Help wanted. All over we see these signs. Many businesses are in need of workers to help to run their business, provide their services, and make a profit.

In our families we need help. As children, we need help getting our food, getting dressed, and getting our basic needs met. As we grow, we need help in planning for our future. Will we go to college? If so, where? What career will we pursue? Will we get married? If so, to whom? If we have children, we need help in raising them and facing the many challenges that come with parenting. As we mature, we need help as we care for our aging self and parents; and navigating life’s financial, health, and relational challenges. And so, we cry for help.

In our churches and in our lives, we need help obeying and standing for the truth against the onslaught of Satan’s schemes against God’s truth, His promises, and His people. We need help in loving one another and reconciling broken relationships. We need help in sharing the gospel.

In our culture, we need help knowing how to navigate technology, education, entertainment, politics, and the rapidly changing cultural shifts in our world. In our world, we need help trying to make sense of suffering from war, famine and plague, and natural disasters.

A common cry for everyone is, “I need help!”

The year after I was born, the Beatles made a movie Help! which featured the song by the same title. The lyrics start with:

I need somebody  
(Help) not just anybody  
(Help) you know I need someone, help

And the song ends with the refrain:

Help me if you can, I'm feeling down  
And I do appreciate you being 'round  
Help me get my feet back on the ground  
Won't you please, please help me, help me, help me, ooh

2 years later the Beatles would write a song entitled With a Little Help from My Friends. The song’s chorus is:

Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends  
Mm, I get high with a little help from my friends  
Mm, gonna try with a little help from my friends

Where do we look for help? Often to others. YouTube is full of instructional videos. Look in any bookstore or library and there are shelves of self-help books. I typed in self-help books in the Barnes & Noble search bar and over 2800 results came up. One of the best sellers that came up was entitled Thoughts that Move Energy: Allowing-Awareness-Support- Appreciation-Empowerment. Many of those books tell a person to look to their inner self as creator.

It’s been debated over the years whether the lyrics in the refrain from With a Little Help from My Friends were an explicit reference to drugs or not; but certainly, drugs and alcohol, entertainment, food, sex, and other forms of indulgence or escape are ways people seek help to deal with life’s challenges and problems. Long before the Beatles, people struggled with were to turn for help when facing life’s challenges and they often wrote songs about this theme common to humanity, including the author of Psalm 121. Today we are going to look at this beautiful and encouraging song and instead of looking to other things, others, or ourselves as creator; we will see that our only true source of help is in the Lord, who is the Creator and Keeper of his people.

A Song of Ascents.

121 I lift up my eyes to the hills.  
    From where does 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 Behold, he who keeps Israel  
    will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord is your keeper;  
    the Lord is your shade on 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 forth and forevermore.

Unlike the Beatles, the author, or authors, of this Psalm were writing this song not just thinking about their circumstances; but in the context of preparing to worship the Lord. This song became one of the 15 Psalms of ascents (Psa 120-134), that Jewish pilgrims would sing on their journey to the temple mount in Jerusalem. Three times a year, Jewish men were to go to Jerusalem, offer sacrifices, and worship the Lord (Exo 23:14-17). This involved a climb or ascent as Jerusalem and the temple were located on a mountain or hill, Mount Zion. This journey could be dangerous, think of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luk 10:25-37). So, as the author/authors penned this psalm, they used some of the ever-present dangers, challenges, and suffering involved in that journey as a metaphorical teaching tool and an encouragement for others, including us, as they sought to worship the Lord.

You have probably noticed I have mentioned the possibility of authors, plural, of this Psalm. You will notice that the “I/my” of verses 1&2, shifts to “you/your” in verses 3-8. This has led some commentators to suggest this psalm may be a dialogue between travelers. One of the ways, pilgrims guarded against danger on their journey to worship in Jerusalem was to travel together, safety in numbers. Maybe the first time these words occurred went something like this:

Traveler 1, “I’m looking at these hills and not sure how I’m going to make it. Wait a minute, the God who created these hills will help me.”

His buddy responds, “Yeah, that’s right. Our God the Creator is also your Keeper and Shade, he’s not going to let you stumble as you climb those hills, he’ll give you rest and strength to do that. He’s going to protect us from the heat of the day and cool of night. He’ll protect us from bandits and animals. He’s always with us.”

Traveler 1, “Hey, thanks for encouraging me. We should write a song about that.”

