

# Help

By Jimmy Davis

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**Bible Text:** Psalm 121  
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## **Metrocrest Presbyterian Church**

1265 E. Hebron Parkway  
Carrollton, TX 75010

**Website:** [www.metrocrestchurch.org](http://www.metrocrestchurch.org)  
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Well, sometimes, "Help," is all you can pray, and I don't know about you but that's been the prayer that I have been praying most in the last few weeks because, honestly, I don't know much else to pray except, "Help. Help."

As I think about stories in the Scriptures, I know that I'm not alone in that. I was reminded this week of the story in Matthew 15 where the Canaanite woman came to the disciples and she was pestering them because she had a daughter who was possessed by a demon and she came to Jesus and said, "Have mercy on me, my daughter has a demon!" And they tried to push her away and she cried out to Jesus just this simple prayer, "Lord, help me!" So if that's your prayer, you're not alone. You're in good company because Jesus thought she had great faith.

It's interesting this Psalm is one of those where the Psalmist seems to be talking to himself. It's alright if you talk to yourself, that's okay too, I guess. He's asking himself the question and I noticed with this Psalm what I notice in myself and perhaps you notice in yourself, that when there's trouble around us, when there's trouble in our lives, our first question tends to always be, "How is this gonna affect me? How is this gonna help me?" So if that's where you are, that's what I tend to think is how does all this trouble, how does it affect me, if that's where you are then you're in good company. The Psalmist is there too, however, he doesn't stay there and neither should we.

Help. It's a good prayer. It's the prayer that children pray. It's the cry that children have. I was attempting to take a nap yesterday afternoon when not long into that attempt I heard a blood-curdling scream from one of my children. It wasn't the word help but it was the expression of help. It was pain, and so I just jolted out of bed and went to find out what happened. You don't need to know what happened, that's between us [laughter], but the point is children cry, "Help!" And it doesn't take even words really. Help is the prayer that God's children pray.

Paul Miller in his excellent book on prayer called "A Praying Life," says this. "Little children are good at helplessness. It's what they do best. But as adults, we soon forget how important helplessness is." He says, "I, for one, am allergic to helplessness. I don't like it. I want to plan an idea or maybe a friend to listen to my problem. This is how I instinctively approach everything because I'm confident in my own abilities, but God

wants us to come to him empty-handed, weary, and heavy-laden. Instinctively we want to get rid of our helplessness before we come to God." And then he has a little mathematical formula: prayer = helplessness.

Sometimes "Help" is all you can pray and so the Psalmist says. These Psalms from 120 and on, there are several but 121 is definitely one of them, these are called the Songs of Assent and these Psalms were not necessarily written specifically for this purpose but at some point they were gathered together by God's people to be a little Psalter within the Psalter, a little hymnbook within the hymnbook that was specifically focused on their pilgrimages to Jerusalem when they would go to the holy city for feasts, and they would sing these songs or they would pray these prayers. So this is a prayer for God's people who are on a journey to the place God has for them, and their journey, their goal in this journey, their pilgrimage was to get to Jerusalem, not just to Jerusalem but to the Temple Mount, not just to the Temple Mount but to the temple, and not just to the temple but to the altar where they could find their sins atoned, that they could be as close to the presence of God as they could possibly come.

Psalm 43 is a great picture of the cry of the heart of those kinds of people. The Psalmist said in Psalm 43, "Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy." The goal of the journey of God's people, the goal of the journey of you and me as God's people and this church as God's people, is to get to where God is and be with him such that he is our exceeding joy. That's our goal. We want to get to where he is and be with him there. We want to be in the Holy of Holies.

It's very interesting that when Revelation describes the New Jerusalem, the city that comes down from heaven, it's described in these dimensions and if you start to calculate these dimensions, it turns out that what's being described is a giant, huge cube, one that would take up most of America. A giant huge cube. Scholars believe that's a reference to the Holy of Holies, the dimensions of the Holy of Holies where the ark of the covenant was where the presence of God dwelt on the mercy seat. The dimensions are a cube.

