

Where does my help come from?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 May 2023

Preacher: John Lowrie

[0 : 0 0] Psalm 120 to Psalm 134, and we began with Psalm 120, and this evening we'll look at Psalm 121. Probably one of the most well-known of the 15 Psalms. Somebody said this was their favorite this evening, so that's great. Hopefully I can do it justice. Psalm 121. Let's read this together, and then we'll come to God again in prayer. A Song of Ascents. I lift my eyes to the mountains.

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. 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. Great Psalm. So much in it. So many deep truths, great truths in this Psalm, and the Lord will hopefully speak to us as we consider this together. Let's remember what it was like before you became a Christian. Maybe just before you became a Christian, and you're thinking, I find it hard to believe, but it must be great to be a Christian, to know God, to walk with God, and so forth. I remember when I became a Christian in May the 12th, it was my spiritual birthday just a few weeks ago, or last week, and in Kelvin Hall in Glasgow, I was saved in 1980. You can do the maths. I became a Christian there, and it was a Louise Palau crusade. It was just before Louise Palau came and did a big mission for a whole week or two. It was a one-off visit, and I just happened to pop in. I lived in Sockey Hall

Street at the time, and the Lord saved me. I'd been seeking for about a year and a half, and then God found me in that meeting. But I remember, as part of that process, you know, you go forward to take your name, and you're allocated somebody to disciple you, and it was two brethren men that disciplined me.

There must have been nobody else saved in Blantyre at the time, because it was only me and these two guys, and—but it was a great privilege to grasp something of the Christian life, and most discipleship courses and churches do something like that, don't they? If you become a Christian, well, we'll do a discipleship class with you, and you understand something about the faith. This is what's happened to you. You were alienated from God. God's broken in. He's saved you. He's died on the cross. His blood has cleansed you. You're forgiven. You have a relationship with God. Something about the faith over four, five, six weeks, or whatever. And also how to behave as a Christian, not only about what to believe, but how to behave. And it's good for you to join a church, become involved, take communion, pray, read the Bible. There's a spiritual warfare out there. And these are the basics that you get in the Christian life. But soon you discover, after a short time, the Christian life is not an easy life to live. Here's a book that I quite like. You can't buy this book. This book is *Hen's Teeth*,

What They Never Told Me When I Became a Christian. It's a book by Philip Yancey and a few others. Any of you read that book at all? I wish I read it around about the time when I became a Christian, because you begin to think, this is hard. Does God really love me? Here are some of the chapters.

[3 : 43] Sometimes, somewhere, you will seriously doubt that God is real. Another chapter, you won't always feel great about being a Christian. Another chapter, guilty feelings don't always disappear when God forgives you. At times, the Bible will seem as dry as dust. Sometimes you won't get what you pray for, no matter how hard you pray or you try. You have to put up with hypocrites in the church.

A loving God does sometimes let suffering happen, and doubts don't always go away. Those are just some of the chapters, and it's cheery, aren't they? But it's the very real world. It's not easy to live the Christian life. Sundays can be great. We're on the mountaintop, but then Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday comes, and the problems of life arise, and we feel we're carrying the world on our shoulders.

How do we cope with this? And Psalm 121 deals with this. The times when we need help. You might be saved, you might be on the mountaintop, singing and rejoicing. The simple truth is we need help as we go through life. So, we're continuing a series of studies on the songs of the pilgrims. These 15 songs that were sung on these pilgrimages, maybe three times a year as God's people went up to Jerusalem. It was commanded in Deuteronomy, three times a year you must appear before the Lord at the place where he chooses.

Feast of tabernacles, feast of weeks, feast of unleavened bread. Three times a year when they went up, and they would sing, they would renew the covenant, they would rejoice in the fact that they are God's people. They would recall their deliverance from Egypt, the God's provision in the wilderness, and they celebrate them in these three feasts. So, there's this going up to Jerusalem, metaphorically and also physically as well. It's the highest part in Palestine. And last week we looked at Psalm 120.

When the psalmist makes a conscious decision to set out on this journey, he makes this decision, too long have I lived amongst those who hate peace. I am for peace, but when I speak they are for war.

