



Heart Songs: Week 5 | Twenty-Four Seven (Psalm 121)

Reading Description

We must look to God and have full trust in Him when we are going through a season of difficulty. Instead of relying on ourselves to come out of dark times, we can rely on God's strength, protection, and love. With this four-day reading plan from Lenya Heitzig, develop your reliance on God as you study Psalm 121 and discover that He is the only help you need in seasons of hardship. "The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore" (Psalm 121:7-8).

Day 1: Safely Surrounded

In New Mexico, fall is a season when everyone looks to the hills. The golden aspens call for attention among deep green pines while glorious sunrises and sunsets splash the skies with vibrant colors. In Psalm 121, the psalmist lifted his eyes to the hills. Life had taken him into a deep valley—a time when he needed assistance. He asked, "Where does my help come from" (v. 1, NIV)? With wisdom, the psalmist recognized that his relief would come from the Lord. When you understand the Lord is the one true source of help, it becomes necessary to seek Him. His presence is right before our eyes, in His creation.

Nature's majesty clearly proclaims God's power and omnipresence. Acts 17:24 tells us, "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands." Our heavenly Father dwells all around us. God Himself said, "I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create calamity. I, the LORD, do all these things" (Isaiah 45:7). Like the psalmist, we sometimes enter valleys. Where do you turn to be lifted up and out? When troubles come



your way, do you look to the hills for help, or do you try to climb out of the valley in your own strength? Today in Psalm 121, we discover the One in whom the psalmist confidently placed his trust.

Self-reliance is a prevalent theme in contemporary life. We are encouraged to find out who we are, to be all that we can be, and to put ourselves and our needs first. Bookstores are filled with books promoting various methods of self-help, from how to overcome addictions to food, alcohol, and drugs to finding inner peace, healthier bodies, functional relationships, and success in the workplace. But as Christians, we are not dependent on ourselves for help. We are expected to turn to the Lord for assistance twenty-four seven. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1) The Bible is the only self-help book we need.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions:

"I will lift up my eyes to the hills—
From whence comes my help?
My help comes from the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2).

Practical Observation

1. What did the psalmist do physically, and why is that important?
2. In your own words, what question did he ask himself and how did he answer it? Why did he ask a question to which he already knew the answer?

God's Citadel: *The word help means "to surround, protect, or aid" (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010], PC Study Bible). The psalmist looked up and affirmed to himself that only God could protect him from warring neighbors. In times of trouble, we, too, can lift our eyes up and affirm that "God is in [our] citadels; he has shown himself to be [our] fortress" (Psalm 48:3, NIV).*

3. According to Psalm 121:2, how did the psalmist describe his Helper?

God's Order: *God existed before creation and called the physical world into existence. "The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:2, NIV). He brought order to chaos.*

Personal Application

- a. In which of the following valleys are you currently standing or tempted to stand: fear, loneliness, sadness, confusion, anger, resentment, jealousy, or something else? How can you look to God for help in the valley? What Scripture can you recite to help you stand strong in your current valley?



b. Satan strives to keep our eyes focused on our problems. But Scripture tells us, "Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about" (Philippians 4:8, TLB). List some things you can praise God for and be glad about.

Verses:

Psalm 121:1-2

Acts 17:24

Isaiah 45:7

Psalm 46:1

Psalm 48:3

Genesis 1:2

Philippians 4:8

Day 2: Sure-Footed

Dr. Boris Kornfeld was a Jewish medical doctor who was imprisoned in a Russian gulag in the 1950s. He practiced medicine and maintained records for the prison camp; however, the authorities forced him to proclaim prisoners healthy even when they were obviously not. The doctor came to know Jesus through a fellow inmate who was a Christian. His life changed slowly but steadily as he provided care to prisoners and prison staff.

One day, a guard who routinely beat the prisoners needed serious medical attention. The doctor could have easily loosely tied an artery so the guard would bleed to death and no one would have known, but because Christ lived in him, he was unable to murder. Instead, he muttered this sentence from the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." These were strange words from a Jew in a Russian prison camp.

On another occasion, Dr. Kornfeld was tending to an inmate with terminal skin cancer. It didn't seem like he would live through the night, and so the doctor told him about Jesus. In his groggy post-surgery state, the patient heard a commotion down the hall. Dr. Kornfeld was being brutally murdered. When the patient became fully conscious, he understood Dr. Kornfeld had risked his life willingly because of his faith, and he prayed to receive Christ. That patient was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart and 1,501 Other Stories* [Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998]), Nobel Prize for Literature recipient and one of the most outspoken critics of Joseph Stalin and the Soviet regime.

Dr. Kornfeld trusted God no matter the cost, and we share the same assurance the psalmist expressed in today's verses. We need to trust Him no matter where life may take us.

