

January 6, 2008 by Steve Brandon



My Help Comes from the LORD

Psalm 121

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- 1. The Question (verse 1)**
- 2. The Answer (verse 2)**
- 3. The Promises (verses 3-8)**

As we approach another year, a good question for us to ask ourselves is this: "How are we going to live this next year?" I want to help answer that question for you. My aim this morning is to give you a vision for the New Year. Psalm 121 is where I will derive my thoughts. It gives us great counsel and advice as we seek the New Year. This Psalm is a very special Psalm for me and for my family. I have written a very simple song about this Psalm, which our children love to sing. As a result, we have memorized this Psalm. Consider its words:

Psalm 121
I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From where shall my help come?
My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.
He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade on your right hand.
The sun will not smite you by day, nor the moon by night.
The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul.
The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever.

This is a question and answer Psalm. The question comes in verse 1. The answer comes in the rest of the Psalm (verses 2-8). So, let's look first at ...

1. The Question (verse 1)

The Psalmist says, "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come?" When the Psalmist mentions the mountains here, he is certainly referring to the mountainous regions surrounding Jerusalem. We can surmise this because of the superscription to this Psalm, which reads, "A Song of Ascents." You will see the same superscription on Psalm 120. You will find the same superscription on Psalm 122. In fact every Psalm until Psalm 134 contain this superscription. Fifteen Psalms in all have this designation: "A Song of Ascents."

There are many theories about what this phrase means that is used for these fifteen Psalms. But I believe that the best theory is that they are traveling Psalms, which the pilgrims journeying up to Jerusalem would sing. The law had commanded three national feasts (Ex. 23:14):

- The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 23:15), which is also known as Passover.
- The Feast of the Harvest (Ex. 23:16), which is also known as Pentecost.
- The Feast of the Ingathering (Ex. 23:16), which is also called The Feast of Booths

During this time, the Lord required for all the males among the people to appear before the Lord GOD (Ex. 23:17). This meant a journey to Jerusalem three times each year, for every Jewish family. The city of Jerusalem was in the mountains, which meant that any traveler to Jerusalem would travel "up to Jerusalem." Thus, the superscription, "A Song of Ascents." This is a song that you sing as you "go up." And so, I believe that these words were sung by the traveling caravans of people as they approached Jerusalem for their tri-annual worship before the LORD. These songs would have lifted their spirits on their journey. These songs would have prepared their hearts for worship.

How appropriate it was for the pilgrims to offer up this Psalm, "I will lift up My eyes to the mountains." The mountains were their destination. How often did the settlers of the west coast of America traveling the Oregon trail lift up their eyes to the mountains as they headed west? ... Often. How often does the mountain climber stop and gaze upward at his final destination? Often. So also, as the would-be worshipers walked up the hills leading to Jerusalem, they couldn't help but to set their gaze upon the mountains in front of them, where they soon would worship the Lord. And lifting up their eyes, this song would force them to ask the question, "From where shall my help come?"

This is a great question for you to ask, especially as we face a New Year. This is my main reason for choosing this text this morning. I want for you to ask yourself this question often in 2008. "From where shall my help come?"

Each and every one of you will face various challenges and difficulties and temptations in 2008. Those of you who are in the work force will

face your peculiar challenges at work. Perhaps sales will be down. Perhaps there will be problems with co-workers. Perhaps you will be persecuted for your faith at work. For those of you who stay home, you will face various difficulties as well. Your work will seemingly never end. There is always a mess to clean. There are always dishes to wash. There will always be a meal to prepare. You will be tired. For those of you who are in school, you will face your own peculiar difficulties as well. You may struggle in your biology class. You may struggle with peer pressure at school.

Perhaps this year will find a close family member pass away. Perhaps you will face a difficulty in one of your familial relationships. Maybe you will face difficulty in your neighborhood. Perhaps you will deal with disappointment as your presidential candidate of choice isn't elected.

