

A Song for the Journey

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

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. The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil. He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore. This is the word of the Lord. You may take your seats.

What songs are on your road trip playlist?

When I was in middle school, my family went on a road trip out west. And the movie, Oh Brother, Where Art Thou? had just come out. My parents got the soundtrack on CD.

[1 : 47] Remember those? We were in a van for several hours every day for several days. And that soundtrack played on repeat the entire time, didn't it? My family's here.

I'll say when you're stuck in a van with your brothers and sisters for hours on end, I am a man of constant sorrows is a fitting song. It's exactly right.

I'm just kidding. My sister would actually say she's sitting here. It was me that was the problem. It was a great trip and a great playlist. Even now, the songs bring back memories of the journey with my family.

Songs are powerful, aren't they? They not only help us remember, they can also refresh us. This is Christmas time. I'm sure you probably remember at the end of the movie, It's a Wonderful Life. George Bailey, he just went through this whirlwind of emotion, thinking that he had lost his business and that he had failed his family. He was met with trouble at every turn.

[3 : 01] And he began to believe that life was really, truly meaningless. But at the end of the movie, if you remember, they get together in this old Scottish tune, Auld Lang Syne.

It plays. And there's this flood of friends that start to come in, the family, the acquaintances, that come to George's aid.

And as each one appears, they join their voices together in the song, and George's heart is lifted. Why?

Because he sees and hears a powerful reminder of the past and real help for the present. Well, this morning we are introduced to a song for the journey.

That's what I've titled this message, a song for the journey. And it's intended to be a reminder, a powerful reminder of the past and real help for the present.

[4 : 05] Psalm 121 is a song of ascent. It was sung by God's people as they traveled through the hills to Jerusalem to gather and worship at the temple.

And the temple, as you probably know, is the place of God's presence. This trip was extremely dangerous. There was threat of slippery paths and loose rocks and deep valleys, wild animals, violent robbers.

There's trouble at every turn. Fear of the unknown. Anxiety about what's just down the road.

So the question clearly was on their minds, where does my help come from? Well, in a similar way, we are on a journey.

We are traveling our way through the hills of this broken world to the new Jerusalem where we will one day live in God's presence forever.

[5 : 14] But as our Lord promised us, all along this road in the world, we will have trouble. We will have trouble.

The trials, fears, anxieties of life threaten us with trouble at every turn. maybe for you it's an ongoing battle with sin.

Or maybe it's a life-altering chronic pain with no solution in sight. Or maybe it's trouble in your marriage. Or trouble with wayward children.

Or trouble at work. Maybe it's the trouble of just feeling disoriented and you're not sure what the best route is to take. Whatever season, whatever situation you find yourself in this morning, as long as you are still on the journey through the hills of this world, trouble is just down the road and you will find yourself asking, where does my help come from?

What will be the soundtrack on repeat in your heart and mind on this journey? My friends, this is a song for troubled travelers.

[6 : 42] We have a song to play when the anxieties of life threaten to overtake us. This song that we're looking at this morning is a powerful reminder of the past and real help for the present.

Where does our help come from? It comes from the Lord. I think the main point for us this morning is to trust in the Lord who helps us and keeps us through all of life's twists and turns.

Trust in the Lord who helps us and keeps us through all of life's twists and turns. We're going to look at this in three movements. which I believe are faithful to the text. The Lord will be your helper. The Lord will keep watch over you and the Lord will keep your life secure. So the first point, the Lord will be your helper.

at the beginning of this psalm we see the language a psalm of ascent. There are 15 of these songs of ascent from Psalm 120 to 134 and that word ascent captures their purpose.

[7 : 59] They were sung by these Jewish travelers going up to Jerusalem during the annual festival to worship together at the temple. So the context of this psalm is on that journey through the hills leading to Jerusalem and the psalmist on the journey all of a sudden bursts out.

I lift my eyes up to the hills. Just imagine him walking. From where does my help come? this journey is perilous.

