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**Help for the Journey**  
by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

**Psalm 121**

- <sup>1</sup> *I lift up my eyes to the mountains—  
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.*

**Good News Statement** – God provides help and protection during your life journey.

**Message Statement** – As you lift your eyes to the troubles that lie ahead— *fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.*

**Prayer** - O Lord our God, with praise and gratitude, and with a sense of trust, each day we look towards the surrounding hills— they are symbols of Your all-encompassing love; those hills are symbols of permanence and durability; symbols of being able to rise up above the valleys of pain and struggle; symbols of strength and shelter from the storms of life.

Creating God, in confidence and trust we look to you for our care. You are the God who watches over your people day and night— never resting; in good and bad times; in youth and in old age. You hold us firmly so we will not fall when life becomes tough— as we continue on our life-time pilgrimage to our home in You. Amen.

Serving in the military has allowed my family and me the awesome opportunity to do extensive traveling both nationally and internationally. However, now those children are now young adults with their own lives and I have retired from the military – so the opportunity for travel has become seldom or infrequent. But the desire to hit the road once again becomes so passionate that I have on several occasions rounded up the family and stated, “It’s time for a road trip.” The destination is not as important as the journey - I don’t focus so much on getting somewhere but rather I am more passionate about seeing the sights along the way.

A Christian life is like a road trip – it entails the journey and the destination. I think many people who

become followers of Christ struggle because they get the journey confused with the destination. Destination is important because you can just wander around aimlessly on the highway of life. Journey is important because if you focus too much on the destination, you forget to slow down and smell the flowers and enjoy the scenery. The ideal experience is to enjoy the journey while not losing sight of the destination. No matter the journey or destination, travelers will experience struggles or difficulties. Flat tires, engine trouble, being tired, or road construction are just a few road bumps that can make getting there challenging. But despite the bumps – once there all the challenges are forgotten, and the traveler enjoys being there.

Believers tend to become confused and/or disappointed with Christian life because they have the mistaken idea that their lives will be on easy street and full of only the good things in life once they put their faith in Jesus. They do not expect there to be any hazards or difficulties once they have accepted Jesus as their personal savior. After all, Jesus loves us, and things will go our way once we place our faith and trust in Him. But believers must realize that this is rose-colored life is a disillusion and there will be suffering and hardship. Being followers of Jesus means accepting the fact that life will be hard, obedience is a struggle, change is slow and Christian maturity is a process.

Philippians 3:12, says, *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

The traveler is convinced that God can help during the journey because God is the “maker of heaven and earth” The pilgrim lifts his eyes to the hills, and what is seen makes the traveler anxious. But then his eyes lift higher and look beyond to the very One who *made* those hills: the One who made heaven and earth. With God on your side, there is no need to fear anything that has been made. Nothing is beyond God's reach and control. When you face anxious times, do your thoughts turn *first* to God, “maker of heaven and earth?” Remember, no matter how overwhelming the struggle you are facing, God is bigger—much, much bigger—and if you believe and have faith, God is on your side ready to provide help. So run to the Lord of all Creation, and find your help and protection.

Through Psalms 121 we are able to mirror the faith of the Israelites and experience how God's people in the past related to God. Psalm 121 bridges the gap between then and now, the ancient world and the present world. If God's people before the Incarnation could have such a faith in the Lord, witnessing to God's greatness and readiness to help, how much more should this be true among twenty-first century Christians?

The Psalmist, the writer of Psalm 121, is anxious about the journey that is about to be embarked. As the travel nears Jerusalem, the mountains engulf the vision, and worry and fear begin to fill the traveler's mind.

Psalm 121 is titled the "Songs of Ascents." This is a sequence of 15 Psalms, from Psalm 120 through Psalm 134, which were sung by pilgrims on their way up to Jerusalem to visit the Temple. In Psalm 121 the pilgrim is still a distance from Jerusalem and is contemplating the journey ahead. So in verse 1 he writes "*lifts up my eyes to the hills.*" Perhaps the hills remind the traveler of the goal of the journey—Jerusalem sits in the hill country of Judea— but they certainly also remind him of the dangers of the journey: the dangers of the climb; the danger of bandits; the danger of heatstroke and exhaustion in the fierce summer heat; the danger of wild animals at night.

All this prompts the question, "*Where does my help come from?*" The answer is immediate and emphatic, "*My help comes from the Lord.*" This is not a wishful cliché, but faithful confidence in a sovereign God.

The climbers of Mt. Fuji are full of emotions as they stand at the base of the mountain and anticipate their 12,389 feet climb up this great mountain. There's a sense of longing to reach the top, but there's also fear and anxiety about the dangers that lay ahead. Plus, there's a concern about having enough strength to get to the top. Psalm 121 begins with that kind of longing mixed with worry: "*I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from?*" (Psalm 121:1) and then in almost the same breath the writer answers, "*My*

*help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:2).*

If we were to ask the question today, “Where does my help come from?”, the popular answer would most likely be some form of self-help psychology. We are taught twenty-first century culture to look within for help. Perhaps the most influential figure in that regard today is Oprah Winfrey. Charles Colson writes concerning this motivational icon:

“What Oprah is preaching is not particularly new. It’s just that the combination of her public access and immense influence, as well as the particular appeal of her own earnest search for meaning, make it uniquely twenty-first century. The Church of O encourages people to ask all the right questions about life, meaning, service to others, identity - and then to look within to discover the answers.”

But Psalm 121 would not have us look within for the answers to life. It wouldn’t even have us look around for help. Instead it exhorts us to look up. It tells us that help comes from a heavenly direction and symbolizes a strong affirmation of faith in God. First, it is an affirmation that our help comes from the personal covenant-keeping God. Five times in this short psalm God is called Lord or Yahweh. This is the personal name of the eternal, self-existent, living God. It is a name that emphasizes God’s presence to act and God’s promise to act. The God of the universe is not distant; but near. Our help comes from the powerful Creator - the sovereign ruler over all realms. Creation is God’s handiwork, and God is in control of all things. Nothing is outside of God’s power to act.

Children of God - look to the Lord for help. God is love and strength during any and all situations. Pause and think about where you need God to intervene in your life. Is it a relationship that needs healing? A sin that needs forgiving? A situation that needs a resolution? What are you afraid will keep you from following Christ faithfully? Stop looking for help from the next popular self-help guru. Take a moment right now and affirm your full trust in God. As you move forward in your life, with both longings and fears of what may lie ahead, declare to God that your confidence is in the Lord. Walk in anticipation of how God will be proved loving and strong on your behalf.

When the traveler lifted eyes to the hills, the hills became the *source* of worries. But with faith and confidence the traveler looked higher above the hill and saw the *solution* to worries in the midst of those very same hills. God provides help and protection during your journey to and through the hills. So as you lift your eyes to the troubles that lie ahead—and you survey the trees before you creaking in the wind—*let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith*. Don't lift your eyes to the hills and be fearful; lift your eyes to the cross and be faithful, be revived, be strong, be encouraged, be a Disciple – as you continue on your journey with heaven as your final destination. To God be the Glory – AMEN!