[6 : 02] It's almost a personal revival. He wants this deeper walk with God. He knows where he's dwelling, he knows what the difficulties are, and he makes this decision. Too long have I done this. Now I want to walk with the Lord. And you know as a Christian, your life is like Jacob's, up and down, times wrestling with God, times of great blessing, times of finding it difficult to trust God during the difficult times.

That is the real life, times when life seems to be easy, and times when it's so, so hard to keep walking with God. And the psalmist knows this, and this is a point in his life, as they're going up, we're walking with God. We're beginning this journey with Him. Eugene Patterson, in his wee commentary on this, called A Long Obedience in the Same Direction, I mentioned this to you last week. He says this, The moment we say no to the world and yes to God, all our problems are solved, all our questions answered, all our troubles over. Nothing can disturb the tranquility of the soul at peace with God. Nothing can interfere with the blessed assurance that all is well between me and my Savior. Nothing and no one can upset the enjoyable relationship which has been established by faith in Christ. We Christians are among the privileged company of persons who don't have accidents, who don't have arguments with our spouses, who aren't misunderstood by our peers, whose children do not disobey us. Any of those things should happen, a crushing doubt, a squall of anger, a desperate loneliness, an accident that puts us in the hospital, an argument that puts us in the doghouse, a rebellion that puts us on the defensive, a misunderstanding that puts us in the wrong. It is a sign that something is wrong with our relationship with God. We have consciously or unconsciously retracted our yes to God, and God, impatient with our fickle faith, has gone off to take care of someone more deserving of his attention. And he says, is that what you believe? If it is, I have some incredibly good news for you, you are wrong. And it's quite good that the thing is, there are problems in life. There are many problems, and doubts can sometimes come, and we can be fearful and anxious about many things.

But the Lord has not gone off to take care of someone more deserving. He never leaves us nor forsakes us. He loves us. He cares for us. And Psalm 121 is a psalm that deals with those times of maybe doubt and difficulty, wondering. You could, along with some of the other psalms, you could cut them out and put it in a wee glass panel and have it in your kitchen. In case of emergency, break glass. When all fails of certain psalms, you can just, I need this. My soul is out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord. That's what it feels like at times to be a Christian, lose the death of a loved one or something, when nothing makes sense and the heavens seem to be brass. And we begin to wonder, where does my help come from?

That's what we're looking at this evening. So, let's look at this. I only have two points, but they're big points. So, let's look at these together. Where does the psalmist's help come from? That's what he's asking here. Where does my help come from?

Verse 1. He's set out on the journey. He's realizing that it's hard. First of all, he says, our creator God. His help comes from the maker of heaven and earth. He sets out on the way to Jerusalem.

[9 : 41] It's not a smooth road. It's not easy. There are difficulties. And he says in verse 1, I lift my eyes to the mountains. Where does my help come from? What does that verse mean? Some commentators say that this is the psalmist on his journey. He's looking up to the hills, and there could be trouble there. There could be bandits and robbers. And he's thinking, I'm on my way. I'm walking with the Lord, but there are threats to my walk with the Lord. Where does my help come from? Because he sees dangers there. Most of the good commentators say that's probably not the case. It's probably not how to understand this verse. Instead, most of them say the psalmist is looking to the hills, and he's asking himself, as he sets out with God, when difficulties come, where is my help going to come from? Is it going to come from the hills? I lift my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? Does it come from the hills? Now, in the Old Testament, many times, you had the hills, the high places. They're mentioned 72 times in the Old Testament. There were other religions during the vying for the hearts of the people. You could worship God. You could worship Baal. You could worship Asherah. You could worship these other gods. And the temptation was to follow the crowd and to worship in these high places. So, and when difficulties come, you think you want good weather, you worship the God of weather.