These traveling worshipers they were vulnerable. They were far from protection. They were far from their homes. They were exposed to the elements. Just think it's easy when engulfed in the valley to feel intensely vulnerable.

You feel trapped. There's nowhere else to go. There's no way to go but through the dark valley.

Have you ever felt like that? Have you found yourself deep in the valley?

This morning what sorrows do you find that you must walk through? Oh my friends you're not alone.

[9 : 17] the lyrics of this song that we're looking at show that we are among fellow pilgrims who feel the deep distress of the valley where the shadows seem to fall especially dark for a season.

So the first encouragement that we find from our song is that when we're in the dark valley we must lift our eyes.

You must lift your eyes up from the immediacy of your circumstances. It may be that you must travel this road but the shadow where you presently walk is not the end for God's people.

Lift up your eyes and ask where does my help come from? Charles Spurgeon said 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 and they that lift up their eyes to the eternal hills shall soon have their hearts lifted up also.

How can Spurgeon preach this? because it's only the very first verse of our song that the vulnerability that you feel the question that you are asking it's it's only the beginning not the end it's not the end for the believer there is an answer to the question that is wonderfully found outside of our own resources and our own power where does my help come from the Christians anthem is not look deeper within yourself and pull yourself up by your own bootstraps the answer is my help comes from the Lord it comes from the Lord verse 2 says it my help comes from the Lord notice that the psalmist is not content to listen to fears and anxieties swirling around in his mind this is so instructive for us because verse 2 demonstrates the very first step in the battle song against anxiety we must not be content to stop at listening to ourselves instead we have to actively preach the truth to ourselves the preacher

[11 : 56] Martin Lloyd Jones believed this was so so vital for the believer's faith when going through a dark valley in his helpful book spiritual depression he wrote this have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself take those thoughts that come to you the moment that you wake up in the morning you have not originated them but they start talking to you they bring back the problems of yesterday somebody is talking yourself is talking to you now this man's treatment in Psalm 42 in this case was this instead of allowing this self to talk to him he starts talking to himself why art thou cast down oh

my soul he asks his soul has been depressing him crushing him so he stands up and he says self listen for a moment and I will speak to you have you resigned to listen to yourself in the darkness of your valley have you lost sight of the

Lord and stopped walking have you gotten lost in the question where does my help come from my friends was this not the same kind of place where the serpent did his worst when Adam and Eve lost sight of the Lord and got lost in the destructive question did God really say do not stop at the question do not stop at the question you must preach the truth to yourself lift up your eyes and sing sing sing my help comes from the Lord that's what we need to remind ourselves in the morning when we wake up in the valley my help comes from the Lord my friends when we see help in connection with the Lord the help that is available is not some kind of just superficial offloading of things that you can ultimately just are able to do on your own instead this kind of help it's the kind that's given to a soldier whose legs are riddled with bullets in war and he's carried out on the shoulders of his comrade when help is connected to the

Lord the phrase communicates that the Lord does for them what they cannot do for themselves that's the kind of help that he's holding out so when you are faced with a distressing road ahead it is wise to pause and to contemplate your resources and your abilities that's a wise thing to do it is also wise to ask yourself should I forge ahead on my own that's a good question to ask and after asking that question it is wise to come to this conclusion nope I should not do that I should not and I cannot do this on my own I need help I need help where can I find someone who can give me the kind of help I need to travel this impossible path through these terrifying hills how about the one who created these hills how about that one how about I call out to the maker of heaven and earth how about that guy the

Lord shaped the contours of these very hills that you're walking through he numbered every blade of grass he forged the earth he carved out the mountains he poured the oceans he hung the moon and the stars he breathed life into every creature on the face of the earth by the might of his word the maker the maker of heaven and earth it just rings!

