

The LORD is My Help

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[0:00] Let me tell you a few stories. Josh Hamilton plays outfield for the Texas Rangers. A couple weeks ago, he hit four home runs in one game.

It's only happened 15 times in Major League history. So he's a pretty good player. But like the rest of us, he's broken.

Josh is a recovering alcoholic and drug addict during a car crash about 10 years ago. He was severely injured.

And out of that wreckage of that event, his life spiraled out of control until he was waking up in strange places.

Filthy clothes on, praying that God would take him away from all of this. But God apparently didn't answer for the longest time.

[1:01] He failed drug test after drug test until he was banned from baseball for a number of years. He said this later. Addiction is a humbling experience.

Getting it under control is even more humbling. I got better for one reason. I surrendered. Instead of asking to be bailed out, instead of making deals with God by saying, if you get me out of this mess, I'll stop doing what I'm doing, I asked for help.

I wouldn't do that before. I'd been the Devil Ray's number one pick in the 1999 draft, supposedly a five-star prospect. I was a big, strong man, and I was supposed to be able to handle my problems myself.

That didn't work out so well. So he was a broken man, but he turned to Christ. He called out for help. He repented and believed, and God gave him a new life.

But he's still broken. We like our heroes to be perfect. But there was only one perfect man, and it wasn't Josh Hamilton.

[2:08] Story number two. This is from Robertson McQuilkin, who was the president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary, an evangelical college seminary in South Carolina.

He was the president of that institution. So he was probably, he probably is, a good Christian. But like the rest of us, he is broken.

I'll let you, I'll let him tell you his story. And this is from, he wrote this in 1990. Seventeen summers ago, Muriel, that's his wife, and I began our journey into the twilight.

It's midnight now, at least for her. And sometimes I wonder when dawn will break. Even the dread Alzheimer's disease isn't supposed to attack so early and torment so long.

Yet in her silent world, Muriel is so content, so lovable. If Jesus took her home, how I would miss her gentle, sweet presence. Yes, there are times when I get irritated, but not often.

[3:15] It doesn't make sense to get angry. And besides, perhaps the Lord has been answering the prayer of my youth to mellow my spirit. Once, though, I completely lost it.

In the days when Muriel could still stand and walk and we had not resorted to diapers, sometimes there were accidents. I was on my knees beside her, trying to clean up the mess as she stood, confused by the toilet.

It would have been easier if she weren't so insistent on helping. I got more and more frustrated. Suddenly, to make her stand still, I slapped her calf, as if that would do any good.

It wasn't a hard slap, but she was startled. I was too. Never in our 44 years of marriage had I ever so much as touched her in anger or in rebuke of any kind.

Never. Wasn't even tempted, in fact. But now, when she needed me most, brokenness.

[4:13] Not hers, but his. So in the moment of Muriel's greatest need, he lashed out at her, and it was a terrible failure. It was a terrible coming short of the glory of God.

Story number three. Middle-aged man rolls over in his bed, and he's probably the greatest Christian who has ever lived.

He's remarkable in so many ways. Brilliant mind, capable speaker, hearty constitution, deep thinker, ready wit, and yet there is a thorn in his flesh, and it torments him.

He is a broken man. Three times he pleads with the Lord to take it away, and yet it's there, still there, hurting him, tormenting him, hampering him, plaguing him.

He wakes with it. He goes to sleep with it. He's a broken man. It's who he is for now. So brokenness, emptiness, need, it's the stuff of humanity.

[5:26] It's the stuff that we are made out of. It's your experience. It's my experience. In this fallen world, in some way, physical, emotional, certainly spiritual, we can't rise to the occasion.

We look into the reservoir of our heart, and we don't have what it takes. The contemporary Christian song goes like this. Well, I will walk by faith, even when I cannot see well, because this broken road prepares your will for me.

So we are all walking on a broken road. We're all walking on a broken road, because we ourselves are broken. To walk in our shoes is to walk in need, in brokenness.

And in these afternoons, we're looking at the songs of ascent. They're pilgrim songs. They're songs about walking to heaven. The saints of old used to sing them as they made their way up to Jerusalem.

And they're the psalms for this life that we find ourselves in, this pilgrim life, as we travel to the celestial city. Today, we're going to look at Psalm 121. So I'd ask you to turn there.

[6:42] In Psalm 121, God meets us in our brokenness. Psalm 121. We're going to read the psalm in its entirety.

