

# 'An Exposition of Psalm 121'

by A.W. Tozer

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of looking to God, the Creator of heaven and earth, for help and guidance, and focuses on the eternal perspective of God's care and protection.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 121:1

**Topics:** "Eternal Perspective", "God's Protection"

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## Description

A.W. Tozer expounds on Psalm 121, emphasizing that true help comes from the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth, rather than from earthly sources. He illustrates the significance of the psalm as a song of ascent sung by worshippers on their way to the temple, highlighting God's unwavering vigilance and protection over His people. Tozer contrasts the eternal nature of God, who never slumbers or sleeps, with the limitations of pagan gods, reinforcing that believers can approach God directly without intermediaries. He encourages Christians to focus on who God is rather than solely on what He does, and to remain mindful of eternity rather than becoming entangled in the temporal. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a life lived in readiness for eternity, emphasizing the importance of being spiritually prepared at all times.

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## Transcript

"An Exposition of Psalm 121"

Pastor and author Aiden Wilson Tozer

December 2, 1956

The 101st Psalm, I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills of whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper. The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil. He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.

Now the man of God says, I lift up mine eyes unto the hills. And if you have other versions, you will notice that they try to correct the King James and they put a question mark there. Of course, there are no, there are no punctuation marks in the original. And they make it read, shall I lift up mine eyes unto the hills? Why, no, certainly not. My help cometh from Jehovah. But I reject that reading with an explanation. I will lift

up mine eyes unto the hills, perfectly fits the 121st Psalm because it's a song of degrees. Now a song of degrees, is a song of ascent toward the temple. And these songs came to be written as short hymns which the worshippers sang as they marched upward.

There were 10 steps leading up to the temple, not stairsteps, but broad rises one above the other, making room for choirs and orchestras. And as the high priest moved slowly with his incense up to the temple to enter and make atonement, the choir followed behind, or choirs, followed behind singing as they went facing toward the hills and towards the temple. And naturally, they were lifting up their eyes, watching the high priest as he went into the temple. And they would sing there on those different rises, and then step up again on to a new rise and sing another anthem. And they sang these songs of ascent, or songs of degrees. And thus, the worshipers moved ever toward the temple and ever toward the high hill there where the temple stood and ever toward that holy sanctum where the Great Jehovah dwelt between the wings of the cherubim. And the high priest was on his way with blood not his own, to sprinkle it upon the holy mercy seat, and thus make atonement for the people for the year. And thus, these songs were born.

So, we need not juggle punctuation marks. We can understand easily how it was. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, not looked down at his feet, but gaze upward where the temple stood, where high the Holy Temple stands, the house of God not made with hands as we sing. Well, that one was made with hands, but it was the picture of the heavenly.

Now he says, my help cometh from Jehovah. And though he said, I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence my help cometh, he wants us to know that his help did not come from a hill or even from the temple. But his help came from the One whose dwelling place was in Zion. Toward the holy Presence they were marching, and they said, my help comes from Jehovah who made heaven and earth. And don't think this is merely a word. I noticed sometimes anthems are written. Now this happens to be something that I had said more on than I have, than I know, and I have information on. I've talked just because I felt that way. But I noticed that when some composers write an anthem, they get stuck. They're genius. They run out of gas, and so they start yelling, Jerusalem, hallelujah. And you can sing an anthem on two words, you know, hallelujah, Jerusalem. You can sing three quarters of an hour and not say any more than that.

But the Psalms were written by the Holy Ghost. They were inspired by the Spirit and He didn't waste any words. And he said that my help cometh from Jehovah which made heaven and earth. And that's not a phrase thrown in there as a filler. There is no filler in the Bible. If you publish a magazine, your article will run to within two inches of the end of the page. And rather than leave a corner white, why they put in what we call filler, a quotation usually by Andrew Murray or Spurgeon. But there is no filler in the Bible Brother, none whatsoever. The Holy Spirit has no filler. So, when he said, which made the heaven and the earth, he meant exactly that.

