

Psalm 121 “What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?”

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- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- That song was released in 1966 and made popular by Jimmy Ruffin. What becomes of the brokenhearted deals with the struggle to overcome sadness, especially after a broken relationship.
- But fast forward to present day. Perhaps it's a perfect description of what we're all holding deep inside as we walk in this world.
- Sad, confused, brokenhearted, hurt by relationships, just trying to find some kind of peace of mind, maybe.
- But how? We've been challenged by Bill Nash recently to listen to hear. What do you hear in the lyrics? If that were someone talking to you. Can you name some specifics?
- [0 : 59] Just call it out. Pain? Grief? Yeah. Do you hear hope?
- Hope? More of an endless hope. Like, I don't know. I'm just going to keep walking on this gerbil wheel and hope I fall into hope in a hole or something like that.
- Maybe I'll trip over it. But I'm longing. Longing for something more. And that's what people are saying all around us every day and including in here.
- They say it with their words. They say it with their anger. They say it with the tattoos on their arms, crying out, listen to my story. They say it with the scars that they bring into the church.
- They say it with the smiling faces that say, how are you doing? Great. Great. How are you? Great. All right. Let's keep walking. But what becomes of the brokenhearted?
- [2 : 08] These lyrics capture the heart of brokenness and searching so very well. And they remind me of a particular time of brokenness in my own life. Where are all the juniors and seniors, Derek?
- Where are all the juniors and seniors? That's what he says. His fist was hidden on the table. I'll never forget it. And there I was sitting across the table from my boss at a barbecue restaurant in Tennessee.
- A seasoned youth pastor, recently promoted to associate pastor at a prominent church by God's grace. Having had more experience in youth ministry success on my resume than most across the country.
- Having been blessed by the Lord to rebuild and turn around two failing youth ministries at two previous prominent churches. And having devoted at least 13 years of my life towards those two endeavors.
- Having done the same thing I'd always done. Love people. And do my best to do it. It was going well. And now four years into one of the hardest callings from God.

- [3 : 27] Hardest turnarounds. Called to rebuild one of the most broken systems of ministry that I'd ever seen in my life. But he continued. And he lunged his body at me.
- His teeth were showing. He raised the volume of his voice. He was throwing expletives at me. And he was making threats. And he was detailing numbers and percentages and a rap sheet of ministry performance conviction charges.
- To show me just how worthless and meaningless and useless that I was to the church right then and right there. And because there was a number on a spreadsheet.
- That in his mind needed to be just a little bit higher. And if it was then his overbearing boss would remove the pressure from him.
- The pressure from being under his Darth Vader like crushing and suffocating grip. Yet there I sat. Knowing that he had never understand.
- [4 : 31] Having seen and heard and witnessed things behind the scenes. Of this church that would make your stomach turn. But there I was powerless. And scared.
- And at that moment the fear set in. The overwhelming panic. And the fear of loss. If I do what I'm supposed to do.
- If I say what I know that I need to say. Then what will that mean for my job. And for my family. And for my future. I was tired.
- Of pretending. And I was tired of trying to make it work. When I knew that it was also very very wrong. Why am I here God?
- I was asking. Why do you have me sitting in this seat right now? I hate what I see. I'm just so scared. Right now. I'm just so scared. So there I sat.
- [5 : 31] As he spouted meaningless numbers. Percentages. And glaring inconsistencies. Between what ministry was. And what I thought it would be. And my mind just drifted to the fear.
- And my spiritual eyes. They started to search for help. Anywhere. While he continued to mutter nonsense. And all the sorts of things that you hear about.
- On the podcasts. And the news articles. That highlight what's wrong with leadership. And churches today. As they. Look back on the mega churches. That have fallen.
- Into corporate corruption. And there I was. Wandering in a land of broken dreams. Where it seemed that happiness was just an illusion.
- Filled with sadness. And confusion. There I was broken hearted. In the church. What about you?
- [6 : 33] What table. Are you sitting at right now? In the church. What loss might you be fearing? And where do you find help?
- For me. I didn't know where to go. And I didn't know who I could. Talk to. Because this is happening to me. Within the church. I felt trapped.
- Almost like being trapped. Inside a conspiracy theory. Or a building that's falling. That you can't get out of. And I was unable to sleep at night. I would wake up. In the middle of the night.
- And ask. What is my family going to do? I feared the loss of money. I feared the loss of friendships. And everything else. That I'd given my life to in ministry. And I began to realize.
- That I. The process. I'd grown so very far away from Jesus. But I didn't even mean to. Because I was busy serving. The people. Telling me what to do. Who I trusted within the church.
- [7 : 32] And I needed help. And maybe some of you. Have had that feeling before. Maybe within the church. You're not alone. It's not all that way though.