I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip.

He who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand.

The sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore.

God's word speaks to us in this condition that we find ourselves, in this brokenness, in this need, where we're not big enough to handle the situations that we find ourselves in.

[7:56] So he speaks into this, into the darkness of our fears and our failures. And so this psalm, Psalm 121, is a psalm for the weak. It's a psalm for the needy.

And it presents to us God who is our help. And you're going to see, we're going to see three things about God our help in this psalm. The first is that you see God is bigger than all of your problems. God is bigger than all your problems. I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

So who is your helper, brother or sister? Where does your help come from? We lift up our eyes. We raise them up above and we look and we see the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Our God is the creator. And that means he's big enough to take care of all of your problems. And so do you face problems? Yes. Do you face big problems?

[9:02] Maybe so. But you have a bigger God. He is the maker of heaven and earth. And so he understands how it all works.

His understanding is beyond measure. And he's almighty. With his word, he spoke the world into existence. And so your God is big enough to help you in your brokenness, wherever it is.

It's not a stretch for him. It's not difficult. Doesn't wear him out. Does not tire him. Look up to the heavens. Who made all of these?

Your help. The largest star that we know of is Canis Majoris, which, funny enough, means big dog. It's the big dog of all the stars. And it's one big dog. It's radius. It's two billion radius. So geometry has been a while.

[10:02] From the center to the outside. It's radius. Two billion, eight hundred million kilometers. And you're probably like me.

You're like, what does that mean? I mean, that's a lot. I understand that. How big is that? Well, imagine putting Canis Majoris in the place of our sun. So the center of the sun, we're going to put Canis Majoris there.

And Canis Majoris would stretch all the way out to where Saturn is in our solar system. So it would fill the solar system all the way out to Saturn. Seven quadrillion Earths could fit inside of it. That's seven with 15 zeros behind it.

If you were to get into a normal passenger jet and you were to take off and you were to fly once around Canis Majoris, flying at 600 miles per hour, which if you fly a jet, that's about how fast they go, passenger jet, it would take you 1,100 years to go around one time.

[11:12] It's big. But think, it's one star in our galaxy. And there are billions of galaxies in our universe. And then there is God who has to stoop to look down into the heavens.

You stoop to look down at an anthill. God stoops down to look in the universe. So look at your problems.

Look at your brokenness. Look at your need, at your emptiness, at your powerlessness. Then look at your God. He's big enough to take care of all of your problems.

He's bigger than all of your problems. The second thing Psalm 121 says is that God, your help, never sleeps. He never sleeps. He never falls asleep.

He who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. God doesn't fall asleep on the job. The psalmist says it twice because he wants us to understand that.

[12:22] He doesn't get tired. He doesn't fall out of consciousness or something. So Elijah is on the mountain and there's 450 prophets of Baal with him.

And you remember the showdown. What God is going to answer with fire? Which God is it going to be? And the Baal boys, they go first and they start in the morning and they start whooping and hollering and cutting themselves and crying out from morning till noon.

And finally, Elijah gets up and he starts, he gets up from his rock or wherever he was sitting and he starts shouting. He starts telling them, shout louder. Shout louder.

Surely your God is up there. Maybe, you know, he's thinking. Maybe he's busy. Maybe he's on vacation. He went to the beach. Maybe he fell asleep and you need to wake him up.

And so they shouted louder and louder. They got more hysteric. But Baal never woke up. That evening, Elijah prayed one prayer.

[13:27] He said, Oh Lord, answer me so that these people will know that you, oh Lord, are God and that you are turning their hearts back to you. And whoosh!

The fire came. God doesn't sleep. He doesn't vacation. He doesn't go away. You can never wear him out. Nothing distracts him.

He's always ready. He's always watching over you all the time. Night and day, he's awake. And that would be, I imagine, a comfort for many of you who struggle to sleep.

I know that a few of you, not, not, actually not just a few of you, struggle to sleep. In the hours of the night when your spouse dozes, you lie awake and you stare.

And in the hours of the night when your body is tired and your mind is still awake, your Lord is awake too. He hasn't fallen asleep either.

[14:29] And he gives his strength to the weary. Young men stumble and fall. They do. But in his care, he gives you strength.

His care of you never wavers. He's always watching. He's always vigilant. He's always ready. He's always protecting. I know I've told you this story before, but one time a lady came to Mr. Spurgeon, Charles Spurgeon, and she said, Mr. Spurgeon, Mr. Spurgeon, I have the worst dreams.

