

Biblical Reflection 1:
“Look Up for Hope”
July 6th, 2022



I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

The LORD will not let your foot be moved...

The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

From *Psalms 21*

These are amazing words of inspiration and hope, but are they true? What does such faith mean for those who are traumatized and brutalized by others, such as the people of Myanmar, where thousands of people have had to flee for their lives into the jungle? How does the psalmist's confidence apply to those whose homes have been burned to the ground? What sense do these assurances make to the families of those who have been beaten, tortured, or killed?

For years I struggled with such broad promises of the LORD's protection and help in the face of so much exploitation and abuse of the vulnerable around the world. To trust in God's deliverance sometimes seems ridiculous when so many suffer and die at the hands of evil doers. I've heard many testimonies of people who have experienced God's miraculous help, yet other people of faith are never rescued by God.

At the same time, in spite of gut-wrenching experiences and unanswered questions, my faith in God has been indispensable and life-giving to me. God's unconditional love, acceptance, and forgiveness have provided a powerful source of self-acceptance and daily hope. Jesus Christ's resurrection gives me hope that someday there will be justice, if not in this life then in the next. God's presence in my life motivates me to become the kind of man God wants me to be for my family and for my community. My experience of God's love and grace fills me with more compassion and mercy for those who are weak and vulnerable, people who need to experience the light of Jesus Christ and the love of God through a fellow human being. Even though I can't fully understand why God allows so many to suffer so horribly, I am deeply grateful for all that God has done in my life and in the lives of so many other people who have similarly reached out to God and put their faith in Jesus.

So how should we interpret assurances of God's help and deliverance like we find in Psalm 121? Was every Israelite saved from evil, as the Psalmist declared? Certainly not. But the Hebrew writer was not a fool. He knew that even those with great faith in the LORD sometimes fall victim to evil and injustice. Everyone suffers in some way, and some day, each of us will die, no matter how many times we might be saved from a premature demise.

Yet, the psalmist is not offering words that are out of touch with reality, but ones that offer hope in the midst of our suffering. He speaks in hyperbole and metaphor to inspire the people to lift their eyes from focusing on their troubles so that they might see what God sees and reach out for what only God can provide. Hope and strength do not come from fear or faithlessness. We will not be stronger or better by allowing ourselves to be swallowed up by cynicism, hatred, or vengefulness. If we focus on evil, we will be consumed by it. If we focus on God, we will find the perspective and strength we need to face and overcome it.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, lift your eyes to the beauty and majesty of creation and to your Creator. Remember that "the LORD who made heaven and earth" is good and has done amazing things in nature and for people of faith from the beginning of time. Your Creator loves you and is an ever-present help in your times of trials and suffering.

I cannot prove to you that God cares, and I cannot make sense of the gross disparities in the world and all the senseless violence and heart-breaking tragedies. Yet, if you let go of questions about the prevalence of evil that no one can answer, and if you drop your resistance to that inner voice that is calling you to put your faith in your Creator and in Jesus Christ, you will find relief, acceptance, forgiveness, and hope as never before. This kind of hope cannot be extinguished even in death. And the love that comes from God is more valuable, enduring, and powerful than anything else in all creation, for it is not based on your own accomplishment or worthiness, but on the character and power of God.

He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:32-39, NRSV