The fear of a future loss. That owns you. You had that. It's called anxiety. Okay. In his book.

The Anxiety Opportunity. Author Curtis Chang. Writes. That. All humans exist. I'm going to read this quote here in a minute.

That all humans exist. Somewhere on the anxiety spectrum. Consider this quote here. Anxiety has become the most common mental illness in the U.S. In 2018.

63% of American college students reported overwhelming anxiety. Since the pandemic. A recent study reported that depression rose 28% globally above pre-pandemic levels.

[8 : 27] Some seek help through their churches. But only 30% of pastors feel well equipped to help congregations. Congregants deal with matters of mental or emotional health. Only 36.9% of those afflicted with anxiety seek assistance through medication and professionals.

Which means that the vast majority are isolated and confused. That was me. Isolated and confused. Inside the church.

What about you right now? Where do you look for help? What table are you sitting at? If we're honest, right? Many times we find our help in the wrong places.

It could be Netflix. Listening to podcasts. Scrolling through social media. Staring at our iPads. Eating more than we should. Drinking more than we should.

Maybe we'll just go trade on the stock market. Playing our favorite video game. Thinking about our favorite sports teams. Putting ridiculous expectations on our spouses or significant others.

[9 : 31] Gossiping about somebody else to remind ourselves that we're not as bad as we think we are. Someone else has it worse off than we do. Checking out. Disengaging. Distracting.

Staring at the numbers in our bank account. Feeling sorry for ourselves. Spending money on things that we shouldn't. But they're all temporary helps. They make the pain go away for a little bit.

But they come right back. Just like a drug. You need a bigger hit. Why? Because there's absolutely only one place that we're supposed to go and designed to look for our help.

And thank God for the words of Psalm 121. Psalm 121.

The Lord will keep you from all evil. He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out. And you're coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

[10 : 55] This is a psalm of ascents. Okay. We see the picture of a person walking a path. Maybe broken dreams. They're on a life journey.

And the Old Testament audience would have most likely interpreted this as a psalm to instill confidence. To those who are making this journey to Jerusalem to worship in the temple.

So they sing a song of ascents. And when they worry, they try to redirect their heart to what really matters. The things of God. So they say it out loud and they sing it. But also they would have known it as a parable for our entire lives.

And in this life, because of these words, we can be confident in God's ultimate protection and his provision and his care for us in every single situation.

Okay. Because God gets us. He starts by saying, I lift my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

[11 : 58] One commentator writes that the question where security can be found could originally have been prompted by any number of situations. But in its present pilgrim or journey context, it pictures an anxious gaze at hills which could shelter marauders.

Or a longing gaze at the far off hills of Zion. How shall I escape the dangers of the way and arrive within the hills of home?

Perhaps that's what you may feel where you are right now. Charles Spurgeon writes that help comes to the saints only from above.

They look elsewhere in vain. Let us lift up our eyes with hope, expectancy, desire, and confidence. Why? Because Satan will endeavor to keep our eyes upon our sorrows.

That we may be disquieted and discouraged, be it ours firmly to resolve that we will look out and look up. For there is good cheer for the eyes.