So just as God's people then were on a journey to get to the presence of God in that Holy of Holies, we are on a journey, the Christian life is a journey to get to that new city, to get to where God is and dwell with him there. That's where we're headed and the road to that place is rough and travel is pretty treacherous, and so Psalms like this are helpful and I think this Psalmist is expressing fear, concern. This road is awfully dangerous and so he looks around at the hills around him and, you know, commentators are divided on what does he mean when he says,

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?

What is it about the hills? And there's at least three explanations for what the hills represent, and I think they all apply.

Harm can be hidden in those hills. A traveler on the way to the holy city in those days would look to the hills and that's where the robbers would hide, that's where the bandits would hide, or the hordes who would attack a caravan. Harm could be hidden in those hills, and so the feeling of the Psalmist may be, I don't know, "I look to the hills where that harm is hidden and I'm anxious. Where is my help gonna come from?"

But it could also be as some commentators suggest that as they look at the hills to where they're going, and if anywhere you are in Israel if you go to Jerusalem, you're always going up. That's why they're called the Songs of Assent, we're going up to Jerusalem, and the hill that is in the hills, the one that they're all looking for is the holy city. So hidden in those hills is the holy city and so maybe if that's what the Psalmist is saying, "I look to the hills. From where does my help come?" And perhaps the emotion there is not so much anxiety about harm but anticipation about the holy city coming, "I'm gonna get there but I need help getting there."

But Psalm 125, a few Psalms later, another one of the Songs of Assent says this in verse 2, Psalm 125:2, "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore." So the hills may not only hide harm, they may not only be hiding the holy city but the helper himself is hidden in the hills. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people. So perhaps the Psalmist is reminding himself of that, "I look to the hills. That's where my help comes from."

So though he may be anxious about the harm that's there, maybe he's anticipating the holy city to come, he is assured that his helper is in the hills as well. I don't know which of those emotions is yours at the moment, are you anxious about the possible harm that is coming upon this expression of God's people; about a harm that's coming to you personally as one of these people. Are you anticipating, "God, this is a broken world and it just stirs my anticipation for that day when all will be made right, all will be made new." Are you assured that as the mountains surround Jerusalem, the Lord surrounds his people. I think that's where the Psalmist wants us to go. I think he wants us to move from anxiety to anticipation with assurance.

So the cry is, "Help," but the answer to the cry is a helper. Verse 2,

2 My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

The Psalmist answers his own question. "From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD." And what I want us to just briefly think about this morning is who is this helper, who is the Lord according to this Psalm, and there's two descriptions of him: he's the living God and he's the loving guard. He's the living God and the loving guard.

The living God is the Creator. He made heaven and earth. That's who my help is. That's who your help is. He's the Creator and made heaven and earth and I love what Spurgeon said, the great Baptist preacher from a long time ago, he said this about God who made heaven and earth, "He, God, would sooner unmake heaven and earth than to desert his

people." Your helper is the Creator of heaven and earth and he would sooner unmake heaven and earth than to desert you, than to desert his people. Now how do we know that? We know that because he's also the covenant-keeping God. He's not just the Creator, he's the covenant-keeper.

This word "LORD, My help comes from the LORD," you see how LORD is in small caps there and in verse 5 and in verse 7 and in verse 8? Whenever you see that in our English translations, that capitalized word LORD is always the Hebrew word Yahweh. It's the covenant name of God. It's the name that God told Moses on the mountain, "I Am Who I Am." And that's the name that God would use to remind his people, "I am the Redeemer. I'm the one who sent you Moses, the mediator, to come and to rescue you out of slavery and bondage. When you hear that name, you know I'm a covenant-keeping God. I made a covenant with my people. I kept it. I've redeemed them. They are mine." He's the Lord. Verse 4 says he's the one who keeps Israel, his people.

