

*A song of ascents.*

- <sup>1</sup> *I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
where does my help come from?*
- <sup>2</sup> *My help comes from the LORD,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.*
- <sup>3</sup> *He will not let your foot slip—  
he who watches over you will not slumber;*
- <sup>4</sup> *indeed, he who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.*
- <sup>5</sup> *The LORD watches over you—  
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;*
- <sup>6</sup> *the sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.*
- <sup>7</sup> *The LORD will keep you from all harm—  
he will watch over your life;*
- <sup>8</sup> *the LORD will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore. (Psalm 121)*

### **Where Does My Help Come From?**

Where can I get help for this? I had the curse of this weather strike me this week: I ruined a tire in a pothole. Where is the best place for me to go? A tire store? The dealership? Wal-Mart? My wife got a new job a few weeks ago and we had to go through the benefits package and figure out what we wanted to sign up for and what we didn't. Some of it was pretty clear, but some of it used so much "accountant-ese" that we weren't completely sure what it all meant. Who should we ask for help? Obviously, I could go on and on listing these kinds of questions. We could talk about medical issues or personal security. We could talk about stress and money matters and property maintenance. And we could offer all kinds of practical answers – call the doctor for medical problems, a financial planner for money issues, a member of the Board of Property and Maintenance to take care of stuff at the parsonage. But the point of the questions today is the One who stands behind all those other people who help us, the one who calls himself "our help." Today, in Psalm 121, God gives us the real answer to the very practical question **where does my help come from?**

#### **I.**

The psalms are the prayers of ancient Israel. But they're also much more than that: they're the word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit. So they deal with the real life of God's people. Psalm 121 asks, "**Where does my help come from?**" It gives the answer every Christian needs to cling to: **From the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.**

When the psalm writer wrote "the LORD" with all capital letters, he wasn't writing a generic title for God. He was actually writing God's name. Eventually, the Jews came to consider that name to be so holy that they stopped pronouncing it out loud. They substituted the words "the LORD" whenever that name came up. So, that title took on a very special meaning for them. When they heard "the Lord" – like when the angel in Bethlehem said that the child that was born to them was Christ the Lord – to the Jews that meant that he was the God that Psalm 121 was praying to. The LORD is the Trinity, the one, true God. Now, sometimes, the name "the LORD" focuses especially the Father. That is the case here in this verse. But the name carries the idea that this is the God of full and faithful love. This is the God who makes promises and always keeps them. This is the God who is and who was and who always will be.

Psalm 121 says that he is our help. He is the one we go to when life is hard and confusing and we don't know how to fix it. What is his qualification to help us? He is the maker of heaven and earth. The LORD said, "Let there be light" and there was light. The LORD conceived of the universe in his own infinite wisdom and

then made all that exists in six normal, twenty-four hour days. Today, of course, the mere mention of a six day creation causes endless arguing. People who believe science alone can give us truth mock the whole idea of a six day creation. So Christians feel a need to push back and try to prove creation scientifically. There's a whole creation science movement devoted to that cause. They even have a creation museum in Kentucky. But winning that argument isn't the reason God calls himself the maker of heaven and earth here. He did create the world in six twenty-four hour days. But he didn't tell us about it to give us something to argue with people about. Rather, he keeps talking about it to inspire confidence in the one who helps us – to strengthen our faith.

The maker of heaven and earth didn't build a machine and then turn it on and let it run. Some people have argued that way. They compare God to a watchmaker and point out that you can't work on the watch while it's running. But God isn't a watchmaker and the universe isn't a machine. The Bible says over and over again that God is running the creation. He is in control of all things. The God who's running everything is the God who promises to help us. He has the power to make and run the world. He has the power to deal with our problems. He has the wisdom to design and execute the marvels of the universe. He can figure out what we need and when we need it. He has the love to give us a world that has all that we need, even in its sin-damaged state. He will love and care for us. He will help us in time of need.

How do we know that's true? Not by how we feel about it. That can be confusing at best. Not by trying to weigh the good and the bad in our lives. Sometimes, it feels like there's been more bad than good, or at least like the bad is winning. Sometimes it's even true. Life will be like that until Jesus comes back. The only way to know the love and the power of the Creator is by knowing his Son. The miracle of God's grace is that God the Son, whom the Bible also calls the maker of the universe, made himself a part of the universe. The Creator became a creation. Jesus entered the womb of the Virgin Mary and he took a real human nature and became just as human as we are. He lived down here where we live. He endured all the hurts and sorrows of this life. He understood what it meant to depend on our helper when life was hard or painful. Jesus stood in our place here so that we will stand with him in heaven.