There are some other problems that you might face. Perhaps some of you will lose your job this year. Perhaps some of you will be diagnosed with cancer. (A good friend of mine in California was just diagnosed with cancer this past week. He's about 35.) Perhaps some of you will be in a debilitating car accident. Perhaps some of you will lose a baby. Perhaps some of you will come upon financial hardship this year, as your work slows down. Perhaps some of you will face some difficult choices as to your future. Perhaps some of you will deal with a hardship in the lives of your children. Perhaps some of you will be tempted to give up on your marriage this year. Perhaps some of you will be overcome by particular temptations that will come upon you (drugs or alcohol or pornography on the internet) Perhaps some of you will be robbed on the street corner at gunpoint. Perhaps some of you will face some major health issues.

Now, I'm not trying to be a prophet with these things. I wish that none of these things will come upon you. My heart for you is entirely different. I desire that the LORD would greatly bless you this year. However, even if that were the case, you will still face your own peculiar dangers. Suppose that 2008 is a great year for you. Your business booms. Your family does well. You are perfectly healthy all year long. But, even if everything this year goes great for you, you will still have your own particular temptations. You will be tempted to be proud. You will easily fall into the trap of self-reliance. You may have reduced compassion for those around you.

I could go on and on, trying to pull out examples of what 2008 may bring in your life, but I may never be able to describe the particular struggles that you will face in 2008. But, I do know that you will face your own peculiar challenges this year, whether things go well for you or things go badly for you. Though neither of us may be able to foresee your future struggles, I do know the answer to every single situation that you encounter. It comes in psalm 121:2. After asking the question, "From where shall my help come?" in verse 1, the Psalmist quickly comes in verse 2 with ...

2. The Answer (verse 2)

"My help comes from the LORD."

As the travelers to Jerusalem were hiking up the mountain, with the sun bearing down upon them, with thirst parching their throat, with their legs aching, and with fatigue setting in, they knew that they needed help for their journey. But, they also knew that they needed help for the coming year. And when they looked for help, they were told to look beyond the mountains unto the LORD, their God. Their help didn't come from the mountains. Nor did their help didn't come from Jerusalem, their religious community. Rather, their help came from beyond Jerusalem and beyond the mountains. Their help came from the LORD.

This is my heart for all of you this year. I desire that you would find your help from the LORD. There is a way that we can face the difficulties of life and not turn to the LORD. When facing trials, we can easily turn to other things for help. When sick, we can look to doctors. When financial crisis comes, we can look for another job to meet the void. When relational difficulties come, we can withdraw into our own hole. When you have difficult choices to make concerning your future, you can try to figure it out all by yourself. When temptations come, you can try to overcome them by sheer willpower. And these things may help you in the day of trouble. But, with such a perspective, you will be looking to yourself and your own means, rather than to God and His means.

But, my encouragement to you this year is to look to the Lord to be your help. Now, I'm not discouraging your visit to the doctor, nor am I saying that you shouldn't be on the lookout for a better job. But, what I am saying is that your ultimate help in all things ought to come from the Lord.

About a year ago, John Piper was diagnosed with prostate cancer. The evening before his surgery, he wrote a brief article to his church family entitled, "Don't Waste Your Cancer." It was very insightful, and especially appropriate for our thoughts on Psalm 121 this morning. Here is what John Piper wrote,

"I believe in God's power to heal—by miracle and by medicine. I believe it is right and good to pray for both kinds of healing. Cancer is not wasted when it is healed by God. He gets the glory and that is why cancer exists. So not to pray for healing may waste your cancer. But healing is not God's plan for everyone. And there are many other ways to waste your cancer. I am praying for myself and for you that we will not waste this pain."

And then, John Piper gave ten ways in which you can waste your cancer. He elaborated on each of these ways with a paragraph. For the sake of space, I'll only give you his points, which will give you an idea of what I'm driving at this morning. Here are John Piper's ways to waste your cancer....