You're infertile. You worship the God of fertility. You want to worship Baal if you want certain things. There were certain gods that you prayed for at that time. It was very common. People don't do that nowadays. There is no God. You just do your own thing. You solve it yourself. But in those days, there was a God who you could turn to, and it was very much the case. The sun god for protection against the sun and so forth, many of these things. And the psalmist is basically asking, as he begins this journey, I lift my eyes to the mountains, to the hills. Where does my help come from? In times of difficulty, do I just do what everybody else does? Do I act as if there is no God and go to these other gods or other solutions? And sometimes we can do that as well, can't we?

We can, if we're downcast rather than read God's Word, we turn on the telly and hope that EastEnders or something will cheer us up or a movie or some music or whatever. And sometimes we look to, we just do what the world does. We seek comfort in other things. We try by the strength of our own arm to save ourself. We use human wisdom. Instead, the psalmist affirms, my help comes, verse 2, not from the mountains, but from the one who made the mountains, the maker of heaven and earth. This is the God, he says, who helps him, the creator God. He looks past the hills, not to other hills, but to the maker of the universe. It's quite something, the maker of heaven and earth. And this is what God challenges us with. I remember, I've not done it for a long, long time, but remember times when you do wonder, does God really see? Do we really believe the right things? And you can do it here more than you can do it in London. You can walk out at night and see some stars. You can't see any stars in London. There's nothing. You can see streetlights, but you can hardly see a single star. And I used to work for the Ministry of Defense on a wee island near the

Isle of Skye, and dark was dark. You might as well walked about with your eyes closed because opening your eyes made no difference. You couldn't see a thing that was pitch black. There was no light pollution at all. You were stuck in a wee island, and suddenly you lifted your eyes, and you couldn't believe the amount of stars that were in the sky. Just amazing. And you thought, you just don't see these. And I used to, whenever I began to maybe doubt, and I would use it to speak to myself. I'd look up at the heavens and think, did this all just happen by accident, the moon and the sun? Is it just boom, there was a big bang? And I used it to chide myself and say, you're a dumpling, John. You, God, made all this. And he really made it. And I reaffirmed God as creator. And the psalmist is doing just that.

This, when difficulties come, his help is in the maker of heaven and earth. And isn't that what God does in Isaiah? Isaiah 42. This is what the Lord says, He who created the heavens and stretched them out to spread out the earth and all that comes in it, who gives breath to its people and life to those who walk in it. Isaiah 40, lift your eyes, look to the heavens, who created all these, who brings out the starry host one by one, who calls them by name. The Lord does this. Look at the heavens. And you remember Job, that great book of Job when he suffered for many, many a long time.

[14 : 51] And he comes and he says, who is this who obscures my plans with words without knowledge? And he speaks to Job out of the storm. Brace yourself. I will question you. Where were you when I created this?

Where were you when I did that? Were you there? And he asks him all these questions. And every answer is no, no, no. And God says, I can, I did, I will, I am. And it's quite something. Without these arguments, you become smaller and God becomes bigger. And men and women have no fear of God as creator.

But we know God. And when you come to know him as your Lord and Savior, you recognize that he is your creator. You're accountable to him. And yet he loves us. Jesus himself said, in the midst of all of this, this is, if I only had one verse to share with people in pastoral counseling, as I go and see folk, it's Matthew 10, 29. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? They're to a penny. Yet not one of them falls to the ground outside of your father's will. Are you not worth more than many sparrows? It's quite something. That in the midst of all the planets, God is in control of the minutiae of a sparrow.

We have moved back to Musselboro and seagulls are just doing where we're heading. Seagulls. I mean, I'd almost think, did the Lord really create these things? And they're just in your face. They're flying.

They're bombing you. They're doing all sorts. And yet, no, a wee sparrow. I mean, some of the birds you see on the beach are great. We pointy beaks. I'm not a normathologist, but you just go, wow, look at that.

[16 : 33] Look at that wee bird. But a sparrow, you just don't even notice it. The most boring wee bird, wee grey brownie thing that just flirts around. And yet, not one falls to the ground apart from the will of my father. And how much more special are we? And in the psalmist here, he reaffirms the Lord's care for him. When difficulties come, where does his help come from? The maker of heaven and earth. But look at what he means by this. He's talking about the accidents of life. Verse 3, he will not let your foot slip. That's one of these things. You don't go out and let your foot slip.

