others or even to things that cannot hold us.

But today, Father, we take courage from what the psalmist says that our help comes from You, the Maker of the Heaven and Earth. So thank You, Lord, for being our Creator. Thank You, Lord, for being our Keeper.

And thank You, Lord, for being our eternal Helper. Father, give us the strength for this week and for the road ahead as we continue to walk in faith and we continue to just continue to glorify You in all our ways and we pray this in Your precious Son's name.

Amen.