Isaiah 41, God is encouraging and reminding his people who are in exile that he has remembered his covenant with them and listen to what he says in Isaiah 41:8-11, "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off; fear not, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.'" You see, this helper is not just the Creator, he's the Creator who chose to enter into covenant with rebellious people and keep that covenant at the expense of himself because this helper is Christ. This helper is Christ.

The Gospel announces the good news that though we have rebelled against and rejected our Creator, the one who created us became one of us in order to keep his promise, his covenant to redeem and recreate us. You can look around for help from any religion or philosophy or worldview you want to but then look at Jesus because he's unique. There is none like him. As Peter said in Acts 4, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Christ alone is your help. Christ alone is the answer to your cry for help.

I was encouraged this week by something that Scotty Smith wrote. He said, "When you're tempted to run from a worst case scenario, heartbreaker of a story, make sure it's Jesus you run to." Worst case scenario, heartbreaker of a story, sound familiar? Christ is our help, Metrocrest. Christ is your help, individual person. Christ is your help. He is the living God who created us, who's kept covenant with us by sending Christ for us, and because he's the living God, you can trust him to be your loving guard.

It's interesting that in this Psalm the word "keep" and "keeper" is used over and over again. Look at it with me, verse 3, he who keeps you will not slumber. Verse 4, he who keeps Israel. Verse 5, the Lord is your keeper. Verse 7, the Lord will keep you from all evil. He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and you're coming in from

this time forth and forevermore. That word "keeper" is the word "guard" or "one who watches over." He's your guard. He's our guard.

About six or seven years ago, maybe seven, Christine and three of her friends from Knoxville took a mission's trip to Africa, to Kenya, and they were leading a women's retreat there in Africa and they had the opportunity to go on a walking safari. So they went to the safari and they spent the night in these tents and three of them were able to go, one of them had broken their foot earlier and the other one was wiped out, three of them, Christine and two of these ladies, actually there were five ladies, went on this walking safari. With them was a guide and another guy, and the guide started taking them, they didn't drive in, you know, Land Rovers out into the savannah or whatever, they just started walking because not far from the resort where they were staying in their tents were all kinds of dangerous animals, and they just started walking. He began to tell them that this area where they were, it was just open and animals were running wild and he began to explain to them, "Look, in case of a rhino attack, here's what you need to do." Not something you hear everyday. "Yeah, we're gonna have a little rhino drill here everybody." And so he told them, "If the rhinos charge us, which they are known to do, the best hope you have is to just get down, ball up and protect your head. Just whatever you do, protect your head. If the rest of you gets trampled, at least you have your head." And I'm thinking, "If the rest of me gets trampled, I don't want to think about it." [laughter] "I don't want to feel it, so just take my head too, please."

So he's warning them about that and then he points to this other man who had been walking behind them, and this man, I have a picture of him here. You can't see it, I know. I know you can't but you can look at it later. But here's two of the ladies, Christine stepped back and took this picture, here's two of the ladies talking to the guide and here's this guy standing here dressed in full uniform like military looking uniform, and he has a rifle in his hand. But if you look at this picture and you can come see it later, you'll notice he's not looking at them, he's looking off into the distance and their guide said, "The man with the gun is your rear guard. He will be watching. He knows how to look for rhino attacks and he knows how to stop a rhino with his rifle. So just be assured, he's watching. He's your rear guard."

And later these ladies were thinking, "Doesn't it say somewhere in the Bible something about God being our rear guard?" And it does, Isaiah 52:12, God promised his people that when they return to their land from exile, he would go before them and he would be their rear guard. The rear guard on this safari gave these ladies and this guide two things they couldn't give themselves: he gave them sight and security. He knew what to look for. He had his eyes on the horizon all the time, waiting for renegade rhinos. He also gave them security because he had something else they didn't have, he had a gun. So if a rhino came, I just hope he had a whole lot of ammo because they don't usually run, you know, by themselves. If a rhino came, he had a way to keep them secure and safe, and because their rear guard was watching and wielding a weapon, they could relax somewhat and enjoy the tour and listen to the stories that the man was telling about the savannah, about the animals and what's going on. They didn't have to worry about seeing the attack. They didn't have to worry about being secure from it because they had a rear guard.