You're going along in the middle of winter, and your foot slips. It's things you don't plan for. And here is the psalmist affirming himself that he who—he will not let your foot slip. Verse 3, he who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel, the whole nation, will neither slumber nor sleep. The world believes in fate or bad luck or whatever. We don't believe in this. We believe a God who's sovereign, whose providential care is towards us. Accidents don't happen in that sense to us. The Lord is over there. Even if you went out and slipped and broke your hip, you have to include God. God somehow sees this. He sees the end from the beginning. He's allowed certain things to happen. I get a great deal of comfort in the sovereignty of God and the providence of God. Otherwise, I'd say, Lord, were you sleeping? A bit like Baal, when Elijah says, maybe he's sleeping.

Maybe he's having a holiday. Maybe he's relieving himself. Really very graphic. Maybe he's not there. The other gods are not there when you need them. But our God is there when we need him. He is always there for the accidents of life. When our foot appears to slip and there doesn't appear to be any reason, he is behind it. He leads us. He guides us. Doesn't mean you'll never have illnesses or you won't fall or stub your toe and stand on a bit of Lego. Doesn't mean these things won't happen.

But the Lord is over all these things. Ultimately, he's not out to harm us, and these things don't do this. But not only the accidents of life, the daily things of life. Look at verse 6.

The sun will not harm you by day. You could certainly say that in Scotland, couldn't you? This is not impressive if you live in Scotland. Maybe if you lived in Africa or something. I remember being stuck in a van working with OM as a young Christian distributing tracks in St. Etienne down that way. It was a furnace. It was so hot. We're stuck in this van, and I think OM just denied you everything they could. Water and big dogs barking at you. And I just remember there was this big Londoner, big rugby player guy. He came in after we were distributing tracks. You could hardly breathe.

[19 : 28] And he quoted this verse. The sun will not harm you by day. And I'm thinking, I'm struggling to believe that. I must confess, just as you go about your daily life, let's spend, I love that life.

You work in the morning, you're up early, and then from 2 o'clock, you have a siesta all the way through whatever. You're back in life at 7, and then you're having your meal at half 10 at night. I want that culture. That suits me. I like an afternoon nap. But the sun won't harm you by day.

They recognize they need to live that way, because the sun will harm them. But the thing is, just as we go about our daily life, the Lord is able to lead us and to guide us and to look after us. And that's what's happening here. This is the natural disasters that might come our way, just as we're affected by the economic climate, as we're affected by the cost of living, war in Ukraine, bodily ailments, relationships, things that affect everybody. The same sun that shines on them shines on us. But we have the Lord to lead and to guide and to protect. It doesn't mean that we're not affected by these things, but ultimately the Lord loves us. He's still and can care and care for us. Then you come to imagined dangers. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

It's a strange thing. I've never known anybody to be afraid of the moon. But in this time, and it wasn't very long ago, where people saw the threat that came from the moon, lunar, it's where we get the phrase lunatics, madness. It's the moon that causes, and folk would have believed that. It's the moon that's driving me crazy. Mental disorders, depression, discouragement, even those things. The moon won't harm us. Things that, oh Lord, I'm going to be fearful. I'm going to be anxious. Many people just need a calm disposition. Do not be anxious about anything.

But with everything, with prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God. Why? And the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ. We all need peace. I want peace on a Monday. I don't want to wake up on a Monday thinking, Lord, what's going to happen? I've got this to do.

