

Onward and Upward

Part 2: Psalm 121-The LORD Who Keeps Us

6/21-28/2025

We are in a series called Onward and Upward walking through the Psalms of Ascent, 120-134
Some say they were sung by the Jews returning to Jerusalem from bondage in Babylon
Others say they were sung by the Levitical priests during the Feast of Tabernacles as they stood
on the 15 steps leading up from the Court of Women to the Court of Israel
But the likeliest view is that these 15 songs were sung by groups of Jewish pilgrims traveling
to the Jewish High Holy days of Passover, Pentecost and Sukkot
No matter the setting, they reflect a spiritual ascent—a journey of growing faith
It is a journey with God that is filled with danger and opposition from three relentless
enemies: *the world, the flesh, and the devil*

PP “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind” Ephesians 2:1-3

The *world* is the systems, values, and influences of a culture that seeks to oppose God's ways
The *flesh* is the inner pull of sinful inclinations that run contrary to God's will
The *prince of the power of the air* is the devil who opposes God and seeks to lead us astray
When a sinner repents, and steps onto the onward and upward path, the attacks from these
enemies comes fiercely, making the journey sometimes lonely and often difficult

Psalm 121 bolsters our trust and confidence in the LORD, the One Who keeps us safe

Let's stand and read **PP Psalm 121**

PP 1-The Importance of Speaking Truth to Yourself

The journey to Jerusalem no sooner began when the Psalmist cries out for help

PP “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?” 121:1

Why the psalmist looks up to the hills has to do with ancient beliefs in mountains

David was tempted as well: **PP “In the LORD I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, ‘Flee like a bird to your mountain’” Psalm 11:1**

In ancient days, gods were thought to inhabit the mountain, their symbols of strength and might
The Mesopotamians built ziggurats, imitating mountains and the Egyptians pyramids
The Aztecs, Native Americans, Mayans, Greeks, Romans and virtually all peoples had a religion
that saw mountains as the place for their deities to dwell and where to go for their help

But **PP ‘They sacrificed to demons that were no gods’ Deuteronomy 32:17**

Psalm 121 opens with needing help, but he reminded himself that false gods couldn't give it

Look a little more closely for a moment and notice the pronouns in these two verses

The ‘*I*’ and ‘*my*’ show that he is singing this truth to his own soul, reminding himself, **PP “My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.” 121:2**

The ‘**LORD**’ is the name *Yahweh*, God's greatest name, and as we saw last week, it is the name the Heavenly Father gave to His Son Jesus

6 times ‘**LORD**’ is mentioned in this Psalm, the God Who is pre-eminent, powerful and personal

In every sign of trouble and difficulty the Psalmist looked to the **LORD** with eyes of faith

The very first thing a person needs to learn as they begin to walk with God is that He is powerful, and that He is personally good

To believe that God is mighty but not good short circuits your confidence that God *will* help
To believe that He is good but not mighty short circuits your confidence that God *can* help
Christian, sing the truth of **the LORD** into your troubles: Yahweh can and will help you!
But we are about to see in verse 3, you need more than just speaking the truth to yourself

PP 2-The Importance of Friends Speaking Truth to You 121:3-8

PP The Gates Trilogy: *Alone*

*I scale a mountain as high as the clouds, Where snow, all year, gives it a shroud
A feat assigned, so unimaginably great, That dogs my steps with a terrible weight
It's a struggle to choose the easiest route, My confidence is shattered by relentless doubt
One thought stays, the rest are windblown, I'll never reach the top, if I am all alone*

In verse 3, the pronouns change from **'I'** and **'my'** to **'you'** and **'your'**

PP "He will not let your foot be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber." 121:3

The helpless pilgrim, crying out for help, discovers a friend speaking truth into his heart
Pause for a moment, honestly ask yourself, *Do I have wise friends speaking God's truth to me?*

Ask yourself this as well: *Am I regularly speaking God's wisdom to others who struggle?*

We all speak to others, but is what we say to them rooted in the Word, is it true?

To that friend whose marriage is unraveling or someone racking up debt in foolish spending

To a heart weighed down by depression or that young person entangled in a toxic relationship

So much of what we pass along sounds like a mix of pop psychology and podcast quotes-Dear

Abby and Jordan Peterson-but true counsel is more than clever advice

It's truth shaped by Scripture, pointing people to the Savior.

Our words have no power to heal if they don't lead that friend to Jesus and that is what the friend
in Psalm 121 is doing by lifting the anxious pilgrim's eyes back to the LORD.

