

# Singing of God's help!

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[ 0 : 00 ] We've had such a blessing already through the singing and the praying and his leading of us. And it's such a blessing to read this psalm, Psalm 121.

Marvellous psalm it is. One I know by heart, it's one of these I've learned. And perhaps Psalm 1 and Psalm 121 will be the most recited from my lips.

But it's absolutely beautiful. And I want us to read it together. I'm going to do something unusual, which is to ask you to stand for the reading of the Word of God. You can read it off the screen. That would be helpful. Then read it with me. I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber.

[ 1 : 15 ] Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand.

The sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life.

The Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore. Amen. The Lord will bless to us the reading of his Word.

Please be seated. Have you ever felt the need to ascend? This is a song of ascents, which means it's a song you sing when you're climbing, when you're going up.

And we'll talk a little bit more about that in a moment. But if you're a kind of an explorer, then you might have seen a range of hills or mountains and decided to climb them.

[ 2 : 20 ] You might just have tried to scale a wall or climb a tree or something else. But you're curious to see what's at the top. We had scaffold.

We still have scaffold. But when we had scaffold at the back here, it was really, really high. And I wanted to see what it would be like to go up there. But I remembered I was scared of heights. So I sent Josh and Eve up. And they took a photograph. Well, actually, they wanted to go up. And I admired them being so far up there.

But it wasn't for me. I'm scared of heights. I don't mind being in planes 35,000 feet up in the air, which is crazy. But I just don't like being high, seeing something I can fall from, knowing my clumsiness.

I figure that if I'm 35,000 feet up and the plane goes down, well, I'm going to heaven. So I can't really worry about that at all. And actually, Psalm 121 is really just saying to us, you know, God is in control.

[ 3 : 23 ] Don't worry. Don't worry. He watches over you. Don't worry. Remember, he's your help. That he's always with you. That he'll never leave you.

He'll never forsake you. And in a spiritual sense, God wants us to discover this. He wants us to ascend to that place in faith when we're content to leave the future in God's hands.

Whatever the storm, whatever the difficulty, to know that God watches over you. He watches over your life. You don't need to worry. He's got it. And that's a wonderful place to be.

That's a place Jesus wants us to be, isn't it? He said, come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Come and lay your burden on me and let me carry it for you.

And you'll feel wonderful. You'll feel safe. Because Jesus helps us carry the yoke and he makes the yoke easy for us, the burden easy for us to carry.

[ 4 : 31 ] And so this psalm, wonderful psalm as it is. Next slide, please. This psalm, first of all, is a song for a journey, a journey of pilgrims to the temple in Jerusalem, to the presence of God, to a place of worship.

And this song, which is for the journey, reminds us that it is a song to be sung when I need help from God.

You notice that he's looking for help. I lift up my eyes to the mountains or to the hills. Where does my help come from?

Yeah, hills is a bit misleading. These are mountains, of course. Mount Zion, upon which the temple of Jerusalem was built and the city itself built on a mountain. And then a range of hills and mountains that led from some of the lowlands in Israel to that place of worship.

And all of those places, all of those mountains, those hills, would need to be scaled and then it would need to be overcome, as it were, by the pilgrim as their journey to the house of God.

[ 5 : 42 ] And of course, if you're used to walking in hills, you'll enjoy the scenery, but when you get tired, it isn't pleasant to face another hill. But if you anticipate what lies on that hill, and in this case, the temple of God, the very presence of God, the opportunity to worship, it makes the journey worthwhile.

And I say that because sometimes we get a bit poetic about all of this and think that these hills must somehow be wonderful places that we're just going to enjoy in some mystical kind of way.

No, though, the hills are problems to overcome. They're obstacles in the way. They're the things that can present us, prevent us, as it were, from reaching the very presence of God.

When we need help, the psalmist is saying, God, who is above the hills, is available to us.

It may take a climb on our part to discover God above the hills, but he is there, always there, as our helper in time of trouble.

[ 7 : 00 ] Now, sometimes, of course, hills are impressive, and mountains remind us of God's creatorship. They remind us of how awesome he is.

And sometimes they're places of protection. Psalm 125, verse 2 says, as the mountains surround Jerusalem. That's great, it's a place of protection. But he goes on to say, so the Lord surrounds his people, both now and forevermore.

See, the problem for Jerusalem from time to time was that they relied on the fact that the city was impregnable. But it wasn't impregnable if they were unfaithful to Almighty God.

It wouldn't protect them. Jeremiah the prophet said, don't keep saying, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, as if, therefore, you're protected from being overrun by your enemies.