[13 : 12] And they that lift up their eyes to the eternal hills shall soon have their hearts lifted up also. So, where do you look for security right now?

If you're honest, okay? Where do you set your gaze? I want you to think about that. On the journey of life, the Lord says that we're called when we look to those hills and we worry, we're to look to Him.

Okay? Though the hills are far off and the danger may await, they remind us of the true home that awaits us at the end of life's journey. Zion or heaven itself.

Okay? That's rest too. Rest with Jesus. Complete satisfaction and safety and happiness. And that's what we're longing for as human beings.

That's what we're looking for in everything bad that we go do. Okay? The same one who made heaven and earth, though, cares for the brokenhearted. Walking in this land of broken dreams.

[14 : 16] I have this walking path I go to and this is where I meet with God. I went there this morning and it runs by the Flint River. But then when you walk out, you actually see the hills.

There's nothing like studying this verse and looking at those hills. Or you can look out there in Jones Valley. It's right across the street. When you look to the hills, what do you see? Do you get worried? Or do you see God?

This morning I went there and just prayed. And then when I got up, I started to trip. And there was this root that kind of made a little hoop. And you could get your foot in it.

And it was a really cool picture. God promises when His roots are strong and He'll hold our foot in place. To keep us from slipping. And that's exactly what this verse says here.

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. The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade on your right hand.

[15 : 22] The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night. See, in the Middle East, a journey is day and night. It's filled with all kinds of dangers.

And the heat at times is completely unbearable. I think you understand the heat. It's unbearable. Right? You might have thought that yesterday. But it's even worse. In the desert climates.

And in the ancient Near East, it was also believed that too much exposure to the moon could pose a threat to your health. This is where we get modern day words like moonstruck and lunatic.

Okay? So God's people aren't free from the dangers of the world. Don't believe that trash wherever you hear it. It's trash. God's people are not free from the dangers of the world. But they are free from the ultimate harm of dangers.

The final product. Okay? And why is that? That's because of the shield that we possess. And that shield is the Lord himself. And this is why we see all over the Psalms repeated the steadfast love of the Lord.

- [16 : 30] Right? It's strong. It will not break. The thought of taking refuge in the shadow of wings. He is our shield. He's our protector. And it's an ultimate protection that will not go away.
- You can't wash it off. And you can't accidentally lose it by something you do. It's an ultimate security. And the temporary distractions and hopes that we look to in our world. They're going to fade away like snowflakes that you hold in your hand.
- But when you look to God for ultimate guidance and hope and direction. You're going to be blessed. The scriptures say. Do you know what blessed also means? It means happy.
- Okay? Happy is he whose help is in the God of Jacob. Whose hope is in the Lord his God. Who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that's in them.
- Who keeps faith forever. Who executes justice for the oppressed. Who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoner free. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
- [17 : 32] The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners. Those traveling in life. Just like Psalm 121 says.
- He upholds the widow. If you're here and you're a widow. He loves you right where you are. And I know it's lonely. Okay? But he knows it's lonely too.
- He's going to send people to help you. It's okay. Right? He upholds the fatherless. But the way of the wicked. He brings to ruin.
- Right? You're not going to be touched by Satan. In the words of the great 1990s prophet MC Hammer. You can't touch this. Alright?
- Name it and claim it y'all. Where the spirit of the Lord is. There's freedom. And protection. You can't touch this.
- [18 : 31] John Calvin writes. And as amidst the many dangers which every moment threaten us. It's difficult for us though to get rid of all anxiety and fear. The prophet at the same time testifies that God keeps watch unceasingly over our safety.
- So though you will never escape your anxiety. God will never leave you in it. Okay? He's going to hold it with you and for you. Okay? The Lord will keep you from all evil.
- It continues. He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore. This is a parable ultimately about our lives.
- Okay? A song of ascent that cries out to God for hope and for help in the midst of trouble. Crying out to him while knowing that he cares.
- He listens. He's going to keep us in safety until our final destination. Which is home with him. And how was this accomplished?
- [19 : 37] That's the important piece. If you think about it, God took a journey, didn't he? He took a journey here. He didn't have to. And he took it from heaven to earth for us.
- And he didn't come here to prevent us from having any pain. That's trash theology if you hear it anywhere. It's a complete lie from the pit of hell. God didn't come here so that you never experience pain.
- Okay? That's not why he came to earth. He didn't come here to prevent us from having pain or avoiding loss or to give us the perfect house. He didn't come here to give us the largest bank account or the perfect vacation or the best award.
- He didn't come here so we could be the greatest athlete on our team. He didn't come here so that you can have the best grades in the nicest car or go to the best school or be the most beautiful.
- He didn't come here so that you can have the best kids or so that you'll never be sick. He didn't come here so that you can eat at the fanciest restaurants either. He didn't come here so you can have the most successful business.