Like Dr. Kornfeld, pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem were not always sure where life would take them and had to fully trust God every step of the way. Small groups of pilgrims recited this psalm on the long journey to Jerusalem. During the trip, the pilgrims had to sleep on the road, yet the language in these



verses shows a confidence in God's watch, care, and protection. By inattention, continued wakefulness, or weariness, a sentinel may slumber at his post, a pilot may slumber at the helm, and even a mother may fall asleep beside a sick child. But God is never inattentive, exhausted, or weary. He never averts His eyes from the condition of His people or the needs of the world. He offers a twenty-four seven sanctuary to us. Today we will step up to another truth: our ever-watchful Father keeps us sure-footed.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions:

"He will not allow your foot to be moved;
He who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, He who keeps Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalm 121:3-4).

Practical Observation

1. What is affirmed about a believer's position in God?

God's Preservation: *The word moved means "to waver, slip, fall, or fallen in decay" (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010], PC Study Bible). God knows how easy it is for us to slip and fall into sin. Though we may stumble, He will not permit us to suffer permanent defeat. God "guards the paths of justice and preserves the way of His saints" (Proverbs 2:8).*

2. According to verse 3, who is the Lord to His people?

3. What word is used to attract our attention? What does our keeper not do?

God's Watchful Eye: *The word sleep differs from the word slumber and is translated to mean slack or lazy (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010], PC Study Bible). The keeper of Israel isn't lackadaisical about anything. For the individual believer, the church, Israel, and the world, every detail of every day is seen by His omniscient eye. "God carefully watches the goings on of all mankind" (Job 34:21, TLB).*

Personal Application

a. It is sometimes said, "If you don't want to slip, don't go into slippery places." What are some of the slippery places you have fallen into recently: judgment, hypocrisy, filthy language, hatred, lying, contention, gossip, selfishness, or envy.

1. Journal about the slippery places you mentioned above. What were the circumstances and who was involved?



2. Confess to the Lord and repent of your sin. If you need to go to another person to ask for their forgiveness, make plans to do that now.

b. Verse 4 says the Lord keeps you. Has there been a time when you've almost fallen on a slippery slope, but the Lord kept you near Him instead?

c. We learned today that our keeper does not slumber nor sleep. Journal about the comfort you receive knowing God continually watches over you. As you lay your head on your pillow tonight, meditate on these comforts and thank Him for loving you.

Verses:

Psalm 121:3-4

Proverbs 2:8

Job 34:21

Day 3: Son-Screened

Imagine you are preparing for a two-week backpacking adventure, hiking by day and camping by night. You pack only the essentials: food, water, a first aid kit, sunscreen, and minimal clothing. The comforts of home stay behind because everything must relate to provision and protection.

As you start your adventure, the guide mentions marauders in the hills ahead, but not to worry, the Lord is your keeper. The guide recounts that many who have traveled this path have succumbed to heatstroke and had to return to base camp, but not to worry, the Lord is your shade. There is no shade by day nor protection from the elements or animals by night, but not to worry, the Lord's mighty right hand will not allow anything to strike you.

Suddenly, the provision and protection in your backpack seem insignificant. What good is your energy bar if a mountain lion decides he is hungry? The Lord *must* supply His provision and protection for you to arrive at your destination. You are utterly dependent upon His love and watchful eye.

This was the situation for the Jewish pilgrims going to Jerusalem in Psalm 121. The psalm was written in a call-and-response style: one party would sing out the first two verses and what follows would be in response. The response is an encouragement to rely on the strength and protection of the Lord.

Throughout the response, the pilgrims were reminded that God is big enough to make the heavens and the earth, yet involved enough not to let one believer's foot slip. God isn't prone to the sleepiness of man, and He won't doze off to let unexpected danger strike. He preserves His pilgrims with His powerful



right hand—the hand of strength. He is also tender enough to provide shade for the weary, warmth for the cold, and protection for the vulnerable.

God's character is complete, lacking nothing. Where we are prone to have strength in one area and weakness in another, God is not. His strength is perfect, His love is perfect, and His protection is perfect.

Today we focus on God's twenty-four seven protection over our lives. Read verses 5-6 through the eyes of a pilgrim on a journey. Think about the craggy rocks and uneven path, the hot sun and the cold nights. Think about the protection the Lord provided to His followers, both in biblical times and today. Think about your life and the elements from which God protects you.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions:

"The LORD is your keeper;
The LORD is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
Nor the moon by night" (Psalm 121:5-6).

Practical Observation

1. In what two ways is the Lord described? How are these two descriptors related?
2. In what areas of your life is the Lord your shade? Why is that significant?
3. What two things does the Lord shade us from? How do they relate to a time of day?