That Savior who not only lived for us, but also died for us, who suffered hell itself on the cross so that we don't have to, and then who rose from the dead – that Savior promises to do all things for our good. Our good means getting through life in this painful and sinful world and reaching heaven. So God does not promise that he will enable us to avoid every hurt and sorrow. He promises us help – which means there are going to be things that we need help with – tough and confusing times. But Jesus promises to get us through, even when we feel weak and alone. He promises to use the power and the love that he has displayed since before the world began to keep our faith alive and bring us home to heaven.

## II.

But that promise isn't only for heaven. God is with us now. He loves and blesses us already here. In fact, he pictures himself as a watchman standing guard over us. So, **where does my help come from? From the Lord who watches over my life.**

God says that he won't let our foot slip. How many times have you fallen down in your life? When kids play tumbling over is just a part of life. They climb the snowbanks in our parking lot and they fall down. They run around and trip and fall. Most of the time, the worst that happens is skinned knee. When you're my age, a fall is a little more serious. You could break a bone or just feel sore tomorrow. When you're twenty years older than I am, even a little fall can be life threatening. I can't tell you how many elderly Christians I've visited in the hospital because their feet slipped. But God promises to hold our feet steady. He is on watch.

He says, **“He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”** God is always on duty. Have you ever had to watch through the night? It's hard to stay awake, isn't it? If you're a nurse and you work the third shift, you have to stay awake and alert and watch over the patients in your care. If you're a police officer, you're only going to protect the citizens of your community if you're awake. Sometimes, our sinful weakness gives in and we find ourselves asleep when we should be wide awake. But that never happens with God. His eyes are always open. He is always fully engaged. We never get hurt because he got distracted or tired.

And he says that he is our shade at our right hand. The idea here is more than just comfort. It's safety. The people of Israel lived much closer to the equator than we do. The sun was hot and powerful. Even here, if you overexert yourself during the summer, you can suffer heat exhaustion or even heat stroke. I know it's hard to imagine right now, but it happens every year that someone drops dead mowing their lawn or working on their

yard or working out because they didn't get out of the sun. But to us, God says, **"The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night."**

God protects us from heat exhaustion and sunstroke. And God protects us from evil that's done in the moonlight. In a world without street lamps, getting around at night was hard. But if there was a bright moon, it would provide just enough light for a criminal to figure out how to break into your house while you were sleeping. In a larger sense, the moon probably represents all those scary things out there at night – the noises, the animals for people who lived closer to nature than we do, the people who are up to no good, the devil and his evil angels. When we sleep, God is awake and watching. He protects us from all harm and danger.

In fact, the psalm says, **"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."** Your whole life, when you come and when you go, when you're born and even as you lay dying, God is always watching, always protecting you from all harm. That is his promise. Now, does that seem a bit over the top? I mean, does it even seem like it matches reality or your personal experience? Are we saying that Christians never suffer heat stroke or get robbed or have the devil attack them? Obviously not. But does that mean that God didn't keep his promise? Why should we believe him?

Because his promise is true. God does promise to watch over us and to keep all true evil from us. But evil is something that does permanent damage to us. Think about the difference between what a surgeon does and what a mugger does. Both might use a knife. Both might cut deep into your flesh. The surgeon might even spread your ribs and cut out your heart – so that he can transplant a healthier one into your body. Does the surgeon's knife hurt? Absolutely. In the days after he slices you open and inserts drainage tubes, do you feel better or worse than you felt before he did all that? Worse, usually. You might be laid up for weeks. You might have to learn how to walk again. But the surgeon cut you because it would've been worse if he didn't. All the pain and the recovery process are designed to save your life. The mugger just wants to hurt you. He wants to take from you. He doesn't care how much damage he does or what it does to your life. The surgeon cares deeply, but he cares enough to do the hard thing and inflict that pain.

God is the great surgeon of your life. He inflicts pain and sorrow on your life like a surgeon inflicts pain on a patient – to make you spiritually healthier. He watches over you and he allows nothing and no one to accidentally or randomly to hurt you. Every trial, every tear, every hurt is consciously sent by God. When it comes, always it serves your ultimate good: reaching eternal life. That's why this psalm ends by saying God will watch over you both now *and forever more*. God is watching to get you home. Because he does love you, he doesn't allow any extra pain to come. He answers prayers and delivers you from sorrow and hardship. He protects you from harm and danger you didn't know were out there stalking you. He gives you the best and happiest moments of your life, just as he sends pain and hurt when it's necessary.

How do you know all that is true? Look to the cross. That is God's proof. There on the cross, Jesus died to set you free from pain and sorrow. The pain and sorrow of hell first of all, but also he died to free you from all the hurt that comes with life in this sinful world. When you rise from the dead, you will never hurt again. All that this psalm says will be literally true and you will rejoice for all eternity. Jesus rose from the dead so that you can see that life coming. So when life hurts here, look to the cross and the empty tomb and remember God's promises: he is your help in every need and sorrow. He is the mighty maker of all things and he is watching over your life. Let's sing about that help in the words of Psalm 121.