provision if the Lord has this kind of power just think of this if he has that kind of power then whatever you're facing is a small thing for him and that's not to say whatever you're facing is insignificant to him on the contrary shocking reality is that our all powerful maker wants to be our helper he wants to help us so we can cry out to him in dependence he doesn't he doesn't scoff at your audacity like some kind of standoffish king instead he delights to guide his sheep and to help his children Hebrews 13 wonderfully says for he has said

[17 : 18] I will never leave you nor forsake you so we can confidently say the Lord is my helper I will not fear what can man do to me second point the Lord will keep watch over you in verse three we are introduced to some of the language that forms a major theme for the rest of the song not only is the Lord our helper he's also our keeper our keeper the words keep and keeper they're used six times in these eight verses and the idea is that the Lord not only helps his people but he also guards he protects he secures his people and he does it in a number of different ways the first way that he does it is implied in this verse look at it again with me it says he will not let!

your foot be moved did you notice the shift in pronouns from one to two to verse three they moved from first person I and my to second person you and your so the psalmist sang the first two verses and now it appears that someone is singing to the psalmist it looks like to me that the fearful pilgrim who's on his way through this terrifying journey through the hills is now joined by and encouraged by faith filled friends and fellow worshippers along the journey isn't that exactly what we need isn't that what we need we need friends we need friends and more importantly we need gospel friends we need gospel friends what's the distinction between friends and gospel friends

I can think of friends I've had that share a common interest but the friends that I need the most are the ones who share a common savior if the Lord really is the centerpiece of my life if he really is the king of my heart if my aim in life really is to live in such a way to honor him in all that I do then I need friends who will help me walk in such a way that I make it to the end this to be to be friends with unbelievers you heard my remarks earlier about the bridge we should certainly befriend unbelievers absolutely however I would urge you to make sure your inner circle of friends make them gospel friends these are the friends who aren't simply going to pull from their reservoir of their own resources or just tell you whatever you want to hear gospel friends gospel friends walk with you in the darkest part of the valley and they remind you of the truth all along the way gospel friends do you have gospel friends do you have these kind of friends we need to walk with gospel friends this

is one of the reasons we have community groups what what a joy what a joy it is to have friends in different seasons and different backgrounds all walking toward the same destination if you don't have a community group

I want to urge you make that top priority for the new year these friendships they are such a gift a real gift but let me also say that you need more than just physical proximity in other words it's not enough just to go to a community group you need to let others into your life you see the psalmist voiced his need for help help we need to do the same to help our friends help us so what are you struggling with what do you need help believing let others chime in let them into your life with a song of hope in the Lord that's what we need and the friend here in our song he points out that the Lord will not let his foot be moved you can just think in a journey where perilous ravines were just one false step away that promise is a big deal it's the

Lord's constant attention and care for his people he never takes his eyes off of your every step that imagery of the foot slipping is directly used in relation to our spiritual journey throughout the Old Testament it often refers to spiritual slips!

[23 : 01] When we lose traction on the path towards God like in Psalm 73 you can look it up later the psalmist took his eyes off the Lord and he starts to envy the prosperity of the wicked and he says my foot almost slipped verse 3 is a promise that no matter what happens to us the Lord will not let our foot slip off the path to our destination in the new Jerusalem we will be able to complete our journey into God's presence Charles Spurgeon once again he said our feet move in progress but they shall not be moved to their overthrow what an encouraging promise we keep moving ahead he gives us traction for the path ahead it is the Lord who formed a people and set them on this journey to begin with he will hold them to the end this this promise is punctuated by two more truths the first is that the

Lord never slumber or sleeps doesn't that stand in contrast to you and me if I go for even just a few sub six hour nights in a row I just deteriorate into a worthless heap of trash am I the only one is anyone with me it's terrible I need sleep we feel our frailty in just a matter of a few hours without sleep so as the pilgrims made their camp along the way in these hills they would be in fear of marauders coming into the camp at night while their guard was down my friends in a similar way we often run ourselves ragged sleepless raggedness with anxiety trying to manage all the possible outcomes with our limited resources and understanding anxiety maybe a working definition of this sleepless anxiety might be something like this anxiety is a heart response of fear and worry over uncertain outcomes flowing from this is very important flowing from misplaced trust misplaced trust in self misplaced trust in circumstances misplaced trust in others instead of resting in God's sovereign goodness and care the principle then is that at some point you and