[20 : 46] He didn't come here so that you can be admired as the smartest person in the room. He came here to tell us that we're sick and we're dying. We didn't like it.

And he told us that we're going to lose everything on earth that we have right now. Everything. And everything that you look to besides God will kill you quicker.

Sin is decaying your body. And sin is decaying this world. And sin is decaying souls. And the only cure is to get a new heart.

And the only way to get a new heart is to kill the old heart. Okay? And so God did what you and I could never do. To give you and I what we could never buy.

New hearts. Hearts that are forgiven and they beat with the blood of the love of God. The love that the wandering, brokenhearted needs so very desperately.

[21 : 50] There was this TV show called WandaVision about a superhero that she was so sad and wanted to avoid the loss of her children so very much that she created a fantasy world where everything was perfect.

Just to avoid and distract her from dealing with the grief that she didn't want to walk into. We're not so different, are we? We may not be superheroes, but we try to buy our paradises.

We try to avoid the inevitable. But Christianity is not just a blueprint for avoiding loss during our lifetimes. A blueprint for creating safe places where we can hide from the world around us.

That would be a lie to live that way. It would be profane to God if we were to live that way. Author Curtis Chang wrote, We experience anxiety as the uncertainty surrounding loss.

But in actuality, all loss is absolutely certain. That's the irony of anxiety. But right now, in the now, this moment here, we're going to continue to be vulnerable to loss, no matter how much we do.

[23 : 03] Okay? We will suffer pain, and it is absolutely unavoidable. So to try to avoid it is to actually only increase anxiety. When we distract ourselves, we actually make it worse.

The best thing you can do is run at it and embrace it. But we don't just have to stay there. Right? We got to look to the hills, but there's something more. There's the Lord.

There's a world where all of our losses will be restored, and all of our death will be undone. The resurrection of all things and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth.

Now, we didn't like it when Jesus told us about it, so we killed him. And the reason we didn't like it is because it got in the way of our plans.

So we got rid of the problem. We killed Jesus, and we went back to our plans so that we could go back to our lives and back to our power. But little did we know that he planned to be killed so that we could live.

[24 : 12] And this is why Jesus died on the cross. And where did he die? Why? On a hill. When you look your eyes to the hills, remember Jesus on the hill.

Okay? This is why Jesus was raised from the dead. And where was he raised? In a garden tomb. He didn't die for us to go and try to recreate our own paradises.

He died so that we could be with him and his. And in this decaying world, we can hold his hand now in making everything brand new by reversing the curse of decay one person and relationship at a time until he comes back and makes it all brand new.

Do you believe this? Church, if you do believe this, the Bible promises you will be saved. Saved for a purpose now and saved for a future home in the hills of Zion where Jesus is.

But the journey has to take you to your knees before him first, before he lifts you up and sends you. Okay? Where you let him in, you let him go on the journey into the dark corners of your soul and say, save me.

[25 : 23] Now, here's why this matters. When we over-focus on our worries in the now, we tend to overlook the love and the power of God in the now and the not yet.

And this is why anxiety is such a great tool of Satan. Okay? You're not sinning if you deal with anxiety. Okay? But Satan loves to use something to get you away from God.