[21 : 41] Yeah, I'm one of these guys. Unless I'm worrying, I'm not doing something right. I feel I have to worry whether it's a shelf that's not put up right or anything. Doesn't matter what it was. We just find things to worry about. And these can sometimes just be imagined things. And we need a sound heart and a sound mind. Dangers that can threaten us, perceived dangers. And basically, the psalmist is looking at all these accidents every day, the future. And he's saying, my help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. It doesn't mean that these things won't come our way, but it's so easy to look for help in other things and not in the Lord. David says, or the psalmist says, my help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. In 2023, we know more than the psalmist knows, more than David knows. One of the psalms, Psalm 19, the psalmist says, David is talking about creation, and he's looking at God's creative power. And he likens the son to a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. In those days, that would have been King

Solomon. Thinking of that, wow, that's great. A bridegroom. We often think the bride is more impressive than the bridegroom. But there, here is a bridegroom coming. And he says, I've looked at the son, and the son is a wee bit like that. And people maybe went, wow, that's good, isn't it? I never thought of that. You try telling that to folk in Westerhailes. The son is like a bridegroom. And they'll go, really, it's just not impressive. But the thing is, we know an awful lot more. I'm going to show you a video just now, as I come to the end of this first point, to drive this home. When I prepared this, I came across, I remembered a video, and they've modernized it up. The version I first came across was like Buck Rogers in the 1960s. They've started this up. I don't know if you've seen it before. It starts off, it zooms out from a woman line in the Google headquarters. Have you seen it?

And then it zooms out. And what it does is it shows you the vastness of the universe, looking at more than just a star, as I was encouraging you to do. The vastness of the known universe. It kind of shows the whole picture. And then it zooms back. And then it zooms into, I think it's our eye. And it shows the minutiae of our God. He doesn't just create big things. He creates the tiniest of things. So, after this, you read the verse, my help comes from the maker of heaven and earth. In this, it will show you light years.

A light year is not a time. A light year is a distance. It's a distance you can travel if you traveled at the speed of light. The speed of light is 186,000 miles a second. That's fast.

That is fast. In one second, you could travel the earth seven and a half times traveling at that speed. And one minute traveling at the speed of light, just one minute will take you 11 million miles.

[24 : 58] One minute. So, you imagine how far you travel in one light year. As you see this, you'll see numbers to do with light years, millions of light years. It just blows your switches.

But let's watch the video. Thanks, Phil. Appreciate that. ju■ nad Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[27 : 27] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[30 : 27] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

You know I Wahoo, even as you go back on the bypass or whatever it is you travel home. He watches over you. He won't slumber nor sleep. And he's committed to do this. As I was preparing this, I remembered a song popped into my mind by the police. And you'll probably, I'm sure you can guess maybe what song it was. Every breath you take. Let me remind you the words. Every breath you take, every move you make, every bond you break, every step you take, I'll be watching you. Every single day, every word you say, every game you play, every night you stay, I'll be watching you. Oh, can't you see? What comes next? You belong to me. And it's quite something. Oh, can't you see? You belong to me. And the Lord would remind us of this. Every breath you take, I'll be watching you. That's what the psalmist is singing. You could almost put this in this psalm. Coming and going, he neither slumbers nor sleep.

[34 : 22] Every step you take, every breath you make, I'll be watching you. Oh, can't you see why this is? Because you belong to me. I've entered into a covenant with you. It cost me the blood of my son.

That won't be broken. It will never be broken. Saved once for all. It is quite something. So, here is a psalm that, where the psalmist begins his journey, he's discovering that it's hard, it's not easy. He will need help. Where will his help come from? It won't be where the world looks.

We have a God. Our God is the God of the video and beyond, the creator of heaven and earth. He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or imagine. And he will. Why? Because he's not only our creator God, he is our covenant God, sealed in the blood of Jesus Christ. May the Lord encourage us with these thoughts as we walk with him into this coming week. So, let's stand and we'll sing together a song. Sure, you know this one, He Will Hold Me Fast. It's a great song. Thank you very much, Phil. Heavenly Father, we thank you for that reminder this evening that the Savior who created all things, the Savior who came, who loved us, who died to save us, is the same Savior who rose again and can keep us and will keep us. And we thank you, Father, for the relationship that we have with you through your Son. We thank you, Lord, for the covenant that binds us together, that was sealed in the blood of your Son, that new covenant, not based on works, but based on grace. And we thank you for your grace, which not only saves us, but keeps us. Father, we hear your word as we close.

Now, may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant, brought back from the dead, our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will.

And may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to the glory, to whom be glory forever and ever. And all God's people said, Amen. Amen. Please be seated.