



Text: Psalms 121<sup>1</sup>  
Series: Songs of God -- Psalms  
Title: My Help Comes From the Lord  
Date: July 10, 2011  
Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

- Summer focus on Psalms that we sing:
  - Psalm 25 "To You, O Lord, I Lift Up My Soul" (Graham Kendrick)
  - Psalm 105 "Give thanks unto the Lord, call on his name"  
AKA "Psalm of Thanks" (Andy Park)
  - Psalm 51 "Create in a clean heart, O God" (Keith Green)  
Troubling line: "Cast me not away from thy presence, O Lord, and  
take not thy Holy Spirit from me..."
  
- Psalm 121 "I Lift My Eyes Up" (Brian Doerksen 1990)

**"I lift my eyes up to the mountains;  
Where does my help come from?  
My help comes from you, Maker of heaven, Creator of the earth.  
O how I need you Lord, you are my only hope,  
you're my only prayer.  
So I will wait for you to come and rescue me  
Come and give me life."**

### **Psalm 121 A Song of Ascents**

**<sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the hills.  
From where does my help come?**

**<sup>2</sup> My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.**

**<sup>3</sup> He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.**

**<sup>4</sup> Behold, he who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**<sup>5</sup> The Lord is your keeper;  
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.**

**<sup>6</sup> The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.**

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.



**7 The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.**

**8 The Lord will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time forth and forevermore.**

“Song of Ascents”

- a series of Psalms that were intended to be sung as people made their way into the temple for worship (ie as they “ascended” the steps to the temple) OR as they made their way from their homes to worship in Jerusalem (ie. as they “ascended” the mountains to Jerusalem) OR it could have been both!

- this song makes good sense as a song sung as people set themselves to journey to Jerusalem for worship in the temple

**v.1-2 The Psalmist declares what he knows**

**v.3-8 The Psalmist declares what he believes**

**v.1-2 The writer “does theology” – he thinks about life in relationship to God**

**He knows that a trial is coming ... “I lift up my eyes to the hills.”**

- The hills presented serious challenges to the traveler as he sought to worship God in Jerusalem...

- The grade was steep
- The footing was unsteady
- The elements could be harsh
- The environment could be dangerous, cf Luke 10 The Good Samaritan

- We face serious challenges as we seek to worship God with our lives
  - There are days / months / years in our lives when we face obstacles and challenges to our worship of God
    - Will we press on through the challenges or turn back?

**He knows that he will need help ... “From where does my help come?”**

- He knows he can't make it on his own ... the challenges are beyond him and his own resources

**He knows where his help is found ... “My help comes from the LORD,”**

- The psalmist declares: “Yes, I have serious challenges BUT I have a Helper!”



- He lifts his eyes above the challenges and connects his faith and his life together!
- He grabs his faith with both hands and applies it to the very real, immediate situation that he faces

His confidence is in “the LORD”... God’s personal name (not “generic god”)

- The God who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush as the “I Am”
- The God who saved his people from slavery in Egypt and by his strong arm, brought them to the Land of Promise
  - He defeated the armies of Egypt
  - He opened the Red Sea and brought them across on dry land
  - He defeated enemy after enemy to give His people their land
- The God who gave his people His Word and His promise to be their God and to care for them
- For NT believers, it’s the God who revealed himself in our **Lord Jesus Christ**

Cf. Isaac Watts:

“O God, our Help, in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home.”

Cf Martin Luther:

“A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;  
Our Helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.”

**He knows his helpers ability ... “who made heaven and earth.”**

- Many times in OT – God is sovereign over his creation...

Cf. Jeremiah 32:17

**‘Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.’  
Jeremiah 32:17**

Same confidence in NT...

Cf. Acts 4:24

- The first church prayer meeting began...

**“Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them...” Acts 4:24**



NB. The psalmist moves from the truth that the LORD is Creator to celebrate the truth that He is also the “helper” and “keeper” of His people.

- The power that called creation into being is now directed to the care of His people

Let’s put this into **NT context** ... **Jesus** is the “maker of heaven and earth.”

**“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” Colossians 1:15-16**

**v.3-8 The Psalmist now becomes a preacher ... to himself! (“my” becomes “your” and the “you’s” are all singular)**

- cf Psalm 42:5 “why are you downcast o my soul”

- we often need to “preach” to ourselves – to grab what we believe about God with both hands and apply it to the challenges of our lives.