Now, the heathen around about them had local gods with limited jurisdiction. You will read your Old Testament and you will find how many gods there were. They named them, many of them, and they were all local gods. You had to get a passport, you know, a visa in order to get in to worship them, because they had local, there were boundaries, and you couldn't get past those boundaries, and they didn't have any jurisdiction outside their boundaries. Baal had his limitation and Astarte had her limitation or was she a he? I'm not sure. And all the gods had their limitations, but Jehovah made heaven and earth and he had no limitations. My help cometh not from a local God, but from the God that made the heavens and the earth. And if He made the heaven and the earth, hence He had sovereign universal authority and power. And these marching Jews, marching upward toward the temple behind the high priest, were thanking God

and worshiping and looking forward to help knowing that they were talking to the God who has absolute sway, and who is not limited in His jurisdiction.

Now, the Christian believer is like this, he goes past all secondary things. He goes back of all matter and all motion and life and all mind. And he goes to the God, the un-beginning One, the uncreated One, the primal source of all things that we call our Father which art in heaven. Not a law nor principle, but a Person who made the laws and the principles, and whom we call our Father which art in heaven.

Remember that the praying Christian never deals with subordinates. It's wonderful to learn that, because down the years, some people have been afraid to go straight to God. They have thrown up a series of subordinates; office boys and clerks you have to get by before he can go to God. But there are no office boys nor clerks to a true praying Christian. He never deals with subordinates. Isn't it wonderful that you, riding on a bus or washing dishes at your kitchen sink, isn't it wonderful that you can look up and say, our Father which art in heaven and address directly and without the intermediary, the Deity? The only intermediary is the man Christ Jesus, who is also God, and whom you are addressing, so that when you address the Trinity, you address God at the summit. And every praying man is having a meeting at the summit. That is, we don't work in degrees of importance upward, but go straight to the summit and talk to God our Father Himself.

Now they said, my help comes from Jehovah which made heaven and earth. And once the blood was on the mercy seat, any Jew anywhere, any place in the world, could look up and say my Father and could look up and say the God of our fathers. And we can say, God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that no Christian ever deals with subordinates nor secondary things. You can go straight to God and address God Himself. Because now the blood is on the mercy seat.

Then they consoled themselves as they stood there and sang and played their instruments, He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. Now this doesn't have too much meaning for a generation that were born in hospitals and raised on sidewalks, because you don't slip on the sidewalk as a rule. But to travelers in Palestine who made long trips and found their way on foot to the temple to worship at certain seasons, they could easily fall by stepping on a round stone and having it go out from under them. On some mountain paths, they could easily step on a rock that they thought was solid and find it was only a bit of shale, and would give away and let them go down to break a bone or kill themselves. But it says here, He will not suffer thy foot to be moved.

Now the word "suffer" here is a good word. It means permit, allow, that's all. But it does mean that, and then it means a good deal more by connotation. God will not permit thy foot to be moved. He will not allow it. And he doesn't say he will not permit, but he says, He will not suffer, because suffer is to permit with a connotation of pain. If your child, say, has to have a surgery, you don't want him to have surgery, but you're suffer him to have surgery. You don't want him to have to undergo the pain and the fright of the knife, but if he must have it, or if she must have it, then you suffer it to be done. Even as Jesus in one occasion said, suffer it to be so now, permit it with suffering. And so, he says, He will not suffer, that is, God will not endure the pain of seeing your foot slip. Now, that's what the Bible says here. He will not endure the pain of seeing your foot slip. Not only will He not endure it nor permit it, but He will not suffer. And then he says, He will not slumber nor sleep.

