

My help comes from the Lord.

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- [0 : 0 0] Today, Psalm 121. Lord, speak to us now as we read your word.
- Help us to take it in. Let it speak in our lives. Amen. Okay, are we there?
- One, two, one. 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. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
- [1 : 1 4] 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. It's a privilege for me to be here and to share with you from God's word. This is the first time I've been here, actually, all the way from Musselburgh, so far away.
- But yeah, no, it's a real privilege to be here. If you'll turn with me again back to Psalm 121. I want just to look at that for a short time together this morning.
- [2 : 3 2] I don't know if anyone is familiar with the song, You'll Never Walk Alone. It's a common, it's a well-known song, isn't it? A classic song that's been covered a number of times over many years.
- But for me, and maybe for some of us here, it's well-known to football fans, isn't it? It's a well-known song if you're a Liverpool or a Celtic fan.
- And this is the anthem that they sing. So as supporters, they wait for their players to emerge from the tunnel, and they sing these words.
- I'm just going to say them to you. When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high, and don't be afraid of the dark. At the end of the storm, there's a golden sky, and the sweet silver song of a lark.
- Walk on through the wind, walk on through the rain, though your dreams be tossed and blown. Walk on, walk on, with hope in your hearts, and you'll never walk alone.
- [3 : 3 8] And then it concludes with this eruption of cheers and applause as they try to will their team to victory. It's a song to remind the players that they, as the supporters, are with them.
- A constant support throughout the 90 minutes. Now, I'm very much aware that bringing up football this early on is a dangerous thing. I promise that I won't mention it ever again.
- And that's the last I've mentioned of it. So if I've lost you, please come back. Please. I won't talk about it again. But there is a connection here.
- It is the same with the psalm, I think, that we're going to look at this morning. And I think it too could be entitled, You'll Never Walk Alone. Now, I'm sure many of you will already know that the book of Psalms is a collection of songs, isn't it?

It's like the hymn book of the Bible, if you like. And this song is a song of encouragement for the believer, for us going through life's journey, if you like.

[4 : 48] And so I want us to take some time just to work our way through the eight verses of this psalm and to pick up on four things which I feel stand out and that shows us about God.

Firstly, that he is my strength. He is your strength this morning. Secondly, he is my support. Thirdly, he is my shade.

And then fourthly, he is my saviour. Now, it's important for us to understand the context of this psalm before we wade into what it means for our lives and how we can apply it.

And as you can see at the top, if you just glance down with me to the top of the psalm, it is labelled a song of ascents. A song of ascents.

And this actually goes for a number of the surrounding psalms. Psalm 120 to 134 are all in this category.

[5 : 54] They all come under this heading. And so it's like an album, if you like. If these are songs, it's like an album. And so these 14 songs by the psalmist is an album. And the second track on this album, Psalm 121.

You'll never walk alone. And so these songs were sung by the Jewish people as they made their way up to Jerusalem from wherever they were in the world at that time.

They were on a pilgrimage, a pilgrimage to worship God. And so we need to imagine this pilgrim. We need to imagine this pilgrim as he's writing this psalm, making his journey up and through the mountains to Jerusalem to worship God.

That's where our head is at this morning. So first of all, God is my strength. I want to look at the strength that God provides. Now this journey absolutely was not an easy one.

I want to look at just these first two verses initially. 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. It was not an easy journey.

[7 : 06] It may have been several miles over tracks and uneven ground. It was physically demanding. And now, of course, there was no go outdoors or taizo that you could go and pick up some really good hiking boots and set off on your journey.

There's nothing like that. The conditions were poor and no doubt the footwear was basic and simple. This wasn't a journey that you would make without planning and preparation.

And the writer here finds himself at the start of this psalm. I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? You see, the mountains would bring a mixture of emotion.

A mixture of emotion. Because initially they would indicate that he's almost there. He's almost there. He's weary and he's tired. He needs rest. Yet in his mind's eye he can see the gates to Jerusalem.

He can see it. He's close. He's so close. But also these mountains indicated the threat of robbers.

[8 : 21] The danger of wild animals perhaps. All sorts of danger. And so he's scared. He's feeling vulnerable and exposed.

He needs help. He needs strength to get him through. So the psalmist here, he sees his situation, doesn't he? What's in front of him?

And he panics a little bit. He panics. I need help. I need help. I see myself in this. Isn't that like us this morning?

We see our problem and we feel alone and afraid, don't we? We feel helpless at times, in fact. I wonder if that is you this morning.

I don't know what it is that you're facing at the minute, what you're going through in your life right now. But maybe you're in need of help. You need strength to get you through this difficult period in your life.

[9 : 25] But look at what the psalmist realizes. It's almost like, of course, of course. What does he say? My help comes from the Lord. My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

You see, God is his source of strength. The creator God is the one that will enable him and help him. The one that has made and sustains all things.