Because if you forsake the Lord, then you are at risk. Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the workers watch in vain.

[ 8 : 13 ] But of course, the hills as well, according to Jeremiah, can be places that are dark and intimidating. Jeremiah 3.23 says, surely the idolatrous commotion on the hills and mountains is a deception.

Surely in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. Now, if you're like me, a fan of Lord of the Rings, you'll know all about the intimidating and dark dangers of mountains.

But the point here is, whether the psalmist is praising God for his creatorship or the psalmist is saying to us that there will be hills and mountains in our way that prevent us from experiencing the very presence of God, as one commentator says, the first option emphasizes the need for help.

The second option contrasts idols which provide no help with God. The psalmist's question, from where does my help come, refers to the object of his trust and security.

Where do you find your trust and security in life? Other than God, what do you place your trust in? That's the question.

[ 9 : 28 ] When I face troubles in my life, when I face difficulties, when there are mountains before me, do I remember that the Lord is my helper? So I know that whatever I face, I will overcome because God is my helper.

Or do I just fall apart at the seams because I have put my trust in something else that cannot save? And this is the option that is opened before us at the outset of this psalm.

He knows happily that God is his helper. He says, my help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. And that's our privilege to know, isn't it?

Our privilege to know whatever trouble we face is that our help will come from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Whatever it seems like, however difficult it may be, however dark the way it may be, however momentarily I may lose my nerve and fail.

I remember then, my soul says to me, hope thou in God. Trust in God. Rely on Him. We like to fool ourselves into thinking that we're in control of so much, don't we?

[10:46] We're not in control of very much at all, are we? Not really. We never even know if we've got the next moment, do we? Something catastrophic happens in our body, we'll be gone. We're never really in control of anything.

But God asked us to cede control to Him and to trust Him because Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.

He says, not a hair of your head will be harmed. And yet, ironically, He says at the same time, they're going to kill you and put you in prison and everything else. There's kind of an irony there, isn't it?

Nothing can ultimately harm you if you belong to Jesus. That's the wonderful truth here. I lift up mine eyes to the hills.

Where does my health come from? My health comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. And it's wonderful to think about that. The Maker of heaven and earth is for us.

[11:47] Paul says that in Romans 8. God is for you. Who can be against you? Well, there's lots that can be against me, actually. Famine, persecution, nakedness, sword. Lots can be against me.

Ah, He says, but we're more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor demons, nor things to come, the things past, or things to come, nothing in all creation can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Your Creator is for you. And your Creator, who the Apostle Paul describes in Colossians 1, verses 15 to 18, as Jesus, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For by Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. All things were created by Him and for Him.

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body of the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy.

[13:02] Do you need a miracle? He is the Creator of heaven and earth. Do you say, well, this is impossible, I'll never manage?

He is the Creator of heaven and earth. He is above all things and in control of all things, and He holds all things together, including your life.

Do you think it's difficult for Jesus to control your life? Well, you say, you've never met me, I'm a chaotic person. He can take chaos and form it into something beautiful and wonderful.

He took the chaos of the dark matter that He first created and said, let there be, and there was. He creates order out of chaos.

We can trust Him. He is our helper. He's got everything in control. We don't need to worry. I thought about this this morning. Add a little piece to my note.

[14:03] Remember that wonderful hymn of Isaac Watts. Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our beloved home.

I love that. Our beloved home. He is not just a friend. He is our home. He is the person who is with us, who sits with us, who stands with us, who walks with us, who is there with us every day.

The hills may be in the distance. The hills may be places of foreboding that I fear, and I might think, I'm all alone here, but then I remember, no, no, God is with me on the journey.

He is closer to me than the hills. He is more real to me than any mountain, and He is bigger than the mountains, and greater and more powerful than them, and He will help me overcome.

What a wonderful thing. Under the shadow of thy throne, thy saints have dwelt secure. Sufficient is thine arm alone, and our defense is sure.

[15:20] Marvellous. Next, a song for the journey. When I need the companionship of God, the company of God. I've already said that this was sung by pilgrims as they went up to the house of the Lord, and it must have been wonderful to be there, to sing with them.

Let me show you the next slide. The cathedral on the hill. Can you see it? That's St. James' Park. Ever since I was a boy, when I used to get the train that rattled from South Shields to Central Station, we would ascend up the hill to the cathedral on the hill.

We would ascend, walk through the back streets, and get up to that wonderful stadium, St. James' Park. And as you drive toward it, as you come up the, off the A19 and on the 167, I think it is, no, no, it doesn't matter, Washington Highway, you can see it.