Now, the pagan gods, and you and I don't understand this as we should. It doesn't hit us as it should, because in America, we don't worship idols. At least we don't worship visible idols. But the pagan gods

encircled Palestine except for the Mediterranean, and then beyond they did, they encircled the Jews with their idolatry. And those pagan gods could be caught asleep. You remember that when the man Elijah was on the mountain and the Baal priests were praying and they weren't getting any answer, he got sarcastic with them and said, well, maybe he's asleep and you must wake him up. Maybe he's taken a journey and isn't home. He's out of his jurisdiction. But he says here, He will not slumber nor asleep.

Now, Jehovah's eyelids never close. I wish you could keep that in mind. And the reason, there's a reason back of all this. I said to Brother Reidhead, you know, I don't have the interest in study that I used to have, that is, I have interest in spiritual things, but not in other studies. And because I said, why should a man who's getting along in years study more? Well, he said, remember, you're learning for eternity. And that was the answer. I had no reply to that one. You're learning for eternity. And I'd like to find a reason for everything God reveals. Brother, I would, I really would. I'd like to penetrate below the surface and find a reason.

You know something? I don't believe we're as good as Christians as we ought to be until we not only accept what the Bible teaches, but until we try to discover why it teaches it, and get at the root of the thing. Now, I think I know why God never sleeps. I believe I know. Sleep is a recouping of spent energy. Sleep is necessary to recharge the batteries. And when we have worked eight hours and done some other things, necessary things, our energy is down, and then we must go to sleep in order that nature can recoup her wasted energy. But Jehovah never expends energy and therefore, he never needs to sleep.

Now, the man Jesus slept in the back of the boat because He was a man, and being a man when He walked ten miles, He had expended some energy and He had to sit down weary on the well or sleep in the boat to recoup His energies. That was the human Jesus. But the God-man and the eternal Godhead, never sleeps, because they never, that is, God never expends energy. How could God expend energy when God is the source of all the energy there is? Where would the energy go? And then if God recouped His energy, that would mean He would have to get energy from somewhere. Where would he get it from?

You say, where do I get my energy from? You got it from food, water and air. You get your energy from something you've taken into you. And that's why we have to eat all the time, to me a bothersome necessity, but we have to eat. And that's to recoup our wasted powers. But God doesn't recoup his wasted powers, because He hasn't wasted them. He doesn't recharge, because He hasn't lost anything. And the energy that God gives you to live hasn't left God. It's still in God, because God surrounds all things and holds all things.

So, there I think is the answer to why Jehovah never sleeps. And the God who sleeps or has to sleep is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He's a local god with a limited jurisdiction that's dependent upon somebody. You can catch him napping. And a lot of the stories, and they're beautiful stories without a doubt of the old Greeks. They turn up in Shakespeare and in many of the other poets and in Homer and the rest of them. The gods who tumbled off to sleep and somebody slips up while they were sleeping, and did something that they wouldn't have allowed if they'd been awake. But thank God for One who never sleeps. He slumbers not nor sleeps.

And then he says, the Lord is thy keeper. He is thy keeper and thy shade. And now it says, the Lord is thy keeper, not the Lord will keep thee, nor the Lord will give thee shade. That is true also. But notice that it is not what the Lord will do, but what the Lord is. And we are kept not so much by what God does as by what God is.

The new Christian and some people never get beyond that, the new Christian is greatly taken up with what God will do for them. Tracts and booklets and books and testimonies are given and songs written about what God does for us. And it's legitimate, I suppose, just as it's legitimate to walk around on your stubby one year old legs, if that's the best you got. But to walk around on stubby year-old legs when you're twenty-five, would be a bit incongruous, and yet Christians for twenty-five years Christians have never gotten beyond what God does for them.

But as you go on into God, brethren, what God does for you becomes less and less important, and what God is to you becomes more and more important. It's not what God does so much as what God is that matters. Jesus did certain things, and I believe along with my brethren in what we call the finished work. But I think that by always mouthing the phrase, the finished work, the finished work, I think that we can reduce salvation to a job done, a contract fulfilled. It was that but it was infinitely more than that. Jesus not only did something for us, He became something to us. He is our righteousness. He is our wisdom. He is our sanctification. He is our redemption. He did not say I will raise you from the dead. He said, I am the resurrection.