1. You will waste your cancer if you do not believe it is designed for you by God.
2. You will waste your cancer if you believe it is a curse and not a gift.
3. You will waste your cancer if you seek comfort from your odds rather than from God.
4. You will waste your cancer if you refuse to think about death.
5. You will waste your cancer if you think that "beating" cancer means staying alive rather than cherishing Christ.
6. You will waste your cancer if you spend too much time reading about cancer and not enough time reading about God.

7. You will waste your cancer if you let it drive you into solitude instead of deepen your relationships with manifest affection.
8. You will waste your cancer if you grieve as those who have no hope.
9. You will waste your cancer if you treat sin as casually as before.
10. You will waste your cancer if you fail to use it as a means of witness to the truth and glory of Christ. [\[1\]](#)

This is my heart for you this morning. As you come upon your unique struggles and difficulties and temptations in 2008, I don't want for you to waste them. Rather, I want for you to see and experience that your help comes from the Lord, not merely from your own means. Now, by all means, I'm not saying that you shouldn't exert yourself in your trials. Rather, I want for you to pledge yourself this morning to put your trust in the LORD through your trials, so that you don't waste the difficulties that the LORD brings upon your life in 2008. In so doing, I want for you to learn that you can trust Him.

We could easily take the Spirit of John Piper's words regarding cancer and adapt them generally into "trials."

1. You will waste your trials if you do not believe it is designed for you by God.
2. You will waste your trials if you believe it is a curse and not a gift.
3. You will waste your trials if you seek comfort from the experiences of others, rather than from the help that God gives.
4. You will waste your trials if you refuse to think about death.
5. You will waste your trials if you think that seeing your trial end is more important than cherishing Christ.
6. You will waste your trials if you spend too much time thinking about your trial and not thinking about God.
7. You will waste your trials if you let it drive you into solitude instead of deepen your relationships with manifest affection.
8. You will waste your trials if you grieve as those one who has no help
9. You will waste your trials if you treat sin as casually as before.
10. You will waste your trials if you fail to use it as a means of witness to the truth and glory of Christ.

This is my heart for all of you this year: Don't waste your trials and difficulties and struggles and hardships that come upon your life. Rather, use them to display your trust in the LORD! The LORD is fully capable of being your help. The Psalmist identifies the LORD as the one "Who made heaven and earth." If God made the heaven and earth by the word of His mouth, then certainly, He can be your help, in whatever trials you face in 2008. The LORD can be trusted! And my heart's desire is that you demonstrate this to others this year.

I recently heard a message from a man named Paul Washer. He is the director of HeartCry Missionary Society, which seeks "to support indigenous or native missionaries so that they might evangelize their own peoples." They aren't a missions agency. They are a missions society under the leadership of a local church, who seek to support those indigenous pastors whom they deem as worthy of support. They don't have "HeartCry Missionaries." Rather, they seek merely to support those who are most worthy of support in their estimation. In their literature, they have stated one of their foundational principles.

"Every need of [the] ministry will be obtained through prayer. We may share our missionary vision with others and even make known to them the specific tasks which the Lord has laid on our heart to do, but we may not raise support through prodding or manipulating our brothers and sisters in Christ. If this ministry is of the Lord, then He will be our Patron. If He is with us, He will direct His people to give and we will prosper. If He is not with us, we will not and should not succeed."

In this way, this organization is a bit like George Mueller, who sought to establish orphanages to demonstrate how much may be accomplished by prayer and faith. Anyway, in this message that I heard, Paul Washer shared a portion of a journal that he kept during some of the most difficult days of his ministry. I want to read it for you now, because it reveals my heart for all of you in 2008: I want to say in all circumstances, "My help comes from the Lord." I know that it's a long quote, but, I believe that it will encourage your heart along the lines of trusting in the Lord. Paul Washer writes, ...

November 25 - Twice today we met for prayer. We are waiting for the mail, which usually arrives around 3:30. At the moment, we have \$180 and six days remaining to provide support for the rest of our missionaries in 14 countries. I just received the mail in the mailbox. There was not one letter for HeartCry. We must continue to wait for God's deliverance. We will pray when Darin returns from sending the money to Peru. We have nothing but His presence, but it is enough.