That's a beautiful picture to me of what the Psalmist is saying here in 121. The Lord is your keeper. He's your guard. He's watching. And the emphasis in the rest of the Psalm, verses 3 through 8 is God's consistent, constant provision of sight and security. He's persistent. Verses 3 and 4 he says,

3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.  
4 He neither slumbers or sleeps.

He's 24/7 on the watch. Are you tired? Are the troubles that you're experiencing wearing you out? They don't wear God out. They don't wear your rear guard out. He doesn't slumber. He doesn't sleep. He does not snooze on the job.

In verse 6,

6 The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

Well, that just means 24/7 whether it's danger in the day or danger at night, he's got your back. He's always on duty and he's not just always on duty now in the present, he is because it says in verses 5 and 6,

5 The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade...

He's also on duty from here on, verses 7 and 8,

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.

24/7 now and forever you're being watched over, Metrocrest. He's got your back. Things you don't see, he sees. Things that make you feel unsafe, you're secure.

Now one more thing about this Psalm that bugs me and I'm sure bugs you. All these promises, your foot will not be moved, the sun won't strike you, he'll keep you from all evil, really? Are we being kept from evil? Are we not being attacked by the enemy? He will keep your life. What does that mean? Does it mean I won't die? Does it mean I'll never get hurt or harmed? If he has to promise you that he's gonna protect you and guard you from evil and he's gonna guard your life, guard your soul, then it must mean you're gonna be in some dangerous situations. This Psalm does not promise no suffering, no hardship, no hard times, no attacks. It promises you will be guarded in the midst of those things. It promises that his people at Metrocrest, his people individually will be guarded in the midst of those things. He will keep your life.

You know, Jesus said, "Don't be afraid of the one who can kill your body but fear the one who can cast your body and your soul into hell." Speaking of himself, the one who can cast your body and soul into hell, has promised that if you're his, he will keep you. He will

keep your life. That's no guarantee that your body won't get beat up, your heart won't get wrenched, your eyes won't pour tears. There's no promise that that won't happen but he will keep your life. He will keep your soul. That promise is fulfilled in the Gospel because our biggest danger is not, the biggest danger we face is not the destruction of this church. Where is the church at Ephesus? How many churches has God risen up and let back? I'm not suggesting I want it to die. Nobody wants this church to die, but that's not our biggest threat. Our biggest threat is we all as sinners deserve the white hot wrath of God for our sin and Jesus took it on the cross for us. Our biggest threat is removed and whether this church survives or not does not determine whether you survive in eternity. It doesn't. He will preserve your soul if you are in Christ.

Listen to this, this is what I'll finish with is Romans 8. You all know these verses, you've heard them but sometimes the Scripture just comes into technicolor in the midst of suffering and listen to what Paul says. I think this is a perfect application of Psalm 121. This is what God means that he will guard us and keep us. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" If he took care of our biggest problem, why will he not help us with the others? "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies." If you're afraid, if I or you are afraid that someone will bring a charge against you personally or this church corporately or that this church's reputation will be destroyed or my or your reputation will be destroyed, God justifies. Who's going to bring a charge against his elect? "Who is to condemn?" He goes on, "Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." He's praying for us. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" This is where it gets right down to the crux of the matter. You can separate us from our favorite place of worship, you can separate us from our children, you can separate us from our spouse, you can separate us from our health, you can separate us from our work, but who's gonna separate us from the love of Christ? "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'" This is normal. "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

He's got your back, Metrocrest. He's got mine. He's got every individual in this room. He's got your back if you're in Christ because he gave his to the whip, he put his on the cross. He's our guard because he went unguarded to the cross.