There is the difference between being the resurrection and merely using the resurrection, a vast difference I say. And in our day, in these terrible days of making the Lord your servant instead of being the Lord's servant, and always emphasizing what the Lord does for us, I tell you, you'll never grow spiritual giants in the earth with that kind of teaching. We've got to turn it around and begin to talk about what the Lord is to us, He is to me. The young wife isn't so concerned with what her husband gets for her. If she's unworthy of a decent husband, she is concerned with what he is to her. And children, if they are properly trained, will not be so concerned with what their parents get for them but be concerned with what their parents are to. So, the Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy shade. And the Lord will preserve thy going out and thy coming in now that He's guard and shield and secure and that's what the word preserved means.

Now this idiom, thy going out and thy coming in is quite common in Hebrew. And it's quite common to us in our language too. The going out and the coming in. After all, you think about it a little, that's about all you do. You go out and come in. You go out in the morning and come in at night. The next morning you go out and the next night you come in. And our going out and our coming in, that's just about it. That about covers it. And the Scripture says here, with a sweeping it in, it takes all of life in. The Lord will guard thy going out and shield thy coming in, and secure thy going out and coming in. Now what more do you want? He not only is thy keeper and thy shade, but He will guard, shield, and secure because He is all these things, Thy going out and they're coming in.

Then he ends, from this time forth, even forever more. Did you notice God never stops with time? Everything people do, some people wonder why I do not take to politics more and preach politics from the pulpit. Well, there are several reasons. One is, I have no commission from God Almighty to preach politics. And the other is that politics deals with time and God has sent me to deal with something else- eternity.

And I never like a sermon or never like to have anybody come to me and say Brother Tozer, that was a timely sermon. I'm not dealing with timely things. I'm dealing with timeless things. And a Christian is not concerned so much with time. He's concerned with eternity. From this time forth, even forevermore. Ultimately, only forevermore will matter. Ultimately, I say only forevermore will matter. Time will not matter.

Four years, I thought that the time of the election, when everybody was pushing and two men were seesawing to get a job. But Cal Coolidge had the answer to that long ago. He was walking somewhere

with a friend and he saw the White House and the gentleman reminded Mr. Coolidge, who was then President, that it must be a wonderful privilege to live in the White House and be President. Well, he says, it has its disadvantages. And they said, what are they? Well, he said, there's no chance for advancement. And second, he said, you can't keep your lease. You got to get out of there.

Now, here we were fighting over who got in there. But how long will they stay in? Four years more and the law says I can go to your farm and settle down and raise Angus cattle. I don't want anymore. And if Stevenson had been elected. At the best, eight years and we'd said, go back to your farm and raise Berkshire hogs, we don't need you anymore. So, no matter who gets in or how, or by a landslide, it's all got time on it. And that's why I can't get enthusiastic about anything that has time on it either.

Even from this time forth and forevermore. There you have it. God Almighty is forevermore and He made you forevermore. And all that really matters is forevermore. From this time forth and forevermore. I want to warn you beware of the treacheries of time. Time will get you down. I know that I might as well be singing bass in an angelic choir as to preach this to some of you young people. Because old Mother Nature is making you think you're going to live forever, you sixteen-year-olds and seventeen-year-olds. You know it hasn't been more than two weeks ago that I was seventeen. It seems like it, just a little while ago. If my father we're living now he'd, or my mother we're living now, she'd be over a hundred. And there we have it. I believe I figured it out right. Time goes by and you think you've got all the time in the world young fellow. You have a pitifully short time. And if you get bogged down in time and all tangled up in the temporal, woe be to you. And don't let anybody get your tangled up in the temporal or in time.