I we've got to stop and rest that's just the facts we've got to stop and rest we are finite we are dependent creatures we simply cannot cover all the bases all the time our resources will eventually be exhausted our energy will eventually be spent our circumstances will change and others will let us down that's the facts so then how much more wonderful is it that we can look down and see the Lord never slumbers!

or sleeps! Never! Never! He in stark contrast to us is infinite and independent His resources are never exhausted and His energy is never ending He remains awake even while we rest in order to keep us in order to keep us in other words the Lord will keep you He will not slumber so that you can oh what a gift where in your life might you need to release the grip of control in order to rest in God's sovereign goodness and care not only does He offer His watchful care to you we're reminded that He is the one who created and keeps Israel the language of this song is meant to provoke memories of the

Lord's unfailing provision and protection not just for these fellow pilgrims but for generations and generations and generations and generations that's what He's getting at here in mentioning the Lord keeping Israel the travelers would be reminded of the Lord the covenant keeping God creating and sustaining a people set apart for Himself I mean the language here it would have surely drawn those travelers back to the Lord's promise to Jacob and Israel Genesis 28 15 behold I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and I will bring you back to this land for I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you the very fact they're walking through the hills is an example of His faithfulness they exist because of

[28 : 50] His faithfulness His promises kept the language is intended to draw their attention to the record of God's faithfulness has the Lord not kept Noah Abraham Isaac Jacob Joseph Moses has

He failed in any promise He has ever made no He will help you stay the course He will help you He won't fall asleep on you or maybe you're hearing this and you're thinking He seems to have fallen asleep I feel all alone or maybe you feel like you've gone too far off course and the Lord has abandoned you I believe by God's kind providence that you're here this morning to hear His voice say to you again the Lord is here

He's here He's with you the Lord is awake He's awake He's not sleeping He's not sleeping on you the Lord is working for your good not just them but your good even in the darkness He brought you into the people of God and He will keep you trust in Him trust in Him this morning point three the Lord will keep your life secure in verse five says the Lord is your keeper so here the psalm continues to bit out this imagery of the Lord as our keeper His keeping work is multifaceted in some cases there's this direct divine intervention like when

God parts the Red Sea for Moses or He rains down fire on the soaked altar for Elijah now if you're anything like me those are the ones that I really want God if you're with me do it this way please I want an obvious direct demonstration of God's power however there are other expressions that we need to be attuned to of his keeping or we're going to mistake God's keeping care in our lives for abandonment we've got to know these other ones as mentioned earlier he often uses other believers in our lives very often he does think of the effect of Ruth's faith filled kindness toward her struggling mother in law Naomi was that not God's keeping kindness and care Naomi had lost her family and had a seeming loss of a future or think about

Paul writing from his prison cell to encourage the Philippian believers I mean those situations they seem less than ideal if we're being honest and yet God displayed his keeping care through his people in the midst of these painful situations maybe you find yourself in Naomi's loss or Paul's prison this morning what voices has God placed in your ear to keep your life secure a third way to look for God's keeping work is the providential circumstances of your life think about the story of Esther God's name God's name is not mentioned one time in the biblical book of Esther is it not God's story his name's not in there and yet the entire story is intended to magnify God's protective care in preserving his people from destruction it's the whole story so the story highlights a human perspective but it is God who is ultimately weaving the story together for the good of his people so it is with you and me the Lord is keeping us in so so many ways even now it might even be the person sitting next to you he's using even when we don't recognize it at the time well the song continues in verse five the Lord is your shade on your right hand verse six says the sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night so if you think about these pilgrims they're journeying towards