You can see it before you get over the bridge. And, you know, you start to anticipate. You know, the excitement begins to build. You can hear the singing, and you're getting ready for the match. And today, they're going to be brilliant, but they never are. But we live in hope, excitement, anticipation.

[16:42] Today will be the day. Well, I know what that feels like. I can't imagine what it would have felt like for these pilgrims going up the hill to the house of the Lord. But I get excited when I come to church.

And I was excited the day. I was kind of so moved that I thought, I'm going to have to kind of control myself or I will be a bit blubbery before I get up. I can't do that.

Come to the house of the Lord. Let us come to the house of the Lord. Let us be excited and anticipate we're going into the very presence of God. He is going to be there.

Who knows what he might be able to do for me? How amazing that I get to go to the house of God. But amazing too that he's with me on the journey.

That he's my ever-present help, my companion. Next slide please. To quote old St. Augustine. Come on, let's go, let's go.

[17:41] Others ask, where are we going? Are they, and they are told to that place, to that holy site. People talk to each other and catch fire with enthusiasm and all the separate flames unite into a single flame.

This one flame that springs up from the conversation of many people who enkindle one another, seizes them all and sweeps them along to the holy place. Their devout resolve sanctifies them. If then, holy love energizes people and tugs them to a material place. What kind of love must it be that tugs a person united in heart toward heaven as they say to each other, we are going to the Lord's house.

Let's run. Let's run fast, they say, for we are going to the Lord's house. Wonderful. Wonderful. If I can get excited going to St. James' Park, what excitement there must be when we go to the house of the Lord.

And if I can be excited when I'm in the house of the Lord, then how magnificent it will be to be in the very presence of God in heaven. How magnificent to anticipate that.

[19:00] And on the way to that house, how excited they are at its prospect. It's going to be good. You see, the temple and Jerusalem were just figures of the great temple and the new Jerusalem which is in heaven.

The city, Paul says, which is above that is free. It's a picture of the very presence of God in the glory that awaits the child of God.

The thought of this verse, says Derechidna, leaps beyond the hills to the universe, beyond the universe to its maker. Here is living help, primary, personal, wise, immeasurable help for the child of God.

God. And therefore, we don't need to worry on this journey. To use another football metaphor, but to change the team, just in case you think I'm biased, which I am, the Anfield cop sing, you'll never walk alone.

If you walk through a storm, you can hold your head up high, not be afraid of the dark. It'll be fine because you'll never walk alone. It's a good metaphor.

[20:26] And it's true of us on this journey, which is why the psalm says, He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber.

Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life. Well, that's all right, isn't it? He watches over you. Do you think he wanted to tell you that? Six times he wanted to say, I will watch over you or keep you.

It's the same word in Hebrew. The Hebrew word shamar means to just look over you, to watch over you, just to be there. Like a loving parent with a little child, just to make sure that you'll be okay. I'll not let your foot slip. I'll not allow you to be ultimately harmed. And so the next slide, please.

[21:29] This is a song for the journey when we need reassurance from God. Because God is watching over you. Next slide. God is watching over you.

There's a major emphasis here. Six times I've said, he watches or he keeps over you. Keeps watch over you. Protection, said Derokidna, is a burning issue for a pilgrim who is traveling arduously and

through lonely country.

I mean, there might be bandits on the way. There will be scorching heat. There will be the cold of the night. There will be the possibility of falling from one of these steep ravines and breaking a limb that will prevent me getting to the house of God.

All kinds of reasons why I may not make it. But God says, you'll make it because I'm watching over you. Have you ever read Pilgrim's Progress?

One of my favorite characters in Pilgrim's Progress is ready to halt. He's on a crutch. He's on his crutches and he's trying to get to the celestial city. And he struggles along the way.

[ 22 : 41 ] You meet him periodically, ready to halt. And eventually when Christian gets to the river's edge and he's going through the river of death which it's meant to represent, he has to swim and he fears he's going to fail.

And then he looks around and he sees he's ready to halt in a boat and he gets across easily. He struggled so much in life fearing that he may just fall apart at the very moment when he needed to be most courageous at the river of death and the Lord helped him across easily because he watches over us.

He is with us always and we'll be ready to die when we die because Jesus will make sure that he's with us. He'll be with us just as he's been with us in this life on this journey.

He will draw near. It's been the greatest, one of the greatest privileges of my life as a minister to be with people who are dying in the Lord and to watch us there in many cases comfortably just yield their spirit to Jesus.