Of course, that’s probably not how it happened. What we do know, is that the Holy Spirit inspired the author(s) to write down these words “for our instruction,” as Paul writes in 1Co 10:11.

As this glorious psalm became an encouragement to the ancient Jews traveling to Jerusalem to worship God; we too can be encouraged by this psalm as we seek to worship God in our present circumstances and trials, and as we journey on to our eternal worship of Him in the new Jerusalem. So, as we look at this psalm, we’ll think about the immediate context of the dangers and trials in life as we seek to worship God; but more importantly we’ll be looking at the spiritual truths that will keep us safe as we seek to worship God, both now and through eternity, because, the Lord is our Helper, Creator, and Keeper.

This past summer, our family went to the Black Hills in South Dakota and did some hiking. I found myself looking to the hills and thinking, “I’m going to need some help, especially keeping up with our kids.” And Libby was thinking, “I hope Chip doesn’t stumble and fall.” So, the psalmist likely had some of these same ideas in his head when he wrote v1, “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?” He may also have been thinking about challenges in his life that seem insurmountable. The pagans surrounding Israel, and unfortunately even the Israelites, often worshipped their false gods and idols in “high places.” In doing so, they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). I think this certainly must have been on his mind. Is this where he would turn to for help? No! He probably remembered:

Psa 2:6 “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

And as the psalmist looked to that hill, he answers his own question in v 2 with, “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” He knew the only true help was in the name of the Lord.

The LORD is used five times in these 8 verses. We need to remind ourselves over and over that it is the Lord who is our helper. LORD, YHWH, the tetragrammaton, Yahweh is the proper name of the one true God, the self-existent one. The name speaks to his presence, covenantal nature, his salvation, deliverance and blessing (Exo 3:14, 6:2-8). Hearing this name would bring immediate comfort and confidence that God was present with them, He would help and protect them on their journey to worship Him. The psalmist additionally adds confidence in God as his helper by referring to Him as Creator, the one who made heaven and earth. In calling Him the Creator, he acknowledges his need for help as a creature and his dependence upon the Creator. Unlike the false gods, the Creator, who made heaven and earth is the one who could help him. He is the all-powerful, sovereign God. This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God made the heaven and the earth, is there anything that is too hard for Him? Listen to these scriptures that give us confidence in our Creator:

Jer 32:17 ‘Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.

Psa 124:8 Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Psa 146:5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, 6 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever;

Deu 33:26 “There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty.27  The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. … 29 Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph! …”

Isa 40:28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. 29  He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.30  Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;31  but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

The Lord, the one who made heaven and earth, is the one who would help him and guide him safely on his journey to worship God. Of course, this is also true of us and all God’s elect. Isaiah prophesied of a time when all nations would worship God:

Isa 2:2  It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, 3  and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Praise God that He has included us in this prophecy. We can worship together with all peoples now, and this will ultimately be fulfilled when Jesus returns.

One of the ways that this Creator God, helps us is that he is our Keeper. This is the dominant theme through the rest of this psalm. *Shamar* (shaw-mar) is the Hebrew word that is translated Keeper, keep, keepeth, preserves, watches, or protects; and it is used 6 times in vv 3-8. It comes from a root meaning hedging about or around. The Lord guards, protects, attends to, preserves, and watches over us. The use of this word for God as our keeper, preserver, and protector is prominently used throughout the Old Testament and especially in the psalms:

In Jacob’s ladder dream we see God’s covenantal nature in keeping his people.

Gen 28:15 Behold, I am with you and will **keep** you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Job said:

Job 10:12 You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has **preserved** my spirit.

Psa 16:1 **A Miktam of David.** **Preserve** me, O God, for in you I take refuge. 2 I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.”

Psa 25:20 Oh, **guard** my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

Psa 37:28 For the LORD loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They are **preserved** forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.

Psa 97:10 O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He **preserves** the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

Psa 146:9 The LORD **watches** over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

So that gives you some idea of the confidence that “the Lord is your Keeper” would bring to the Jewish pilgrims on their journey to Jerusalem and should give confidence to us as well. In this psalm, I see at least 4 ways, God as our Creator and Keeper helps us:

He establishes our steps and holds us firm v3

He never sleeps or slumbers. He is always watching over us vv3-4

He is at our right hand protecting us vv5-7

He keeps our life and soul vv7-8

Before we look at how he helps us, I want to point out that this song is poetry. It is not prescriptive, but descriptive about the way God generally works for his people. This psalm is not a promise that we will not experience any hardship or evil. It assures us that even in the midst of hardship, God has promised to help and keep us, so that we may worship Him now; and that He will safely and securely help and keep us so that we can worship Him throughout eternity in the New Jerusalem.