November 26 - Today the HeartCry staff is going to celebrate Thanksgiving together and we have much to be thankful for. This morning, Darin, John and I gathered for prayer. It was one of the best times of prayer that we have ever had. I felt led that God would send someone to us before the mail arrived who would give a gift to the mission. At midday a brother from Kentucky came to the office and gave us \$15. It was a great confirmation to all of us that God had heard our prayers and that he was with us. At 1:30 we met again for a time of prayer. I felt a great impression that God was asking someone, somewhere to do something and whether out of fear or lack of faith, they were struggling with submitting to the Lord. After a time of prayer, the burden was lifted. At 2:45, Darin brought me the mail. Praise the Lord! We received an additional \$1395. It was enough to pay the missionaries in Siberia, Ukraine, and India. After wiring the money, we finished the day with \$40.44. There were four days left in the month of November. The staff will miss another paycheck this week, but we have food and our bills are paid. Like the oil in the widow's jar, God has stretched our resources and kept the destroyer at bay. We will meet again at 3pm for prayer. Darin just came in and asked if we could send \$30 extra to the missionary in Siberia. This will help him buy more firewood to keep his family warm. I agreed. We now have \$10.44 in our account. Praise the Lord what a privilege He has granted us.

November 28 - Yesterday was Thanksgiving and the mail was not delivered. Today, I knew that we would receive two days worth of mail and support. I was hoping that there would be more support because of this. We received \$175. We

now have \$185 in hand. We need 60 times this amount just to pay the men in the field for this month. We have two more days. We must take guard against doubt, despair, and self-pity. Tomorrow is another day. We will look to God

November 29 - \$220 arrived in the mail today. We now have a total of \$405. Tomorrow is Sunday and there will be no mail. Monday is the first of December and most of the missionaries have not been paid, and the staff has only been paid twice in the month. We are in dire straits and we have made our need known to no one. We wait upon the Lord. Our greatest interest is His glory. I cannot see how our fall would bring encouragement to the saints, but I do see how it would justify the carnal. They would say that we were foolish and proud to have believed that a ministry could prosper without making its needs known to anyone but God. Many young believers have been encouraged to trust God because of His dealings with us. It would have been better to have never started than to be the cause of their unbelief. God, we deserve to fail, but please do not let us fail. Your glory is at stake. Oh God, please Get a name for yourself.

November 30 - I preached to the Mexican mission this morning, but once again, they forgot to give the promised support of gas money. I was informed this evening that someone gave \$150 to the mission in the morning service. We now have \$555. Tomorrow is the first of December and we have yet to pay most of the men for November. This has happened only a few times in the history of our mission and never when the amount needed was so great. I can hardly bear to ask the staff to go another week without their salaries. I know that they will do it willingly, even joyfully. We are in the greatest need since our beginning. We will wait upon the Lord and see what tomorrow will bring. We have no reason to hope in the flesh. If help comes, it will come from the Lord.

I spoke with my pastor today. He knows all our troubles and would cut off his right arm to help us. He knows that the Lord has pressed upon us the prohibition to make our needs known, even to our own church. I know that every person in our church would come to our aid if they knew that there was such a problem. I even know that several people throughout the country and they would gladly meet our every need with one donation. But the purpose of our mission is to depend upon the Lord alone. He is our patron. If He wants this mission to continue, He is faithful and able to let His people know. If He does not help us, then we should not be helped. Although we recognize that God has had His hand upon us, we know that He does not need us. If the HeartCry Missionary Society perishes tomorrow, it will not hinder God's great work on the earth.

December 1 - When I arrived this morning, Darin told me that someone had given \$100 in the Sunday evening service. We now have \$655. I was thinking again about how the mission where I preached on Sunday had failed to provide the promised gas money for the last three weeks. They are wonderful believers and would do all in their power to help me. It seems that the Lord has made them forget. He is drying up every well dug by human hands, that He alone may be our only fountain.