I'm not sure if anyone has been watching the series Planet Earth on BBC One on a Sunday evening. Maybe you catch up on iPlayer.

But it really is incredible. But it really is incredible, isn't it? Some of the footage that is captured is incredible. There was actually one week just recently that they looked at the mountains.

They looked at the mountains and the wildlife that was there and all that was surviving in these harsh conditions. But the beauty and the detail and the complexity of our world is incredible.

[10 : 30] You can't help but praise the designer of it, can you? We can't help. Praise the maker of the heavens and the earth.

And this is where the psalmist's help comes from, isn't it? Notice also how personal it is to him.

My help. My help. He uses the word my. The one that spoke those very mountains that stood in front of him, that he faced.

The one that spoke those into existence is interested in the safety and the well-being of the writer. The God who made our incredible world and everything in it is interested in me and he's interested in you this morning.

He cares for you. He made you and he sustains you each day. So just as God is the psalmist's strength, so we this morning as believers, as Christians, can say, He is my strength.

[11 : 40] He is my strength. Psalm 46 says that God is our refuge and strength, our ever-present help in trouble. So whatever God calls us to do in our lives, whatever it is that we might be facing today or in the week ahead, we can do in the strength that God provides.

You are not alone. He is your source of help. God knows you personally. God knows what your needs are. He knows what's going on in your life.

And he is the only one that can provide this strength that will last, that will sustain. So this morning, if you've come looking for help, don't look to each other, although we can help in some way.

But it is God that will supply the strength that we need in our lives. God will never fail us. So he is my strength.

Secondly, he is my support. In verses 3 and 4, He will not let your foot slip.

[12 : 53] He who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. Of course, we need more than strength for life's journey.

We need support also, don't we? And the psalmist moves on. He will not let your foot slip. You see, he remembers what the way was like.

He remembers it from last time. He sees that spot where something terrible almost happened. Do you remember that? Oh, that was so close last time.

Such a close call, that incident that happened. And so he remembers these times, these difficult sections and parts of the journey.

This harsh terrain that they would have had to endure, the steep climbs and the narrow passages. And the psalmist tells us that, although the way is treacherous, you may stumble, you may trip, but you will not fall down.

[14 : 08] You will not fall down. Our oldest girl, Leah, is two. She's at this age where she wants to do everything on her own.

I'm sure if you've got young children or grandchildren, you're very aware and familiar with this stage. Little Miss Independent. And sometimes this means not wanting to hold Dad's hand as we cross the road.

Something so simple, but it can become a really big deal. Now, if Leah is holding my hand, if she's holding my hand, then she can let go at any time, can't she?

However, if I'm holding her hand, that's a different story. I know that I'm not letting her go until she's safely over the roads. And this is how God is with his children.

It's not us that's holding on to God. It's God that is holding on to us. He will not let us fall away through life's journey.

[15 : 15] The Lord has a hold of you. And so you might loosen your grip on him, but he will never loosen his grip on you. In Deuteronomy, it says, Be strong and courageous.

Do not be afraid or terrified, for the Lord your God goes with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. And that's something we hear often in the Bible, isn't it?

He will never leave you nor forsake you. And so maybe this applies to you this morning. It doesn't matter how far you've fallen.

You're never out of God's reach. You're never out of God's reach. There is always a way back to him. Always forgiveness.

And because of Jesus this morning, there are countless second chances. Countless second chances. So maybe you have let go this morning, or you're trying to let go.

[16 : 17] God wants to hold you. He wants to keep you. He wants to be your support. It goes on to say that he watches over you.

If you look down into verse 4, he watches over you. In verse 3, he watches over you will not slumber. He watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

There comes a time when the psalmist, these hikers, simply have to stop and rest. The day of travel ends, and they need to sleep.

They're physically exhausted. They're tired. They need to stop. And I'm sure many of us know what that's like, the feeling of needing to rest. Some of us will have young children, and just desperate for them to go to sleep.

Please, will you close your eyes so you can get some rest as well? Or working long shifts, long hours, and just the feeling of, I need my bed.

[17 : 20] I need to get to bed, get some rest. I'm exhausted. This is not the case with God. This is incredible. This is not the case with God.

He doesn't feel weary at any point. He never needs to rest. And so he does not sleep, ever. He does not sleep.

He is always watching over us, every hour of the day and night. I find this interesting to think of when with work, sometimes we're on call.

And so there's times where you can get a phone call in the middle of the night, when everyone's asleep, when everyone's in bed, and you're out and you're having to go and do work.

And it's an interesting thought to think that when everyone else is tucked up in bed, God is still awake. God is still there and he's watching over us. And he knows what's going on.