They're just terrible. And he said, well, tell me about it. And she says, well, when I sleep, I dream that I'm surrounded by this great light. And outside of the light, there are all these bad things trying to get me.

And they can't get me. They can't reach me until the light says, you may pass. And then they come, and I hurt. So what do you think?

And Spurgeon said, well, it's not a dream. It's true. Nothing comes to us that doesn't cross God's desk first. Nothing comes to us that he hasn't looked over, that he hasn't examined, and that he is sure won't, in the long run, harm you.

[15:52] It won't be for our harm. So Satan had to visit the throne of God above before he could even touch Job. That's the same for you and me. Job wasn't special in that regard.

Your helper is always awake. Nothing slips by him. The sun can't touch you by day without his permission. And the moon can't strike you by night without his permission.

Your helper watches over you no matter what. Your foot will not slip. You will not fall to your harm. God's like a father who holds his small child by the hand, and they go walking.

And you know, children, very small children, first learning to walk, they aren't so good at that. They don't do it so well. And so you hold their hand, and as they walk, you know, they start to fall.

They tip over. They lose their balance. But Dad keeps a hold of their hand, and though they slip, they do not fall. And though they stumble, they do not hurt themselves.

[16:54] That's who God is for us. Yes, we slip and we fall, but he makes sure that it's not to our everlasting harm. And he's always vigilant.

He's always ready. The third thing Psalm 121 teaches us about your help is this. God always cares. God always, all the time, cares.

The Lord will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and your going, both now and forevermore. God always cares. When we are going, He cares.

And when we come back, He's there, and He cares, both now and forevermore. So this is your help. Not one minute does He get tired of helping you.

Not one minute does He get tired of doing you good. He pursues us with His love. Psalm 23 talks about goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

[17:55] Goodness and love. God pursues us with His love. He watches over us with His love day and night, coming and going. Read Psalm 139 about how God is so intimately aware of our situation and how He pays attention to us.

And so this is your helper. This is the one that Psalm 121 shows you in your brokenness. This is the one that gives you strength when you have none.

This is the one that forgives you when you've sinned, and He invites you to the fountain to be washed and cleansed. He invites you to Christ to have all your sins forgiven.

This is your helper. He is ready, He is willing, and He's always enough. He's always enough. Josh Hamilton stumbled in February.

For the first time in three years, he had a drink. It was a very public fall, and he confessed his sin, and he said this afterwards, after this happens, and praying about it, I cannot take a break from my recovery.

[19:04] My recovery is Christ. My recovery is an everyday process because when I take that one day off, it leaves me open for that moment of weakness, and it's always been that way. I like that.

My recovery is Christ. You know, Josh Hamilton is weak, but Jesus is strong. So, we left Robertson McQuilkin on his hands and knees after he had slapped his wife.

Sobbing, I pled with her to forgive me, no matter that she didn't understand words any better than she could speak them, and so I turned to the Lord to tell him how sorry I was.

Have you ever been there? Broken, sad, coming short of the glory of God. Robertson turned to the Lord, and the Lord forgave him.

That's our help. He doesn't scorn us in our need. He doesn't scorn us when we come confessing. Instead, he says, come to the fountain. Wash that sin away.

[20:11] Confess it all and it will all be forgiven. That's our merciful God. God. And what did Paul find? Three times he prayed, Lord, take this away.

But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness. That's our God. That's the God of Psalm 121.

Ready to help, ready to forgive, ready to give grace in every circumstance. And so I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that in the midst of our brokenness, in the midst of our need and our sinfulness, we find you a fortress, an ever present help, stronger than the evil one that attacks us, stronger even than our own hearts that speaks peace to us.

Lord, thank you that you are ready to help. You are ready to give mercy, that you are big enough for all of our problems.

[21:25] Lord, I pray that this week we would, in the middle of the difficulties that we find ourselves, in the middle of the trouble, in the middle of seeing we don't have what it takes, in the middle of our fears to lift up our eyes, Holy Spirit, lift up our eyes that we might see our living God,

who in Jesus Christ is 100% all for us, ready to have mercy, ready to forgive, ready to give us grace.

I pray for those who don't know this God, God, introduce them to you, enter their life, show them your grace, do something in their life for your glory, and we will give you thanks and praise, in Jesus' name, amen.

Let's sing hymn 81, A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. Let's stand as we sing.