I feel like Hagar. She and her boy were sent away because he was not the child of the covenant. When the water that she was carrying was gone, she laid her boy under a bush and sat a bowshot away because she could not bear to watch him die. I do not feel God's presence. I feel that I have been sent into the desert as one who is not a child of the promise. All our resources are spent. I want to lay the mission down and run away, for I cannot bear to see it die. Satan tempts me to anger and grumbling, but whom am I to speak a word against the Lord. I have not been worthy of even the least of all His mercies He has shown me throughout the years. Even if He slays me, even if He abandons me to hell, even then He would be worthy of praise. He has already done more for me than I could ever deserve in a thousand lifetimes of service. I will trust in Him regardless of the outcome. I know these things. God is good, wise and powerful, and our circumstances are not the result of some defect in God. This trial is ordained with perfect wisdom from an absolutely sovereign God, who has promised to do us good for the sake of Christ. He works all things together for our good—even this. The story of Hagar and Ishmael ends in a great salvation wrought by God. If he opened a fountain in the desert for an idolatrous pagan whose child would grow up to be a persecutor of God's people, will He not help us, His children?

Although there are many daily tasks to be accomplished today, the priority of our hearts will be to pray and wait upon the Lord. I went to the mailbox this afternoon and found an envelope containing \$287. This brings our total to \$942.

December 2 - Today was a good day. Our families came to church to take pictures for the December issue of HeartCry Magazine. We were filled with joy to watch our children and to play with them. How the Lord has blessed us. I went to the mailbox today and found envelopes containing \$612. I had hoped to send support to more men today, but it was not God's will. We met this afternoon to pray and to discuss what the Lord would have us to do. We know that we are able always to trust Him, but we do not know what He would have us to do. Since John is not a U. S. Citizen, he must continue to be supported by the mission. Darin and I have the possibility of looking for work elsewhere. We determined to wait upon the Lord to the end of the week. If funds do not come, then we will look for work. We prayed. John was the last to pray. At the end of His prayer, He prayed for the Lord to open Gabbie's womb, that she might conceive. He no sooner closed his prayer with "Amen," when Gabbie came into the door with tears in her eyes and announced that the doctor said that she was pregnant. What a tremendous blessing. The news could not have come at a better time for two reasons. First, it showed us that God answers prayer. Secondly, John's financial resources are almost depleted and yet, his financial needs will be greater than ever--what an opportunity for God to get a name for Himself!

December 3 - This morning, Charu called, my wife about the medical bills for the birth of our son, Evan. To our astonishment, they were all paid by someone who wished to remain anonymous. We had told no one of our bills. We do not have the faintest idea of who God used to bless us. It is a great encouragement for all of us at the mission. God is able to tell others of our needs. I went to the mailbox today and was blessed by the Lord's kindness. The donations totaled \$2500 and we now have \$3100 for the missionaries. One dear family that sponsored us for years for \$1000/month, sent \$2000 for November and December. This is not the first time the Lord has directed them to give when it was most needed.

Another blessing came from the Mexican mission that had not given gas money for three weeks. They sent \$150 that was given to the mission. At 5pm, Darin left to make a deposit. We were able, by God's good grace to mail support to Benin Ghana in Nigeria. I received a letter today from Ernesto Sacharias. He sent photos of the construction of our new church in Via Salvador. It was truly a blessing to see all the people gathered inside the new building. A few months ago we gave our last \$1000 so that the construction could continue. It might have seemed foolish to many, but seeing the people gathered in that simple building in order to hear the gospel is reward enough.

December 5 - This morning I went to the doctor for blood work. It seems I'm going to have to have more operations. We were greatly blessed today. The Lord provided \$2770 through the mail and someone gave John \$20, which he gave to the mission. Our total is \$3146. Darin was able to send the support so Zambia. We closed the day with \$1700. We lack nearly \$4700 to pay the missionaries in Romania. Darin, John and I will not be paid again this week, but the Lord has seen our need. A dear family in the church sent groceries to the office today and gave each of us a Walmart card to buy more groceries. In the end, we will have more supplies in our home than if we had been paid our salaries. God has never given us a reason to doubt His character or His promises. I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging for bread.

