

# *Pursuing God*

## In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 17: Psalm 121

### God's Promise for the Journey

#### *Stay on the Path ~*

The picture David paints for the reader in Psalm 121 is from the vantage point of standing in the Jericho Valley, some twelve hundred feet below sea level, gazing upward to the mountains surrounding Jerusalem. Walking this path would mean a potential encounter with the likes of wild animals, robbers, and rocky places in which one could stumble and fall. Visually a long, grueling, difficult climb lay ahead; spiritually there would come the affirmation that God was there all the time!

If you knew before you set out on your Christian walk how challenging the journey would be at times—would you have committed to making the trip? If you became aware early on of the slippery, uneven places and just how dangerous the path could become—would you make the same choices? Obstacles have a way of testing even the most ardent climber, but it is precisely those hurdles that can either make or break a person's resolve to go higher and reach the summit. Fortunately for the believer, we walk by faith and not by sight. What's up ahead or around the bend is doable when God is with us, making it more than worth the effort. *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them who love Him* (1 Corinthians 2:9). The key to success in the climb is to *stay on the path* and keep your focus on the Lord. Let Him lead you to higher ground where you will thoroughly enjoy the view from "Mt. Perspective."

#### *Did you know ~*

Psalm 121 is one of fifteen Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134) that were sung at three annual festival processions as the Israelite pilgrims ascended to Jerusalem to worship God. It begins with an acknowledgment of God as Creator and ends with a declaration of personal trust in His providential care.

## Psalm 121

God the Help of Those Who Seek Him  
A Song of Ascents.

1 I will lift up my eyes to the hills—  
From whence comes my help?  
2 My help comes from the Lord,  
Who made heaven and earth.

3 He will not allow your foot to be moved;  
He who keeps you will not slumber.  
4 Behold, He who keeps Israel  
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord is your keeper;  
The Lord is your shade at your right hand.  
6 The sun shall not strike you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil;  
He shall preserve your soul.  
8 The Lord shall preserve your going  
out and your coming in  
from this time forth, and  
even forevermore.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

**Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.**

**Read Psalm 121.**

*Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions*

What is the *tone* of Psalm 121? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

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## *Put a psalm in your heart* ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 121:1–2**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

*I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.*

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## *Learn the lessons of the psalm* ~

*Selah* (Think about):

David, the pilgrim psalmist of Israel, contemplates his journey through the hills toward Jerusalem, finding solace in the fact that the Lord is his enabler at all times.

### *I. My Maker is my Helper on the journey.*

Hills have a tendency of making a problem appear bigger than it really is—appearing to be an insurmountable obstacle, but appearances can be deceiving. Step one in realizing God's sufficiency on the journey is recognizing your own inadequacy. Here in the opening verses of Psalm 121, David immediately acknowledges that he isn't capable of making the climb in his own power.

1. Where does he boldly state his help comes from? vv. 1-2

David is not saying that his help comes from the "hills," but rather from the Lord. It is a reference to God's sovereign work in creation; His title in Scripture as *Maker of heaven and earth*. The very Maker of the mountains is the only One capable of helping him. Everything that he needs—mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually—can be found in the Lord.

2. Personal: Perhaps today you are facing a mountain—an insurmountable obstacle is up ahead and you don't know what to do next. If you can't see your way around it, stop now and acknowledge it and your inability to do anything about it in your own strength. Declare out loud by faith, "My help comes from the Lord."

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The word *help* (*eger*) means *to help* or *to support*. It is used repeatedly in the psalms to refer to God's divine intervention on behalf of His people.

3. How is the word *help* used in each of the following psalms?

a. Psalm 33:20

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b. Psalm 70:5

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c. Psalm 115:9–11

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d. Psalm 124:8

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e. Psalm 146:5–6

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God does not promise His people that they will walk an easy path to enter His presence. In fact, the Bible says, "*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*" (Acts 14:22). What He does promise is His presence to go with us every step of the way!

### *Pause & ponder ~*

The Temple in Jerusalem was close to the heart of God's people. As they traveled there to worship, observing it in the distance from the hills, they would be encouraged to know that God's abiding presence was in His sanctuary to help and bless them. The reward of His presence made the difficult journey worthwhile.

4. Look up the verses from the psalms that talk about God's abiding presence. Note your findings below.

a. Psalm 3:4

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b. Psalm 20:2

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- c. Psalm 46:1–2 \_\_\_\_\_  
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- d. Psalm 124:8 \_\_\_\_\_  
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- e. Psalm 134:3 \_\_\_\_\_  
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- f. Solomon, David's son, prayed a prayer at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. What was the essence of its importance? See 1Kings 8:26–30.  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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Remember, what you see as an obstacle, God views as an opportunity! If you haven't yet caught sight of God in the midst of your dilemma, keep on going, you will!

## *II. My Maker is my Keeper on the journey.* vv. 3–4

Looking at the hills doesn't give God's people strength; it only focuses our attention on the problems up ahead. It is as we put our feet on the path and begin to move forward that we realize God is not only our Helper, He is also our Protector.

1. In what way is the believer assured of God's providential care? v. 3

When walking across rocky, uneven places, God is concerned about your well-being. He watches how you walk through this world. *He will not allow your foot to be moved* (v.3). The potential for harm is great but God will not allow you to stumble—to *slip* or *slide*, *stagger*, or *to be shaken*.

2. What is God's ultimate goal for you? See Jude 24–25.

3. What does this psalm say about God's watch over you? v. 4

The psalmist could lay his head down in sweet sleep under the stars knowing the Lord was watching over him.

## *Pause & ponder ~*

Think about it: How many nights have you willed yourself to sleep only to toss and turn with anxiety and worry over your problems? How many times have you been awakened in the middle of the night by the unresolved tension and turmoil of the day? There is really no reason for both you and God to stay awake. He is already up watching over you and working out your circumstances. He would have *you* trust Him and get a good night's sleep! Record what He ministers to your heart.

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### *III. My Maker is my Preserver on the Journey. vv. 6–8*

The Lord “keeps” or “watches” over His people as a shepherd watches over his sheep. The Keeper of Israel is also *your* keeper, protecting you from danger on the journey both day and night. The dangers of sunstroke were very real to the traveler in Palestine, but the Lord is *your shade at your right hand*.

1. Why do you need not be afraid? Psalm 91:1–2

There was a belief in biblical times that the moon could affect a person's mental and emotional stability. The word *lunacy* comes from the Latin word *luna*, for moon. The application for us today is simply that nothing—day or night, sleeping or awakening, can harm God's child. Your difficulties may hurt but won't harm you with God at your right hand. It is His responsibility to preserve your soul—your going out and your coming in.

## *Pause & ponder ~*

The Christian life is an uphill climb. Psalm 121 reveals how to let God help you on the journey. Your challenge is to ask Him for strength and enabling during the day and trust Him for peaceful rest at night. He stands ready to help as you yield to Him. Jesus promised His followers, “*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). Please share your thoughts.

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## *Live the psalm ~*

What aspect of God's persistent providential care is most comforting to you today: His help; His keeping; His preservation? Please explain why.

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## *Pray the psalm ~*

Take the aspect of God's care you wrote about above and put it in the form of a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, lifting it to Him from a grateful heart.

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*And I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you.*

Philippians 1:6 AMP