**Because the Lord is my help ... every step of my life is taken under his watchful care**

**“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.” Psalm 121:3-4**

“He will not let your foot be moved...”

When walking the mountain roads, **secure footing** is a concern – things that we call “accidents” happen

- cf walking the property at my parent’s cabin in ON – steep / rocks / roots / decaying leaves / etc.

BUT what this writer is saying is that our lives are never controlled by accidents or chance events. None of those slips or falls happens without God’s hand on our lives.

God is never caught napping! There is never a moment when we are not under his watchful care. When our foot “moves,” it’s because he “lets” it ... he permits it.

Joni Eareckson Tada is a Christian woman who on the face of it has the right to believe that accidents can dominate our lives. In her teens a diving accident rendered her a paraplegic. In a human sense, that moment stole away her future. But instead of being angry and bitter she’s joyful – why? She was asked



recently in an interview what one book she wished everyone would read. I was surprised by her answer. This is the book she recommends: “The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination” by Lorraine Boettner. This is her explanation of why:

“The language is a little arcane (ie. hard to understand), but Dr. Boettner paints a breathtaking picture of how awesome – and extensive – God’s sovereignty is. I read it when I first got out of the hospital after my accident, and it proved to be a great comfort. **It helped to know that despite my accident, God had not taken His hands off my life for a nanosecond.**”

- She came to understand that while God hadn’t “caused” her accident, he had “permitted” it

“Imagine a God who didn’t deliberately permit the smallest details of my particular sorrow...what if God insisted on a hands-off policy toward the tragedies swimming my way?”

“I cannot begin to express the relief and release I felt as I plunged deeper into this marvelous truth that my diving accident was really no accident at all. Finally, long after I put down [Dr Boettner’s book], I yielded...I exhaled a long, slow, satisfied breath and relaxed into the sovereign arms of God. **If He loved me enough to die for me, then trusting Him with quadriplegia should be a cinch.**”<sup>2</sup>

NB. Note her last point – our trust is “the LORD who made heaven and earth”  
- The Maker of heaven and earth (Jesus) is also the One who demonstrated his love for us by dying on the cross to bear our punishment for sin

This is where we need to grab our theology with both hands: Do we really trust him enough to place our lives, slips and falls and all, into his hands?

## **Because the Lord is my help ... my life is not at the mercy of cruel forces**

**“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.” Psalm 121:5-6**

When walking the mountain roads, the **forces of nature** can inflict injury

- wild animals
- harsh elements

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<sup>2</sup> As quoted in *Indelible Ink* By Scott Larsen (Waterbrook Press)  
<http://www.christianbooksummaries.com/archive.php?v=3&i=3>



As we travel through life, the “forces” can inflict injury on us, too.

- crippling disease
- the ravages of time as we age

But in the face of these forces we have a “keeper” / a guardian who protects us.

“The LORD is your keeper...”

I love what Matthew Henry wrote...

**“Whatever charge he gives his angels to keep his people, he has not thereby discharged himself, so that, whether every particular saint has an angel for his guardian or no, we are sure he has God himself for his guardian.”<sup>3</sup>**

The One who made the sun and the moon, is our keeper against those forces that are beyond our control.

- nothing that happens under the sun and moon is beyond His control

“the LORD is your shade on your right hand.”

- “on your right hand” pictures a warrior who has another warrior at his “right hand,” ie. a Warrior who “has his back”

God has your back!

**Psalm 91** He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

<sup>2</sup> I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

<sup>3</sup> For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.

<sup>4</sup> He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

**He will never leave your “right hand”**

In his book *If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil*, author Randy Alcorn recalls when his friend, writer Ethel Herr, had a double mastectomy. Two months later doctors discovered that the cancer had spread. One of Herr's friends, shocked and fumbling for words, asked her, “And how do you feel about God now?” Reflecting on the moment the question was posed to her, Herr says:

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<sup>3</sup> Henry, M. (1996). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Ps 121:1–8). Peabody: Hendrickson.



*As I sought to explain what has happened in my spirit, it all became clearer to me. God has been preparing me for this moment. He has undergirded me in ways I've never known before. He has made himself increasingly real and precious to me. He has given to me joy such as I've never known before—and I've no need to work at it, it just comes, even amidst the tears. He has taught me that no matter how good my genes are or how well I take care of my diet and myself, he will lead me on whatever journey he chooses and **will never leave me for a moment of that journey**. And he planned it all in such a way that step by step, he prepared me for the moment when the doctor dropped the last shoe ... God is good, no matter what the diagnosis or the prognosis, or the fearfulness of the uncertainty of having neither. The key to knowing God is good is simply knowing him.”<sup>4</sup>*

God had never left her “right hand.” God had her back. And she “did theology.” Instead of allowing her circumstances or what she could see with her own eyes to dictate her understanding of God, she took God’s Word, grabbed it with both hands, and applied it to her circumstances.