What grace! He declares the wicked righteous by the blood of His dear Son. He prepares good deeds for them by His sovereign will. He empowers them by His Spirit and then He rewards them for what they have done, as if they had done it. What grace! What marvelous grace! In such grace we shall wait upon Him. I would rather be a beggar in the courts of God than to sit in the seats of the mighty in the greatest halls of this present age. I would be the weakest of all His children, that I might see greater portions of His grace. I would be the most incompetent that I might see greater measures of His strength. I would be the most helpless, that His strong arms might carry me. I would be the most destitute, that His right hand might feed me.

At noon, Darin paid \$33 worth of bills. He also discovered that a check for \$150 that we received yesterday was not signed and must be returned. We lack \$4000.

December 8 - \$655 came in over the weekend and \$1500 came in the mail today. After paying bills, we have \$3000.

December 9 - Only two checks came in today. One for \$50 and the other for \$4000. Praise God! That gives us a total of \$8700. After paying Romania and several bills that were due, we were left with \$644. The support for November has been paid.

Time permits us from continuing in his journal, but, I believe that the point has been appropriately made. Paul Washer and all in his staff can say, "My help comes from the LORD." Now, I know that you all aren't called to a faith-based mission like this. And I know that your circumstances are different. But, my heart's desire for all of us this day (and for the coming year) is to so live that we might all be able to say, "My help comes from the LORD!"

Throughout the rest of the Psalm, we will see the promises that God has given to be our help. This forms my third point. We have seen, (1) The Question (verse 1); (2) The Answer (verse 2); and now, we see, ...

3. The Promises (verses 3-8)

These verses are filled with promises of all shapes and sizes. But, all of them come back to the main point: "The LORD is your keeper" (as verse 5 says).

This word translated, "Keeper," is the very common Hebrew word, *shamar*. This Hebrew word can be translated with a bunch of different English words, but all of them are getting at the same meaning. It can be translated, "keep, guard, watch, protect, retain, preserve, refrain, or care for." The idea here is of surrounding and protecting and holding something, and not ever letting go. This word is used six times in this Psalm

Verse 3, "He who keeps you will not slumber."

Verse 4, "He who keeps Israel, will neither slumber nor sleep."

Verse 5, "The LORD is your keeper."

Verse 7, "The LORD will keep (i.e. protect) you from all evil."

Verse 7, "He will keep your soul."

Verse 8, "The LORD will keep (i.e. guard) your going out and your coming in."

Indeed, this is the theme of the Psalm: "The LORD is your keeper" (verse 5). Where does our help come from? It comes from the LORD, who "keeps" us (verse 5) and "protects" us (verse 7) and "guards" us (verse 8). This is the reason why we can say, "My help comes from the LORD."

Let's look at the particulars. Let's start in verse 3, ...

"He will not allow your foot to slip" (verse 3a).

The imagery here is taken from one who is walking down a path, with stumbling blocks in the way. You parents know what the Psalmist is talking about. How many times have you taken your little ones by the hand to protect them from stumbling? You are taking a walk

somewhere along a trail, which is filled with tree roots and rocks and sticks. You are holding your child by the hand. When the way is difficult for their feet to negotiate, and they begin to stumble, you just hold them up by one hand and lighten their load. In some ways, they begin to float in the air. Soon, they regain their balance and are off walking again. It doesn't really matter whether or not they are holding on to you, as your hand is the one that is gripping their hand. It's impossible for your children to stumble, because you won't let go of your grip. So it is with God.

Now, obviously, the Psalmist isn't talking about not skinning your knee. He's talking metaphorically. He won't allow you to slip into harming yourself. When He holds us up with His hand, we won't slip. When we begin to stumble, the LORD will take us by the hand and cause us to float over our trouble.

