

The beginning of a new year always brings a lot of questions. What will this next year be like? Will it be better than last year? Will it be worse? What things are going to change? What things are going to stay the same? For that reason, the coming of a new year can be very exciting. At the same time, many people use the new year as a reason to make changes for the better. New year, new me! Even if they don't keep those resolutions for very long, there is still that impulse to do something new. The possibilities seem endless. What will 2024 bring?

However, dealing with so many questions can leave us feeling uneasy. Questions, especially a lot of them, have a way of making us focus on the negative side of things. What will this next year bring? Will it be worse than it was before? What terrible disaster will happen? What new evil will come up? Will things be crazier than they were before? How can we celebrate the coming of a new year when it seems like nothing has changed? And it certainly doesn't help when we hear about all kinds of bad things on the news, even this early in the year. A week into the new year and we have already heard stories of the earthquake in Japan, the continued wars around the world, even the beginning of an election year and all of the troubles that go with that. Even if a new year is exciting, it often seems to just make us more anxious than before. Where can we turn to find help in the midst of our troubles? How can we face 2024 with confidence rather than with fear?

Psalm 121, our Old Testament reading, asks a similar question. Verse 1 says: "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?" The person who asked this question faced just as many troubles as we do, because there has always been uncertainty when facing the future. Perhaps he was worried about the coming harvest. Would it be good this year? Would he be able to support their family without too much trouble? How easy it is to be worried when your very life depends on that harvest! Perhaps he was worried about a possible invasion. Would

enemies come to destroy everything he had worked so hard to build? Would they come to carry away everything that he held so dear? How easy it is to be worried when the possibility of losing everything is always lurking in the background! So he asks a simple question: “From where does my help come?” Where can I find help in the face of all of these troubles?

He knows that the help he needs is not going to come from anywhere in this world. This is why he looks to the hills. Hills in the Old Testament were often associated with gods, especially among the nations surrounding Israel. This is why God carefully commands His people to not do the same thing as those nations in Deuteronomy chapter 12, where He says: “You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree.” Israel was not supposed to try to worship God in that way, and they were especially not supposed to worship other gods in that way either. However, Israel often did not listen. They also built many high places and altars on the tops of hills to serve these other gods. But this shows how these hills were connected to gods. Maybe it is best to think of it as being closer to heaven the higher up you go, so a hill is the closest you can get. I know it sounds silly to us, since we know that we can go to God anywhere, no matter where we are. But the point is still there. Help is not going to be found here on earth. So which hill should I turn to? From which god does my help come? Who will deliver me from all of my troubles?

The answer is clear. There is only one who will help, only one who will deliver us from the day of trouble. Verse 2 of the Psalm says: “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” Who better to turn to for help than the one who made all things? Do we not see the power of God in creation? Do we not recognize His strength when we look at the stars at night, realizing that He has set every one of them in their place? Do we not see His wisdom as

season flows into season, so that the earth brings forth its fruits? Do we not see His care and concern for His creation with every rainstorm that passes through, watering the earth and giving us a harvest each and every year? Why turn to anything else, then, Christians, knowing that this same God is the one who has promised to help us? He is our strength and our shield, a very present help in trouble. Who better to turn to for help than to the Lord, who made heaven and earth?

But God's help is not just something that is there only when we need it. God is not just waiting around, wondering if we need His help today. God actively cares for those who trust in Him. He watches over them and protects them from every danger. We can see this in the rest of the psalm, especially by focusing on one word: the word "keep." This word appears six times in the Psalm: "He who keeps you will not slumber," "He who keeps Israel," "the Lord is your keeper," and so forth. This word is so important that it appears in the very middle of the psalm too. If you count up the lines of the psalm, there are seventeen in all. The one in the very middle, with an equal number of lines on either side, is the first part of verse 5: "The Lord is your keeper." And that word "keeper" in Hebrew is actually the middle word of the Psalm too. There are an equal number of syllables on either side of it. That is not an accident. Many times in the Bible, the most important thing comes in the middle of a passage. The middle is often the focal point, the place where we see the main thought. The same is also true here. "The Lord is your keeper," which is right in the middle, is the whole point of this psalm.

And that word "keep" in Hebrew includes so much more than just providing help. The word could also be translated as "guard" or "watch over." The word is used in Genesis chapter 2, where it describes Adam's work in the garden: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." Adam was not put there just to provide help whenever it

was needed, but rather to tend to the garden and to work it. He actively cared for the plants and trees of the garden and watched over them to help them grow. The same is true of God, because He cares for His people and tends to them in their every need.

We see another example in 1 Kings chapter 14, where it says: “King Rehoboam made in [the place of the shields of gold] shields of bronze, and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king’s house.” These guards kept watch over the door, making sure that no enemy would try to attack the king and that all who entered were supposed to be there. A watchman who keeps a door or who keeps watch over a city cannot simply sit around and do nothing. He has to always be looking, always be alert, so that he is not caught by surprise. The same is also true for the Lord, Christians. God does not wait around, hoping to provide help when it is needed. God watches over His people. God keeps them safe from every danger. God neither slumbers nor sleeps. He will not be caught off guard, surprised by whatever is happening in the world. God keeps a sleepless watch over you, even when you are sleeping. He will not allow the sun to strike you by day nor the moon by night. As the last verse of this psalm puts it: “The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.” Every part of your life is under His care and concern. And if God cares for you that much, Christians, why should we ever be anxious about what is to come?

Jesus puts it best when He shows us how our heavenly Father cares for us in Matthew 6. Look at the birds, He says. They do nothing to provide for themselves and yet they never go hungry, because God provides for them. If God cares for them in this way, how much more will He care for you? Look at the flowers, He says. God gives them such beauty, even though they last for such a short time. If God cares for them in this way, how much more will He care for you? You mean so much more to Him than birds and flowers. Therefore, do not be anxious, “but

seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Turn to the Lord above all things, and there will be no reason to be worried. God will provide for you through all things, because He cares so much for you.

And do you not see that care above all in Jesus Christ, His Son? God’s care and concern for you is so great that He gave His only-begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have eternal life. As Paul puts it in Romans chapter 8: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” If God was willing to give you Jesus, will He stop caring for you now? Will He just cast you off, as if it’s too hard to provide for you anymore? Never. God will continue to care for you and watch over you, even as He brings you to Himself in heaven. God’s love and mercy never come to an end. They are endless while we are here on earth. They will be endless in the glory and the joy of paradise. God truly is our help in every trouble, the one that we can look to for help in the midst of every danger.

Therefore, Christians, let us lift up our eyes to the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Let us turn to the one who will keep us safe from every danger. Let us turn to the one who is the shade on our right hand, the one who will not let our foot be moved. Let us turn to our keeper and find in Him the help that we need. And then, safe in the hands of the Lord, let us face whatever 2024 may bring, knowing that God will be with us through it all.

Let us pray.

O Lord our Keeper, who watches over those who trust in You, keep us safe from every danger and bless us in this coming new year, so that we may always lift up our eyes toward You and know that You will always help us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.