Here's a story you've heard before, but they say that it is true. Some years ago, some sheep perished and were thrown into the Niagara River just above falls at wintertime. And the water wasn't frozen yet, and it was freezing, but the water was still flowing. And they said that the bodies of these sheep were plunging over the falls. And somebody said he saw some eagles. And those eagles were swooping down, tearing at the flesh of the sheep. And then just before the sheep went over the falls, the carcass went over the falls, scream and fly away and dip and turn and go back and get the next sheep and pull out a hunk of meat and hold it in his beak and then just before it plunged over the falls, leap up again. Something was happening the eagles didn't know.

And a man said, I saw this thing. I saw an eagle floating and with her great talons deep into the wet wool of the sheep and unknown to her, the freezing was going on. And just when the race started swift and the sheep carcass began to dip, she screamed and spread her wings, but she was frozen into the wool. And so with a scream she plunged over into the rapids and rocks beneath and it was destroyed. So, we fool with time. And we get tangled up in time and we say, well, we'll get away from that, but slowly we freeze in. And finally, one last scream, and we find that time has ruined us.

Every great thing goes on into eternity Brethren, every great thing. Somebody made fun of a hymn one time in my presence, of a sermon, and said, why these sermons that always end in heaven, I don't like them. I think they're the best kind myself because they're the most Scriptural and in keeping with all Christian tradition.

Look at their great hymns, Rock of Ages, a great hymn. Do you know where it ends? When I rise to worlds unknown and behold Thee on Thy throne. That's the last verse. Look at Jesus Lover of my Soul. spring Thou up within my heart, rise to all eternity. Love Divine all Loves Excelling. The last verse, stanza says, till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before Thee lost in wonder, love and praise. Guide

me O Thou Great Jehovah, prays in the last stanza, land me safe on Canaan's side. My Faith Looks up to Thee, the last stanza says, oh, bear me safe above a ransom soul. And My Hope is Built on Nothing Less says, when He shall come with trumpets sound, oh, may I then in him be found. And Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound the last stanza is, when we've been there 10,000 years bright shining as the sun, we'll have no less days to sing His praise than when we first begun. So, the great hymns almost invariably end in heaven, where they ought to end, where a Christian ought to end.

And then look at the 23rd Psalm. Did you ever read it? It starts out that about the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, and it goes on to say, and I shall dwell in, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. So, the 23rd Psalm ends in heaven, and anybody that criticizes a sermon that sweeps on down the ages and ends in heaven has to criticize the Bible itself. For it begins, In the beginning, God created the heavens, and the earth and ends, and I saw a new Heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away and there was no more sea. And I John saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. So the Bible that began with the creation, ends with the new creation and the holy city and the land.

So, my brethren, don't allow yourself to get involved with anything that's got the taint of time on it. You will have to handle some things that have time on them without a doubt. You'll have to handle some things. Your job, your work, your house, your car, your body, your family, they've got time on them, but never let them get a hook in you that you can't get free from. Every child of God should be like a fireman. While he's sleeping, his ear is geared to the sound of the alarm, whatever it is in the fire houses and he's ready by just putting on one garment and sliding down the pole. He's out onto the car and gone. He isn't twenty seconds away from slumber until he's on his way. Every child of God should be like that. You ought to be fixed up so in ten seconds even be ready for heaven. It doesn't have to wait.

Some of you have to cram like a lazy high school student that's forgotten your homework and your exams are coming up and you have to cram and sit up and cram into the night hours. Maybe you won't have any night hours to do your cramming Bud. Maybe you'll go suddenly, the alarm will sound and you'll be gone. And maybe on a little page in the Tribune it'll say, such and such died at his home last night of a heart attack. He was forty-seven years old. He was fifty-two years old. He didn't have any time to cry. He didn't have any time to make up.

So, the child of God should use time very loosely. And as they say around the camp meetings, wear time as a loose garment. Never button up your garment. Always have it ready to loose and in a second and throwback the garment of mortality, the robe of temporal things. Leave them loose so they can be thrown away, and you can rise to worlds unknown and behold Him on His throne and say, Rock of Ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee.

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