PP i. *The LORD will protect you against the power of the flesh*

6 times **the LORD** is mentioned, and 6 times the word **'keep'** or **'keeper'** occurs

Six echoes, **PP The LORD will personally, powerfully keep you and that is His promise!**

PP 'Keep' (*shamar*) means guard, protect and diligently care for

PP "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." 3-4

The word **'slumber'** is for dozing off, a nap, while **'sleep'** is the word for long, deep rest

The ancient gods were thought to take long naps, and one of the priest's jobs was to wake the

deity when help was needed, which they did through loud chanting or cutting themselves

Yahweh, the LORD does not nap, nor sleep, He is always awake and watching over His people

There will never be a moment Christian when the Lord's full attention is not on you

Anxious pilgrim, the LORD will personally keep your feet secure on the path of righteousness

Unlike demons or trickster gods who often laughingly made a traveler's foot slip on a pebble and

fall off a mountain path to injury or death

Our God will never tempt us to wander onto paths of sin to bring about spiritual failure

Our Lord cannot be tempted nor will He ever tempt anyone to sin, He is our good Shepherd

Wise counsel reminds our struggling friend that **PP "God is faithful, and He will not let you be**

tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." 1 Corinthians 10:13

PP ii. *The LORD will protect you against the dangers of the world*

PP "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.” 121:5-6

Many years ago, on a mission trip to Mexico, one of our teens, working in extreme heat, began to seizure and almost died

Heat stroke can be fatal and it caused the death of a young boy in **2 Kings 4**

The journey to Jerusalem was long and arduous and the heat was one of the dangers but the danger at night was there

But dangers lurked at night by wild animals and oddly enough, the moon

In Matthew 17, a father brought his son to Jesus because the son was having seizures, and that word means *moonstruck*, or *lunatic*

Many would cover their own and their children’s faces at night to shield them from the moon

We are reminded of our Lord’s warning and promise: **PP “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33**

God does often protect us from car accidents, or deadly viruses, or mental illness-*we would be shocked to learn how unaware we are of His protections*-Christians still face these

But the world system is aiming at the Christian’s destruction as it opposes God

It is filled hatred toward God’s people and seen in the middle east’s relentless effort to expel the Jewish people from the land God gave them as well as the spreading executions of Christians

So we speak truth to the struggling Christian, **PP “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:6)** and encourage them, **PP “here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” Hebrews 13:14**

PP iii. The LORD will protect you against the schemes of the devil

The devil has a battalion of fallen angels, demons, and they are **‘rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over this present darkness’**

PP ‘rulers’ are demonic governors over certain territories; **‘authorities’** are the demonic manipulators of cultural values; and **‘cosmic powers’** are demonic powers seeking to influence areas such as education, media and politics to name a few

In Daniel 10, it seems there are powerful demons behind certain powerful, influential rulers

Even still, the Psalmist sings with confidence, **PP “The LORD will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life.” 121:7**

No evil can come against you but that which first passes through the permissive will of God

If he allows it, it is for His good purposes, and He will help you in it and through it

PP “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.” Luke 22:31–32

What do we tell the Christian brother or sister when spiritual attacks come?

PP “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” 1 Peter 4:12

PP “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” Colossians 2:15

The devil has been defanged, he roars impotently, his accusations are but lies

We remind each other that the Lion of Judah has triumphed over Satan and his demons and put them all to public shame

PP iv. The LORD will protect you in all of life, and all of your life

Psalm 121 is like having a tour guide and biblical counselor with you on the Christian walk

And, by the way, we do, and this guide and counselor has a name, *'the LORD'*
Jesus will be with us all day, every day

PP *"The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore."* 121:8

Christian, wake up every morning, praising God and go to bed praising Him: **PP *"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, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."* Jude 24–25**

But, a traveler's advisory: you must stay on the path, for if you wander from it, you will become vulnerable to your flesh, the world and the evil one

Still the LORD your shepherd will rescue you, and get you safely to the green pasture of eternity

But what suffering you would've been spared had you stayed on the path of righteousness

Even now, if you have wandered off that path, and the world, the flesh and the evil one have you in their grip, you are but a prayer of repentance away from your LORD's rescue

The moment your feet come back to the path of righteousness, your soul will sing Psalm 121

Church, speak the truth of this Psalm to yourself, and let us speak it to each other and walk onward and upward to the holy city of Zion