## **Because the Lord is my help -- my life will be kept by God**

**“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.” Psalm 121:7-8**

As we journey through life, we wonder, “How will our journey end? Will we make it to our destination?”

Is the psalmist saying the bad things will never happen to us?

“evil” – not a reference to demonic or satanic forces in particular  
- In the Psalms, “evil” is that which is contrary to God’s “good” – “bad” might be an adequate translation<sup>5</sup>

Cf. persecuted Church: If the psalmist is declaring that evil and bad things never happen to God’s people then God is failing His persecuted church!

Cf. This week’s prayer bulleting from Voice of the Martyrs:

- Pastor Youcef in Iran – condemned to death for conversion to faith in Jesus

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<sup>4</sup> © PreachingToday.com 2011 Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil* (Multnomah, 2009), p. 399; submitted by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky | posted 8/30/2010

<sup>5</sup> Cf H.C. Leupold re “bad” rather than “evil”: “We suggest the word ‘bad’ for the traditional ‘evil’ because we feel that it captures more of the breath of the original. ‘Evil’ lies largely in the field of things moral. ‘Bad’ takes in the whole realm of the physical as well.” (p. 870)



- Vietnam – Pastor and his family brutally beaten by authorities
- India – pastor and his family beaten for preaching the Gospel

No, the writer isn't claiming that "bad" things will never happen to us.

Notice three things:

- 1) "will keep" (3xs) – future looking
- 2) "going out and coming in" – covers the entire course of our lives
- 3) "from this time forth and forevermore." – future looking

The writer is saying: **When you commit your life to God your life will not end badly!**

Cf Jesus said...

**"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." John 12:24-25**

How can we be sure that our Keeper will keep our lives?

He fell into the ground and died ... and he rose again! And because of that we can be sure that he will keep our lives.

**"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy." Jude 24**

**"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." 1 Thessalonian 5:23-24**

Worship songwriter Brian Doerksen's son, Isaiah, suffers from fragile X syndrome, a genetic condition which results in physical, intellectual, emotional, and behavioral limitations. In his book *Make Love, Make War*, Brian reflects on the day he and his wife first received medical confirmation of Isaiah's condition. In the midst of his heartache, as Brian considered turning away from worship ministry altogether, God taught Brian a lesson that instead carried him further into his ministry:

*[After receiving the test results], I stumbled around our property weeping, confused, heartbroken. At one point I lifted my voice to heaven and handed in my resignation: "God, I am through being a worship leader and songwriter ..."*



*When I was able to be quiet enough to hear, I sensed God holding out his hand and inviting me: "Will you trust me? Will you go even with your broken heart—for who will relate to my people who are heartbroken if not those like you who are acquainted with disappointment?"*

- of his experience of cleaning up his teenaged son after a “toilet mishap”
  - his son is autistic – unable to communicate
  - cleaning him was his way of getting close to his son  
(interview on Joniandfriends.org)
  
- As I listened to Brian’s testimony it struck me: That’s how God demonstrates his love for us, again and again – we mess ourselves, He washes us clean by his grace through the blood of Jesus Christ

Brian wrote...

*I used to think people were most blessed by our great victories. But now I know differently: People are just longing to hear [others] speak of how they have walked through the deepest valleys. The world lifts up the victorious and the successful, but God lifts up the brokenhearted.<sup>6</sup>*

**“I lift my eyes up to the mountains;  
Where does my help come from?  
My help comes from you, Maker of heaven, Creator of the earth.  
O how I need you Lord, you are my only hope, you’re my  
only prayer.  
So I will wait for you to come and rescue me  
Come and give me life.”**

### **Invitation to the Lord’s Table**

#### **Songs of Communion:**

- I Lift My Eyes Up
- In Christ Alone

#### **Benediction**

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<sup>6</sup> © PreachingToday.com 2011 "The Wounded Warrior" Men of Integrity (entry 3-11-10 from the March/April, 2010 issue); Brian Doerksen Make Love, Make War (David C. Cook, 2009) I posted 4/12/2010