The Scriptures use this word picture several times throughout the Scripture. "He does not allow our feet to slip" (Psalm 66:9). "If I should say, 'My foot has slipped,' Your lovingkindness, O LORD, will hold me up" (Psalm 94:18).

Now, you need to realize that these promises are not true of the wicked. We read in Deuteronomy 32:35 of the wicked, "In due time their foot will slip." Rather, in the context here in Psalm 121, it is those who find their help in the LORD who will be protected by the LORD.

Paul's promise to the Corinthians echoes this thought, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Have you ever thought about how it is that God can do this? It is only because God is the sovereign God, who has complete control over all things in this universe. He can make sure that the temptation never comes upon you more than you can bear.

Oh, it might seem too much. And, like Asaph, your "feet [may come] close to stumbling" (Ps. 73:2). But, the One who "is able to keep you from stumbling" can "make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" (Jude 24), if only you will trust Him. Will you? In answering that question, I'm not asking you to put forth your willpower this morning to say, "Yes!" Rather, I'm asking you if you will trust in the LORD to help you trust in the LORD in 2008.

As your pastor, my prayer is the prayer of Psalm 115:9-15:

O Israel, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.
O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.
You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.
The LORD has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron.
He will bless those who fear the LORD, the small together with the great.
May the LORD give you increase, you and your children.
May you be blessed of the LORD, maker of heaven and earth.

In the second half of verse 3 we see another promise, ...

"He who keeps you will not slumber" (verse 3a).

God is always alert. God is always watchful. He is ever looking out for our good. This is in contrast to the pagan deities, who were known to sleep at times. Perhaps you remember when Elijah was on Mount Carmel with the hundreds of prophets of Baal. He said, "Let's have a contest between your God and my God. Choose one ox for yourselves ... and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, He is God" (a paraphrase from 1 Kings 18:23-25).

When the prophets of Baal had done so, they "called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, 'O Baal, answer us'" (1 Kings 18:26). Then, they "leaped about the altar which they had made" in seeking to stir up Baal to respond with fire (1 Kings 18:26). But no fire came to burn the sacrifice, not even a spark. Then, Elijah mocked them saying, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened" (1 Kings 18:27).

But, what may have been true of Baal is never true of the LORD. He will never fall asleep on His watch. He will never fall asleep at the wheel. His watch is 24 hours each day, 7 days each week, 365 days each year. This truth is reinforced in verse 4, "Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" (verse 4).

The Psalmist here is being insistent upon this point. This first word, "Behold" calls attention to what he will say. The mere repetition of this basic truth emphasizes it strongly. God doesn't slumber. He doesn't sleep. He is the faithful watchman, who will not only warn us of the impending danger (Ezekiel 33), but will play an active role in keeping and protecting us.

In verse 5, this same truth continues on.

"The LORD is your keeper" (verse 5a).

This is the heart of the Psalm. This is the core of the promises that God has given us of His help. God is our help, because He is the one who keeps us and guards us.

Church family, I want for you to know this. I want for you to experience this in 2008--the protecting hand of God upon your life. I want for you to know God as your helper. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD. Will you live by faith in 2008?

In the last half of verse 5, we see the promise of how God will protect His people physically.

“The LORD is your shade on your right hand” (verse 5b)

This was particularly appropriate for those in Israel ascending Mount Zion to worship. The climate of Israel is about like the climate of Los Angeles, which is built upon a desert. In the day, it is very hot. In the night, it can get very chilly. While in such a climate, it's one thing if you are staying inside and cool. But, it's another thing if you are out and about traveling.

For those of you who may have had the opportunity to visit Israel, you know how hot it is. In the morning when you begin to set out on your journey, you fill up several water bottles. You also will bring along some sort of hat that will give you protection for your head. You will bring along sunglasses to help your eyes deal with the bright sun, and you may even bring along some sunscreen. You take an air conditioned tour bus to your location that you are planning to see. When you get out, you are hit with this wall of heat. Should you come to a place like Jericho or like Masada, it is particularly hot, or if you are going to take a long hike someplace. When you arrive back at your hotel in the evening, all of your water is gone, and your energy is spent.

