# I lift mine eyes to the hills: Psalm 121

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**Psalm 121**

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—

from where will my help come?

2 My help comes from the Lord,

who made heaven and earth.

3 He will not let your foot be moved;

he who keeps you will not slumber.

4 He who keeps Israel

will 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 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 on and forevermore. [[1]](#footnote-1)

This psalm is a “song of ascent,” and (traditionally, in any case) it is thought that pilgrims going up to Jerusalem would sing or recite this and the other psalms of ascent. It’s easy to forget that Jerusalem is built on higher ground than the area around it, so “going up to Jerusalem” was literally true. As the pilgrims would ascend, they would likely be more aware of the world around them. They would be aware of the physical world, as they would see hills and mountains they wouldn’t see the rest of the year. And, though they were outside more than we ever are these days, they would be outside all the time during most of the trip. They would be aware of the social world of other pilgrims and the dangers of travel. They would be aware of the spiritual world, that people worshipped God, and worshipped gods, in different ways than they were accustomed to. And, of course, they were spiritual pilgrims, going up to Jerusalem to meet God and perform their religious

duties. This pilgrimage could make them hyper-aware of the world around them.

Today, we are going to go through an exercise in imagination. We are, as it were, going on a bit of a pilgrimage ourselves—we are not going up to Jerusalem, or even pretending that we are, but I want us to receive this psalm this morning as a song for *us* on our journey in life. I want you to sit up, to sit in a stance that will help you be awake and listening. Perhaps both feet on the ground, back straight, arms out and hands open to receive. Maybe you’re more of a person who likes to take notes.

Ready?

I lift up my eyes to the hills—

from where will my help come?

With the eyes of your mind, I want you to think about the big things, the hills and the mountains, in your life.

First, I want you to think of the big, good things in your life. And let’s start by being fairly literal: what big things in the natural world give you joy today? Things that make you marvel or rejoice to be in such a grand and wonderful world.

Now, what big, important relationships give you joy? Who are the people who give you life?

Now, what big, important activities give you joy? What do you do that brings you health?

Now, what good, great big things am I missing? What makes you marvel and wonder?

As we travel through life, we often encounter wonderful things, and like those pilgrims of old, we can rejoice in them.

But, perhaps those early pilgrims looked up into the hills and worried about thieves and bandits who would prey on those journeying to Jerusalem. Or perhaps they thought about the strange gods being worshipped there. Second, consider the big, scary things in your life.

Are there any physical threats to your life right now? Are there life or work or family situations that scare you? Are you worried about the future? Do you ever wonder how you’ll be safe? Do you wonder where your help will come from?

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—

from where will my help come?

2 My help comes from the Lord,

who made heaven and earth.

Consider those big, good things. Give thanks to God that God is even bigger. How great is our God! How wonderful God’s skill at world-making!

Consider those big, bad things. Give thanks to God that God is even bigger. Our help comes from the Lord, who made heaven. Our help comes from the Lord, who made the earth. Our help comes from the Lord, who made our bodies, our lives, our work, our families. And God is bigger than all these things.

3 He will not let your foot be moved;

he who keeps you will not slumber.

4 He who keeps Israel

will neither slumber nor sleep.

“He will not let your foot be moved.” As you make your way through life’s journey, God will protect you from slipping up. God will guard your path. When you think you have failed, God is greater than your failures. When you think you have slipped up, God is greater than your mistakes. When you feel the hot sting of shame, God is greater than your shame.

“He who keeps you will not slumber; he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” When you stop to rest, God does not. You need not worry about what is happening while you sleep. God will protect and overcome your night fears. When you are overcome with exhaustion, God reminds you that God is not exhausted—God is still, is still greater. God cares for you, for your family, for whole nations, for the world. God made heaven and earth, and God never stops overcoming the world with God’s love and protection.

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.

God protects you day and night. As The Message says, God is “shielding you from sunstroke; sheltering you from moonstroke.”[[2]](#footnote-2) People use to think that the influence of the moon would make you crazy, turn you into a “lunatic.” People still know that the relentless heat and sun of summer can affect your body, soul, and mind. But God is your umbrella, God is your sunshade. God is greater than the dangers of the day and the dangers of the night.

7 The Lord will keep you from all evil;

he will keep your life.

Now, I want you to consider, briefly (for this is a psalm of comfort and not a psalm of warning) what it means to say this psalm when we are not kept “from all evil,” when we experience the pain and losses of life. Jesus teaches us to pray, “deliver us from evil,” which implies evil can, and will come. None of us knows anyone who has been kept from all evil. No one the psalmist knew was kept from all evil, even the psalmist.

Let us pause and not forget, and even to remind God of the hard and difficult things in our lives and the lives of those we love, and those in the world.

But let us return, and remember: God made heaven and earth. God is greater than the brokenness in the world. God is greater than our own brokenness. But God *will* keep our life.

8 The Lord will keep

your going out and your coming in

from this time on and forevermore.

Six times in this short psalm we are reminded that God will keep us and preserve us. Listen again, and repeat after me; I am going to change some of the pronouns, so be careful!

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1. *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ps 121). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Peterson, E. H. (2002). *The Message : The Bible in contemporary language* (Ps 121:6). Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)