So, First, the Lord, our Creator and Keeper, helps us by establishing our steps and keeping us firm. V 3, “He will not let your foot be moved”. Just as the psalmist was looking for firm places to put his foot on his journey to Jerusalem, we can look to Jesus, our rock, as a firm foundation as we face various trials on our journey in life.

Hannah prayed:

1Sa 2:2 “There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. … 9  “He will **guard** the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail.

David’s song of deliverance from all his enemies and the hand of Saul(Compare with in 2 Samuel 22:32-27):

Psa 18:31 For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God? —32  the God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless. 33 He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights. 35 You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great. 36 You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip.

Not only does God protect us from physical dangers, but spiritual dangers as well:

Psa 40:2 He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

It’s not as though all obstacles are removed by God; but He will keep us firm, he will not allow us to slip and stumble.

Proverbs tells us:

Pro 2:7 he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, 8 guardingthe paths of justice and **watching** over the way of his saints.

Pro 3:23 Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble. 24 If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. 25 Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, 26 for the LORD will be your confidence and will **keep** your foot from being caught.

Psa 37:23 The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way; 24 though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD upholds his hand.

The Lord preserves his people, He will not let our foot be moved, He will see us safely to the New Jerusalem.

Second, the Lord, our Creator and Keeper helps us by constantly watching over us. He neither slumbers or sleeps, vv3-4. As created beings, we are dependent upon him. As much as we try, we cannot do and control everything. We have natural limitations. But God does not. He is eternal, unchanging (immutable), all powerful (omnipotent), all knowing (omniscient), and everywhere present (omnipresent). He is ever vigilant, watching over us even in our sleep. We can rest in Him because He never sleeps.

Psa 127:1 **...** Unless the LORD **watches** over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.  It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Psa 4:8 In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Notice in v 4 that the reason God keeps and watches over us is because He is a covenant keeping God to His people, He is the God of Israel, His church, His chosen people. He doesn’t keep us just because we are something special individually, but because of His great covenant love for his people, He watches over us day and night.

Listen to God speaking of His care over Israel, whom He calls a pleasant vineyard, in Isaiah:

Isa 27:3 I, the LORD, am its **keeper**; every moment I water it. Lest anyone punish it, I keep it night and day;

Not only does God, our Creator and Keeper help us by not letting our feet be moved and by not sleeping and constantly watching over us; thirdly, He is at our right hand supporting, protecting, and interceding for us. He is described as a shade. On the journey to Jerusalem, the pilgrim could be exposed to extremes of temperatures, with heat during the day and cool at night. Listen to Jacob’s description of shepherding while serving Laban in this land:

Gen 31:40  There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes.

There are natural threats and evils. Even as we have seen recently much devastation from hurricanes, fires, and blizzards; in general, most people miraculously survive, and God sustains and provides for his people.

Metaphorically it is true that God keeps and protects us in the heat of life’s trials and affliction.

**Isa 26:3** You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. **4** Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.

**Psa 30:10** Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me! O LORD, be my helper!” **11** You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,

The inclusion of the sun by day and the moon by night is another way of expressing that God is with us at all times protecting us. The fact that He is at our right hand is an expression of his power and presence to keep us safe:

In the Song of Moses, after passing through the Red Sea, the Israelites sang:

Exo 15:6 Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.

David says:

Psa 16:8 I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. ... 11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

And Jesus said that we are secure in his hands:

Jhn 10:28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 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.

And He prayed:

Jhn 17:12 While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

And Paul felt Christ’s comfort and protection with the Lord at his right side:

2Ti 4:16 At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! 17 But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Lastly, and most importantly, we see the Lord, our Creator and Keeper helps us by keeping our life, our soul, secure. We know from scripture and experience that we will experience hardships and difficulties in this life. These verses give us confidence in God’s help through life’s struggles. As we have seen thus far, God will be with us keeping our steps, constantly watching over us, shading and protecting us. God is sovereign over everything that happens to us, and he uses even the hardships and afflictions in our lives for our good, to conform us to the image of Christ (Rom 8:28-29). And we know that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:39). I believe the most comforting aspect of this psalm is that the Lord keeps us from all evil, He keeps our life, He keeps our going out and coming in from this time forth and forevermore, vv 7-8.