Remember dear Robert many years ago they were expecting to struggle and struggle and struggle and with the permission of the family I went close to him and conscious as he was I whispered into his ear Jesus is coming for you he's coming to take you home don't struggle take his hand and go and within a moment within a moment he went.

[ 24 : 21 ] I said to the family do you want me to go and get to get the nurse or the doctor to confirm it they said no no just give us time to pray. So we prayed and they wept.

But it's like that wonderful passage that Paul says sorrowful he says yet always rejoicing. How do you do that? Sad but happy. You can be sad but happy.

Sad that you've lost somebody you love but happy that they have gone to be with the Lord. That's our great hope because the Lord watches over us both now and forevermore.

we are never out of his care never out of his sight. He is always with us. He will never leave us or forsake us. And this is a reminder to us that life is a journey and we're on a road.

But we have to be careful about the road we're on. Jesus says enter through the narrow gate for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it but small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only few find it.

[ 25 : 33 ] Were you listening last week and think to yourself why do these people in North Korea and Sudan and all these follow Jesus when they know it's going to cost them their life? The answer is they know that Jesus is the way to life and therefore any earthly cost is worth paying in order that they might be with Jesus for eternity.

A short time on earth no matter how easy it is no matter how many riches you have no matter how wonderful it may be is nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed.

So what will it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his soul? And what can a man give in exchange for his soul? Never allow any riches to be greater than your love for Jesus.

and make sure that you're on the road with Jesus that leads to life won't you? It's the safest place in the world to be.

You see this world is inconsistent it is uncertain there are all kinds of things that may happen but the one certainty we have if we walk this road this life with Jesus is that when it comes to its end we discover that it will never end because we have lived with him and when we die we will suddenly realize that that happened but we're still alive.

[ 27 : 00 ] I mean great thing that oh I died hey that was easy. Who knew that that which men fear most all their lives subject to the fear of death as the Hebrews puts it right the Hebrews puts it was actually just a hop and a skip into the very throne room of God to be forever with the Lord.

We are says Dallas Willard I have to quote him he's my friend I never met him but he feels like my friend we need to remember that irredeemable harm does not befall those who willingly live in the hand of God.

Irredeemable harm does not befall those who willingly live in the hand of God. God is greater than any difficulties we will face on the journey and he is always with us.

That's another slide you could just push them forward but I'm ahead of myself. I've said it. The Lord watches over you and he watches over you coming and you're going forevermore so you don't need to worry.

Again to quote Dallas at the beginning of each morning I commit my day to the Lord's care I've already placed God in charge I no longer have to manage the weather airplanes and other people. [ 28 : 37 ] He's got it and what a thing to be able to get up every day and say Lord you know I've got all kinds of things going on today all kinds of things that could happen to me today but you're with me you watch over me I don't need to worry about it I give it to you and I know that you will watch over me and you will keep me from harm and then if something happens in the day that makes me worried and a bit anxious about it just stop and say the Lord watches over you the Lord is your shade at your right hand and if I get you know a bit of ruminating going on and think what if what if what if the Lord watches over you the Lord is your shade at your right hand but Lord I've got this awful awful problem I've got the potential of having a dreadful disease one that may take my life the Lord watches over you the Lord is your shade at your right hand but Lord

I can't afford to pay the bills and I don't know how I'm going to manage I'm all alone I'm in need the Lord watches over you the Lord is your shade at your right hand you don't need to worry God's in control he will never leave you he will never forsake you and Derek Kidna says and it would be hard to decide which half of it is the most more encouraging the fact that it starts from now or that it runs on not to the end of time but without end like God himself who is my portion forever the Lord watches over you both now and forever more now and forever more and that's the great thing that's why you have eternal life it's not something future you know it's now and forever more you will think when you get to heaven wow

I see something of the glory of God that I've never seen before but I also experience something of the presence of God that I had all my life because he will never leave me nor will he forsake me what a hope we have in the journey a blessed hope and the last slide please Augustine says sorry that one think of yourself as you will sorry think of yourself as you will be when you get there you are still on the way but keep your future destiny before your eyes as though you were standing there and already rejoicing with the angels in a joy that can never be taken away from you bear yourself as though the prophecy in another psalm were already a reality for you blessed are they who dwell in your house they will praise you forever and ever oh can't you see it can't you imagine it can't you feel it to be in the presence of God forever just whenever it's tough whenever it's hard just remember no matter how hard the hills might be you are going to God's house and all will be well and all manner of things will be well thank you

Lord amen