And here's what he does. He hijacks your ability to see the good in the now. And then he gives you the ability to focus on future worry that does not yet exist. Thereby destroying your happiness in the moment and in the future.

And when you get trapped in that, it's awful. Okay? But what does God do? His power gives you the ability to see him in the now and look ahead to the power of Jesus Christ in the not yet.

And both matter now. You see the battle? Satan just takes everything good God does and reverses it. Go read all of your verses in reverse. Like, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness. Just reverse all those.

[26 : 23] That's what Satan does. Approach the throne of grace with confidence to find help in your time of need. He wants you to not approach it. He wants you to think it's judgment. He wants you to not find help.

He's a stupid idiot. Okay? But he's very smart. I want to beat him down, yet I got to respect his game. But the bag's out.

Okay? You can't touch this. And he can't touch you. Okay? See his plan by shining the light of God on it.

But is he getting you in it right now? Is he reversing it? Because I think that's where he likes the church to stay so that we are humdrum and sad, sad. What the world wants to see is those who are redeemed.

And those who are redeemed are blessed and happy. That doesn't mean you can't experience sadness. But don't let Satan trap you. He's a liar. And he's really good at what he does. He's done it for a long time.

[27 : 17] But I want you to know the love of God and the power of his love in your daily life. Like right now. But our fear of loss and our anxieties, they're the greatest opportunities for us to know the love of God.

Because he holds us in our anxieties and in his safe refuge. And that's the dashboard light. That thing you're fearing the most, that's the biggest door way to feel the love of God right now.

And just like he touched that leper in the peak of his sickness, he accepts us in the midst of our weakness. What a beautiful Savior.

He likes us when we're sick. That's amazing. He holds us. We don't have to avoid sicknesses. We don't have to hide weaknesses.

Because they are the doorways to approach him. If you look in the scriptures, everybody's bringing something to him to fix. And what do they find? Jesus. But the reason they went to him was because there's something wrong with him.

[28 : 20] And there's something wrong with you and me. And that's okay. Hey, it's the biggest doorway for you to run to Jesus. So don't hide it. Okay? What becomes of the brokenhearted searching everywhere just to find someone to care?

Maybe that's you right now. Are you overfocused on your worries to the point where life in Christ has been hijacked by the fear of a future loss? When we overfocus on those worries in the now, we tend to overlook the love and the power of God in the now and the not yet.

Okay? But God's here right now by the power of the Holy Spirit. And he's also alive in the not yet, reigning and ruling and seated on that throne of grace that he says, come on up.

Come on over. Where you can run at all times and you can receive mercy and help to find your time of need. But where are all the juniors and seniors, Derek?

Where are they? Where are they? Tell me right now. He was yelling. What do I do? What was I supposed to do?

[29 : 29] I know that he's under pressure, right? I know he won't accept the truth. The truth that they hadn't been there ever. They'd quit coming to church in the fourth grade.

But they kept their names on the roll sheet so they could keep their tuition discount at the Christian school. He's not going to hear that. His monologue came then to an angry silence.

A man who had more money than I will ever know. More houses than I'll ever buy. He had served in more powerful positions at well-known corporations than I'll ever set foot in.

A man who I knew if I stood up to him had the power to make me and my family suffer. So, as my anxiety took over, the fear of future loss, and then the fear in that current moment, I remembered Jesus.

And I could listen to my breath in that moment. And I could remember the power of the Holy Spirit that he breathed on the disciples when he appeared to them after being resurrected while they were hiding behind closed doors in fear.

[30 : 43] So, I stopped and I prayed. And I said, Jesus, I need you right now. And I looked over my boss's shoulder to those hills where I was worried about the marauders and what's ahead and how am I going to get up there.

And I cried out in my soul to the God who made heaven and earth. And in my mind's eye, I pictured Jesus standing there. I could still see him. And he was just smiling. And he said, it's time.