For these pilgrims who were traveling up to Jerusalem to worship, they would have experienced much of the same thing. As they lifted up their eyes to the mountains, they would have looked into the hot sun. Their throats would have been dry and in search of water. Their bodies would have been beaten down by the sun. Shade would have come as a great blessing to them.

Perhaps you remember when Jonah finished his preaching tour in Nineveh. He departed to the east of the city and found a nice spot of shade where he could watch and see what God would do to that wicked city. In the LORD's kindness, He “appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant” (Jonah 3:6). This is what God has promised to those who trust Him. He would be their shelter.

As verse 6 says, ...

“The sun will not smite you by day, nor the moon by night” (verse 6).

I believe that the point of application for us is toward the LORD's protecting hand over us physically. God cares about our bodies. God cares about whether we are hot or cold or sick or bruised. When the widow had no resources to pay her creditors, the Lord continued to fill her vessels with oil to pay her debt (2 Kings 4:1-7). When Jonah was in the belly of the big fish, God heard His cry for distress and saved him (Jonah 2). When David was in the cave and in distress, the LORD heard him. When Jesus walked along the earth, He paid special attention to those who were hurting physically.

God will protect us. He will be our umbrella to shade us in the summer. He will be our coat to warm us in the winter. He will be our shelter in the time of storm. God protects us physically.

In verse 7, we see God's protection extending to us morally.

“The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul” (verse 7).

The verse teaches the perseverance of the saints. It's not so much that we are so capable in persevering. Rather, it that God is so good at preserving us until the final day. It's God who is “keeping our souls.”

Jude's benediction says the same thing. “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless 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). Jude is talking about God's protection upon us from stumbling spiritually. Because he has His mind upon that eternal day, when we will stand before Christ, blameless, because of His perfect sacrifice paid our debt and made us holy!

The reason why we can be confident of these things is because of the keeping power of God. Jesus says of those who believe in Him, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37). Jesus pictured it well in John 10:27-29, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.” This is the reality of Psalm 121:7. God will keep and protect our souls.

In recent months, we have been going through 1 Peter. It says in chapter 1, Peter describes the glorious inheritance that awaits us who are in Christ. He says that this inheritance is “imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:4-5). God keeps our soul through faith. And in Psalm 121, it's those who can say, “My help comes from the LORD” whose souls are kept by the power of God.

Can you say this morning, “My help comes from the LORD”? Or, are you trusting in your own strength? Are you trusting in your own works. The prophet Jeremiah said it quite plainly, when he said, “Cursed is the man who trust in mankind and makes flesh his strength” (Jer. 17:5). The reason is simple. Such a one will experience his heart “turning away from the LORD.”

And so, church family, make the LORD your help in 2008. Seek Him early. Seek Him often. Trust Him, and He will keep your soul.

And I love how this Psalm ends.

“The LORD will guard you going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever” (verse 8)

It matters not whether you are going out, or whether you are coming in, the LORD will guard those who trust in Him. It matters not whether it is today or tomorrow or five years from now, the LORD will guard those who trust in Him. He never gives up on us. His watchful care will always be upon our lives.

"I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." (Heb. 13:5) is the promise He gives. Also, "The LORD is my helper, I will not be afraid, what will man do to me?" (Heb. 13:6; Ps. 118:6). Church family, you can trust the LORD. Find Him to be your help in 2008.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 6, 2008 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] The entire article is posted here:
http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2006/1776_Dont_Waste_Your_Cancer/

[2] This statement can be found several times on the HeartCry Missionary Society's web page (<http://www.heartcrymissionary.com>).

[3] I transcribed this portion of Paul Washer's journal from a message that you can hear here:
<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=6190762354>. Certainly, there are misspellings and improper punctuation from the original journal. However, I tried to be as faithful as I could be to what he said. The portion of the journal that is contained in this message begins at the 14:52 mark of the message the Paul Washer delivered.