We have seen how God is with us and protects us from natural evils and even evil committed against us from others. Verse 7 says He keeps us from all evil, including the evil in our own hearts.

Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? 10 “I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23) and Nate reminded us last week in his sermon from Nahum, we all deserve God’s wrath (see also Eph 2:3). Because of our sin and the evil in our hearts, all of our lives and souls are in danger of the punishment of hell. But for those who lift up their eyes to the Lord, maker of heaven and earth, and trust in Him alone to deliver us and protect us from our own evil hearts, He will keep our life and soul and preserve us for all eternity.

David wrote:

Psa 24:3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

We are cleansed by the blood of Jesus:

Isa 1:18 “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

**1Pe 3:18**  For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

So, God keeps us from the punishment we deserve for the evil in our hearts through our faith in Jesus’ atoning work on the cross. He also keeps us in our struggle with ongoing sin and our sanctification process. Jesus instructed us in our prayers to pray:

Mat 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

And Jesus sent us the Helper, the Holy Spirit (Jhn 14:6, 16:7-15) who even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive in Christ and raised us up with Him in the heavenly places so that in the coming ages we might have his immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness (Eph 2:5-7). He is the Helper who intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words and that are according to the will of God (Rom 8:26-27). And Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for us. (Heb 7:25)

Additionally, God helps us in our fight against sin and evil that remains in our lives by providing a sympathetic high priest (Heb 4:15):

Heb 2:18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

And He provides a way of escape from temptation:

1Co 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

So, as we lift up or eyes to the Lord, our Helper and Keeper, who keeps our life and keeps from all evil; we remember Paul’s words:

Col 3:1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

And the words of the author of Hebrews:

**Heb 12:1** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2** looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

v 8 says, “ The Lord will keep your going out and coming in from this time forth and forevermore.” Another merism that God is with us always, he never leaves us or forsakes us.

Heb 13:5 … for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” 6 So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

He is with us now, during the trials and struggles we are experiencing in this life; and He will be with us when we die or He comes back. We can be confident that He will lead us to the New Jerusalem. We, and all of God’s elect from every tribe, language, people and nation (Rev 5:9), will be with Him for all eternity, worshipping Him untainted by our sin, seeing Him as He is (1Jn 3:2), and we’ll be singing songs, like the Song of Moses and the song of the Lamb:

Rev 15:3 … “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! 4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

Won’t that be glorious? I can hardly wait.

So, as we close, here are some applications and questions to ponder based upon Psalm 121:

What wrong things do I look to for help in times of trouble/hardship? Is my default to look to the Lord, who made heaven and earth, or do I look to others, escapist behaviors, or other gods/idols? What is keeping me from looking to the Lord, maker of Heaven and earth? Confess them to God and repent. Ask him to direct your eyes to Him. Look to His Spirit as our Helper and praise Jesus that he is our rock on which we can stand firmly and that He will never leave us or forsake us and will safely deliver us to our eternal home.

I want to challenge you to memorize this psalm. It will encourage and remind you of the truth that God is our Creator and Keeper who keeps our feet firm, who constantly watches over us, who is at our right hand protecting us from all evil, even the evil within us.

If you have not lifted your eyes up to the Lord, I encourage you to do so now. As an ambassador for Christ, God is making an appeal to you through me, to be reconciled to God. Put your trust in Him, Jesus, who knew no sin, who became sin on our behalf; so that we might become the righteousness of God (2Co 5:20-21). Then, and only then, may you experience the help and comfort that the Lord is with you from this time forth and forevermore which Psalm 121 talks about.

Finally, for those who are in Christ Jesus, praise God that we do not have to make a pilgrimage to an earthly temple and make animal sacrifices to worship God. Through the blood of Jesus, the once for all sacrifice, we can have confidence to enter directly to God’s holy place through his intercession (Heb 7-10). We are now God’s temple through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1Co 3:16, 6:19) and we can offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1Pe 2:5) and present our bodies as living sacrifices as our spiritual worship (Rom 12:1-2). Just as the Israelites traveled together to worship God, we should not neglect gathering together in worship and we should encourage one another toward love and good deeds as we wait for Jesus to come (Heb 10:24-25). And be encouraged that the God of peace himself, will sanctify you completely and keep your whole spirit, soul, and body blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it (1Th 5:24-25).