[34 : 08] Jerusalem the sun would just beat down on them how glorious a spot of shade would be and in the right hand it was this symbol for all of their efforts all of their efforts to get to Jerusalem to get to the Lord's presence so the shade falling on their right hand is this beautiful image of their lives just being engulfed by his protective presence how often should we expect that well the psalmist uses the language of both the sun and the moon why in order to capture everything that happens under the sun and the moon this this means that at all times and in all circumstances both day and night God is with you and God is for you at all times but then this just ripped me out of my chair

I stood up when I read verse seven the Lord will keep you from all evil he will keep your life I said what really what does it mean that he will keep us from all evil what does it mean that he will keep your life is this a promise that we're not going to experience pain or suffering or loss or danger is that what this means if you've been with us during our last series through the book of Job then you already know the answer to this entrusting yourself to the Lord does not it does not mean that life will be free from pain suffering loss or danger so what good is this promise then that's that's what I wanted to ask what what good is this promise it can come across as so superficial is this just an empty shell of a promise before you turn away in bitterness let's look briefly more deeply at this promise because the word evil is not talking about hurtful things it means the dominion of evil the promise is that evil will not conquer you evil will not deal the final blow that overtakes you and the word life here is so important the word life literally means soul it's the same word you see life in this world it has an expiration date but the soul the soul soul is eternal so in other words this promise that we're looking at in verse seven is not empty and superficial the problem is that we are far too short-sighted that's what our problem is when we read this we're far too short-sighted we want the

Lord to keep our health we want to keep our strength and our goals but my friends your health is not your life your job is not your life your marriage is not your life your family is ultimately not your life all of these things are earthbound and temporary they will come and go eventually and not only will they come and go we will come and we will go but our souls are eternal so think what the promise actually is here this promise is not empty and superficial it is substantive and eternal Charles Spurgeon said if the soul be kept all is kept if the soul be kept all is kept think about as we journey through this life we can sing that

God will not let evil conquer our souls that's what the journey is long it's hard it's painful but God will keep evil from destroying our soul the Lord will keep us on our journey into his presence so that even in the valley of the shadow of death we don't have to fear evil we don't have to fear he watches over us so that evil cannot keep our souls from our ultimate and eternal goal meeting God face to face forever forever and so we hear the words of Jesus Christ it makes so much more sense he's praying over his traveling people the night before his crucifixion in John 17 and he says I am no longer in the world but they are in the world and I am coming to you holy father keep them in your name which you have given to me that they may be one even as we are one

[40 : 08] I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one the evil one our Lord prayed!

that the father would keep us from the evil one how did he do this how did he do this how would he disarm the eternal threat of the evil one schemes how would he do it the father sent the son to a dangerous and distant country far off to live the life that his people failed to live and then die on a cross in order to successfully pay for every debt demanded by the evil one that's what he did he did it to secure his people's passage through this life and into his presence forever so as we travel as we travel through this world we can face the demands of the evil one all along the journey as he his his at us where does your help come from that's what he wants to do is get in now we can look at him and we can lift our eyes to the hills and we will see a hill called

Calvary and we point to the cross where Christ our savior bled and he died in our place and we join the song of those that came before us and those that will come after us our help comes from the Lord our help comes from the Lord he made heaven and earth these are his hills that was my hill and he took it for me this is our song this is our song this is the song for the journey oh my friends it's a powerful reminder of the past it's a real help for the present the Lord will keep our going out and our coming in from this time forth and forever more so no matter what trouble lies around the corner for you let us be a church found singing to one another all along the way trust in the Lord who helps us and keeps us through all of life's twists and turns may

God help us oh father we come to you sheep with a shepherd children with a father we have the question burning in our hearts where does our help come from and we have the answer we're not lost in the question the answer is our help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth we praise you for the gift of Jesus Christ to take all of our sin to give us safe passage pray that you keep us from all evil until we come home at last in your presence forever we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus our keeper amen you've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at Trinity Grace Athens dot com