Do it. So, I looked back at my boss like this. I stared him straight in the eyes. I collated my papers of numbers in red and green arrows and plans and strategies.

And I put him right down in front of him and said, you are out of line. And you will never talk to me that way ever again. Do you understand me? This conversation is over.

And we just sat there staring at each other. It felt like an eternity. And as you can imagine, the ride back to the office was awkward.

[31 : 58] Remember to take your own car next time. And from there, life got worse. But I knew that my help would come because I stood on the steadfast love of God, the maker of heaven and earth.

And that's where my help comes from. That's the only place. And he sets prisoners free. And he will not let my foot be moved. And he will not sleep or take a break from his care for me or for his church.

And he will not let the sun scorch me or the night leave me sick. And he will keep me from all evil. And he will keep my life. And he will keep my going out and my coming in from this time forward and forevermore.

But loss was necessary for my journey. And his loss on the cross, I knew, was more than I could ever give. But in those moments, he held me in my pain.

And he kept my tears in his bottle. And he smiled at me. And I called on my God. And he saved me. And he sent me the ark of Southwood Presbyterian Church.

[33 : 07] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. These past months, it was published in the news that over 40 people, I was not one of them, after my time and had worked at the same place, had left under similar circumstances, wrote a letter to the leadership detailing the horrific and toxic work environment that I also experienced for so many years.

It was abusive. and the senior pastor since has been removed from his role with the goal of healing and reconciliation and the process of healing has begun and I consider him and my boss a friend and I pray for them to be restored to ministry in time but through you, these past six years God has given me a place to heal and to remember that I'm not a failure and you know what, you're not either and whatever you're going through on your journey God is there for you too and he gave me the strength through you and by his spirit to go back there and have the hard conversations with the leaders and he granted me the power to forgive them and I was the one who was truly set free and now I don't have to hide my story in shame anymore because I can tell of how God delivered me and how God has restored my losses and one day he will restore all losses in heaven because that's what the world needs to hear the truth and I can only do it because Jesus is alive in me right now and his power holds me up and I know the man who's going to fix it all and so do you his name is Jesus and the power that he has will hold you up wherever you are in your journey right now so you got to keep your eyes on the only place where true help comes from and that's God himself what becomes of the brokenhearted my prayer is that they get new hearts and the church is a place to help others hold their pain as together we take it to Jesus as we express grace to one another in the context of our broken relationships that's why here we call them grace groups they're really just messed up people groups who need Jesus groups who love each other in the midst of their messed upness groups okay so if that's you great it's okay they're not a go dress up and act like everything's okay group if they are then that's like a really bad group don't do that it's okay to not be okay right and so don't be afraid to talk about it if there's any takeaway whatever you're carrying don't be afraid to talk about it it doesn't mean you have to talk to everybody about it

I realize that can be scary but don't be afraid to talk about it with God first maybe you got to get away and talk to him with us there are people here that want to hear your pain with each other but when you talk to each other I challenge you and Satan doesn't want you to do it so just do it just to tick him off okay but watch how he will use your story to change someone's heart it's amazing just try it sometime you got to take a step of faith to do it though with that I'm going to close with some prayer Father we are a bunch of broken hearted mess ups who you redeem and make whole and you love us in the midst of our pain and thank you that you send us true help and thank you Lord Jesus that you redeem thank you for redeeming me and thank you for redeeming this church and I pray by the power of your Holy Spirit you'd rest on this place and start something that just blows this city up with love and it goes all over the world but may it start by us knowing that we're accepted in our weaknesses and while we are still sinners you died for us even though we thought we were killing you you were killing our hearts to give us new ones on the cross thanks for touching us lepers and saying you love us thank you for holding us in our pain and thank you that you're doing that for every single person here may they take that with them now and every single moment of the day and may it impact and redefine how they see life itself and relationships with other people because you are calling them to change this world one relationship at a time and it starts by telling their stories of pain and how you are walking with them in that pain and holding us up praise the Lord that you are who you say you are hallelujah

I pray this in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org