***Keeper** is translated protector. Jesus protects all who believe in His name. When He prayed for His disciples, He said, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost" (John 17:12). The Hebrew word for shade in Psalm 121:5 means defense or shadow ([source](#)). "I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8). God never slumbers and His protection has no time limit. He protects us twenty-four seven.*

Personal Application

- a. The Lord becomes our shade when we step into the shadow of the cross. Since becoming a Christian, how have you witnessed the Lord's protection against sin and Satan in your own life or in the life of another believer?
- b. We are all vulnerable to attack in different seasons of life. Whether you are young or old, single or married, a parent or not, we all must rely on the Lord for protection. What specific attacks or challenges are you presently facing?



c. How are you asking God to keep you and shade you?

d. Pray a personal prayer based on Psalm 17:6-8. Ask God to show you His love and to protect you in all circumstances. Be specific. "O God! Yes, listen as I pray. Show me your strong love in wonderful ways, O Savior of all those seeking your help against their foes. Protect me as you would the pupil of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings as you hover over me" (Psalm 17:6-8, TLB).

As we journey through life, we encounter storms. Some storms are more intense than others—some bring a sprinkle of rain, some bring pounding hail. Through it all, God keeps us under the shadow of His wing. He doesn't always prevent the storm, but He promises to keep us and protect us during the storm. Rest today knowing that whatever storm you may encounter, your heavenly Father protects you under the shadow of His wing.

Verses:

Psalm 121:5-6

John 17:12

Psalm 16:8

Psalm 17:6-8

Day 4: Safe-Guarded

Near Istanbul lives a species of bird that appears to be constantly in flight. These birds are called Pelkovans and they are known for their melancholy calls. These birds are rarely seen at rest; the local people call them "lost souls" seeking safety and rest and finding neither (adapted from "Unresting Souls," *Heartwarming Bible Illustrations*, Quickverse Sermon Builder, edited and compiled by Richard A. Steele, Jr. and Evelyn Storm [2005]). The phrase "lost souls" and all that it implies is a stark contrast to Psalm 121:7, which promises that the Lord "shall preserve your soul."

Webster's Dictionary provides at least nine definitions for the word *soul*, yet none of them adequately capture the completeness of the word used in this verse. In Psalm 121, *soul* includes the entire inner person, a combination of the mind, the heart, and the spirit (*The Complete Word Study Old Testament* [AMG Publishers, 1994], 2341). Other Bible translations use the word *life* in this verse. The Word of God gives the soul its life-like attributes. The book of Job affirms the soul has desires and is able to complain, mourn, and grieve. In the psalms we learn that the soul can sing, wait, sorrow, hunger, rest, learn, and be satisfied.

The Lord promises to keep and preserve our souls and indeed our very lives. Christians are most certainly not lost souls. The divine keeper of our souls watches, loves, and protects us twenty-four seven.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions:



"The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;
He shall preserve your soul.
The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in
From this time forth, and even forevermore" (Psalm 121:7-8).

Practical Observation

1. What does the Lord do for us?
2. What is God's first act of preservation on our behalf?

The Lord Protects: *The word evil comes from a root word that means to spoil by breaking to pieces and is used especially to describe moral depravity. The Greek equivalent is the poneros, from which the English word pornography originates (John Phillips, Exploring Psalms, Volume Two [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006], 439). "There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief" (Proverbs 12:21, KJV).*

3. According to Psalm 121:8, what is God's second act of preservation?

The Lord Preserves: *God guards us physically and spiritually. He declares, "Every living soul belongs to me" (Ezekiel 18:4, ISV), and His desire is that all souls would be preserved from perishing eternally: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28, NIV).*

4. In your own words, describe God's third act of preservation.

Personal Application

- a. Today we learned that the word *evil* means moral depravity. What are some examples of moral deprivation in our nation and world? Which one has impacted you the most and why?
- b. Now lift a prayer based on Matthew 5:16. Ask the Lord to help you shine your light in this dark world for others to see and to glorify His name. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your moral excellence and your praiseworthy, noble, and good deeds and recognize and honor and praise and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16, AMPC).
- c. What are some ways you can shine your light to those around you?
- d. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Now reread Psalm 121:8. How do these verses provide comfort during difficult seasons in your life?

"From this time forth, and even forevermore" is an amazing conclusion to Psalm 121. The promises in this psalm are available to us now and always, twenty-four seven, and we can trust in God's promise of forevermore. As 1 John 4:16 reminds us, "We have known and believed the love that God has for us.



God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." Respond to that promise with praise. "Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever" (Psalm 136:26, NIV). God loves you. He will love you forever. And His promises endure forever.

Verses:

Psalm 121:7-8

Proverbs 12:21

Ezekiel 18:4

John 10:28

Matthew 5:16

Romans 8:28

1 John 4:16

Psalm 136:26