- [18 : 19] There is never a time when God is not there. Never a time when God is not there. He's always accessible, always ready to listen, to hear our prayers and our cries.
- I don't know if you remember the story in Elijah, sorry, in 1 Kings, the story of Elijah, 1 Kings 18. And they're on Mount Carmel and the prophets of Baal are gathered with Elijah and they're calling down their God to set this sacrifice alight.
- Calling down fire, aren't they? And the prophets of Baal are continually calling on their gods. Nothing's happening.
- They're dancing and they're singing and they're cutting themselves in order for this God to bring down the fire. And what does Elijah say? He says, maybe he's taking a nap.
- Maybe he's taking a nap. He's taunting them, isn't he? He's taunting them. This isn't the case with our gods. This isn't the case with the maker of the heaven and the earth.
- [19 : 28] He never sleeps and therefore there is never a time of day or night when you are alone. God is your support.
- He has a hold of you and will never let you go. Thirdly then, God is my shade.
- He is my shade down in verses 5 and 6. 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.
- I'm sure many of us will have been abroad on holiday. I can't think of a time where I've been here and the heat has been unbearable.
- Certainly, I can remember being in Florida and feeling that sense of just being unbearable. No doubt, many of us will have experienced that if we've been abroad. And you feel like you could actually melt if you stood out here any longer.
- [20 : 37] You could die. This is so hot. So what do you do? You desperately look for cover, don't you? You're looking for protection from the sun.
- Anything that you can find. An umbrella, a shop doorway, anything. You need shade. It's shade that you need. And when you find it, ah, such relief, isn't it?
- Amazing. Well, can you imagine what it must have been like for these folks making the journey to Jerusalem, a difficult journey as we've talked about, but add the dangers of heat, exhaustion, or sunstroke, and it becomes a whole lot worse.
- They needed strength. They needed support. But they also needed shade. It's necessary for survival. It provided relief and comfort in the midst of oppressive circumstances.
- And so just as the shade provided that relief for the weary travelers, God is the one in which we must turn to for relief from our most difficult times.
- [21 : 52] God is the only one that can protect. He brings comfort and peace that nothing else can.
- I'm sure you'll know that verse in Philippians, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. That's an amazing verse just to know, isn't it?
- And I'm sure many of us will have experienced that through our lives. But you'll also know that, and we must see this, that God doesn't take the trials away.
- He doesn't stop the sun from shining. He doesn't stop the moon from coming out at night. But what he does is he provides a protection during these times, these difficult times.
- So what are you going through this morning? what are you facing? What trials and difficulties are you facing? You're desperate for God just to take them away, take them away.
- [23 : 03] But we're saying here that God provides the protection during these times. He is our comfort and our peace that enables us to stay strong through the difficult times in our lives.

life. And so whatever it is that God calls you to walk through on life's journey, he will be with you.

He will be with you. He is your shade. He is your shade. And then fourthly and finally, verses 7 and 8, he is my saviour.

verses 7 and 8, 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 forever more.

There was evil lurking around every corner as they travelled up the mountains towards Jerusalem. See, the robbers and the bandits, they knew when to expect these travellers because it was a pilgrimage that they made three times a year up to Jerusalem at certain dates in the diary.

[24 : 23] Chances were they're waiting for them around the corner. And of course, we've said already there was the added danger of these wild animals needing fed.

They faced evil and danger from all sides. And the psalmist writes, God will protect them from harm, from all evil.

And this is the case with us, isn't it? Have you forgotten that this morning? It's a reminder, God will protect us from all evil. And yes, God protects us, but I think it's deeper than that.

I think this is referring to our heart and our soul. You see, we're constantly faced with evil. As Christians, we're in a spiritual battle, aren't we?

Remember what it says in Ephesians 6, our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

[25 : 27] we are facing a spiritual battle every day. This is the evil that we face. However, it's a mismatch, isn't it?

It's a mismatch. This tug of war is not an equal contest. God is infinitely greater than the evil one.

He is our savior, the one who enables us to have the victory over sin and death. And this, of course, is all possible because of our savior, Jesus.

Because of Jesus who had that victory over sin and death. He became the sacrifice for sin and was put to death on the cross at Calvary.

But when he rose again after three days, he defeated its curse. it no longer has the power it once had. So now, as believers in Jesus, we can have the victory over sin, the victory over evil.

[26 : 44] He will watch over your coming and going, is what it says. There is never a time when he's off duty. He will always watch over our souls.

So even when we are faithless, which we so often can be, can't we? God is faithful. He keeps his promises and he keeps us.

God is going to walk alone. So just to finish, we began by saying that this psalm could be entitled, You'll never walk alone.

And I trust that you can see that just in some small way this morning, that we can take that into our busy weeks, whatever it is that's ahead of us. And remember that we will never walk alone.

No matter what is going on in our lives, God is your strength, he is your support, he is your shade, and he is your saviour.

[27 : 52] Amen.