

Psalm 121
March 1, 2026

Help

More or less, I have lived my life in the I-70 corridor, which stretches straight across America's heartland. I have referred to the same space as a giant cornfield, that runs from the Appalachian Mountains in the east to the Rockies in the west.

For most of us, it is simply the great plains, from Canada in the north to the lower Mississippi down south. There are hilly places in between the mountain ranges, but for the most part it is pretty mild in terms of its terrain, sometimes simply flat. Yet the vastness of it has a kind of majesty.

Growing up near the confluence of the great rivers, also known as Mark Twain territory, the illustration of strength and might was the rivers themselves, the Missouri, the Illinois, and the Mighty Mississippi, best described in the stories and novels of Twain, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *Life on the Mississippi*. It just keeps rolling on.

Mountains have always held a lure because of their unique majesty. They are big and solid, but I have never lived close enough to them to see them as much as have some of you.

The terrain in the land of biblical origins is also mountainous. The tallest peak is in the northern part of Israel. It is called Mt. Hermon and stands more than 9,000 feet above sea level, although much of the land

to its south is below sea level, making it seem higher than it is.

The water runs off those hills and gathers into the lakes below, the one called Galilee, which itself is about 700 feet below the sea level, and then on down the River Jordan into the Dead Sea, where as in Utah and Nevada, it has nowhere to go, thus evaporating and leaving behind salt.

The place where the city of Jerusalem sits is in the southern hill country and is known for its rugged and bare wilderness look. The Hebrew poets of antiquity lived in the vicinity of those hills, and saw them as an inspiration as they learned to understand the nature and power of God, and their place in the world. "I lift mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help?" Psalm 121:1

To look to the mountains as a source of stability and strength is as easy for a poet or who lived near them as it was for Samuel Clemens to look to the Great River. One may also look to the skies, I suppose, or to the oceans if one is nearby.

In all these cases, it is not so much an answer that is raised as it is a question. What is the nature of our weakness, our need? We are inspired by the mightiest features of created life, because they speak to us of strength and stability and permanence. But inwardly we know they are not enough.

What is the source of help? “. . . from whence cometh my help? is the King James Version way of asking it. In more contemporary language it comes out, “where does my help come from?”

And the answer? “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” It does not come from the mountains or the rivers or the oceans, or any of the people, but from their creator. Immediately we notice that the magnificence around us is intermediate; that is, it has a cause and its cause is a more appropriate source of help than the things themselves.

We are drawn into a contemplation of the meaning of life, sometimes called ultimate questions, general questions about where we have come from, where we are going? What are the obstacles that keep us from living a full life? We are confronted by the realities of death, and sin, emptiness, doubt and despair.

There are several questions regarding big issues faced in our lifetimes; what kind of political organization works best, what can be done to alleviate poverty? How should the economic needs of all the world's people be met? Is it possible to at least limit the threat of war? What can be done about disease and pollution? Questions like that.

And the more personal questions; what vocation to pursue, whether to marry and have children, where to live, who to vote for, who to befriend; whether to own or rent, how to spend discretionary income, what kind

of pet, and even some seemingly surface level things regarding fashion and hobbies and vacations?

We have large disagreements about some of these things and sometimes act as though *they* are the most important questions, but they pale before the questions about God, about mortality and sin, about the meaning of our lives.

It is worth repeating that we did not decide to be born into this world, that we had no control over the condition of the world, or the circumstances of our birth, its time and place, nor a choice over those with whom we share the journey. In the grand scheme of things we share only a small part of the world's life, and can control very little of it.

It is appointed that we all will die, and for all the effort and money spent to avoid it, we are yet unable to prevent it. This is the question of mortality. It is a source of great anxiety.

Beyond this concern there is the universal experience of the moral demand; that there is a distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, the sacred and the profane. We are called to participate in the life of the good, the right, and the holy.

We face the added reality that we often fail. The theological word for this failure is Sin, which is both universal and inescapable. Even within these parameters, it is a common desire among human beings to attain a fullness of life that is impossible to

achieve without God's help. There is no aspect of earthly life or success, either associated with family or heritage, or with work or vocation that can guarantee such a fullness.

Of all people, those of faith in Jesus Christ could be most grounded concerning these reality, *least anxious because we are immersed in the life of God*. Because we trust in God's mercy, revealed in Christ Jesus, a greater hope is at hand, to act better and to accept mercy for ourselves and extend it to others, restraining judgement; to live free of guilt and *its* accompanying anxiety. These are the great religious and theological questions of our lives. We do better when we tend to them.

Look for inspiration to the mountains and to the skies that God has made; consider the majesty of the oceans and rivers, gaze at night into the vast reaches of interstellar space, even be willing to examine the achievements of humanity from time to time, if for no other reason to put them in their place beneath the sovereignty of God, and give thanks to God for them.

Humbly and with grace and dignity accept the answer that lies at the foundation of all our asking, that our help is from the Lord, who came to humanity as a part of the world, and to redeem it.

We are in Lent, which is a time for quiet reflection about these things. It is also Communion Sunday, a time to think about the primary demonstration of God's love, which is the gift of Jesus, and the sacrifice

made on our behalf. And to pray a prayer - best expressed in another psalm, the 30th, which I leave with you now as our closing prayer;

I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast drawn me up,
and hast not let my foes rejoice over me.
2 O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help,
and thou hast healed me.
3 O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. 4 Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints,
and give thanks to his holy name.
5 For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.
6 As for me, I said in my prosperity,
"I shall never be moved."
7 By thy favor, O Lord,
thou hadst established me as a strong mountain;
thou didst hide thy face,
I was dismayed.
8 To thee, O Lord, I cried;
and to the Lord I made supplication:
9 "What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the Pit?
Will the dust praise thee?
Will it tell of thy faithfulness?
10 Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me!
O Lord, be thou my helper!"
11 Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing;
thou hast loosed my sackcloth
and girded me with gladness,
12 that my soul may praise thee and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to thee for ever.

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