

# “Our Help”

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**Series:** *Psalms*

**Bible Text:** Psalm 124

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## **Christ Presbyterian Church**

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If you have a Bible, you can be making your way to Psalm 124 this morning. If you don't have a Bible on you, it's printed in your worship guide. You can follow along there. We are looking at some psalms over the course of the summer, and I was thinking this week, we're not really a culture that has songs that we sing while walking. Maybe you do in your family. I don't know. But if we do, they're probably children's songs. Maybe we have riding songs when our kids are little, when you're on a road trip. Probably the military has the closest thing to songs sung while walking or running. But there's a section of the Psalms called the Psalms of Ascent, and the scholars believe that they were the specific songs that the people of God sang together as they traveled in groups going up the mountain to Jerusalem, which is everywhere you're at. You're going up the mountain. They would go at least three times a year for feast days, food and worship. These are the songs that they would sing together as they're on their way to the whole gathering of the people of God in the city of Jerusalem for food and worship, like Psalm 124. Let's read it. Remember, this is God's word.

*If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, let Israel now say, if it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us up alive when their anger was kindled against us. Then the flood would have swept us away. The torrent would have gone over us. Then over us would have gone the raging waters. Blessed be the Lord who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.*

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Would you pray with me?

*Lord, I pray that as we look at your word, you would give me the help of God the Spirit to be able to preach truthfully and clearly and that there would be power in your word. I pray for each person in this room that you would give them the help of God the Spirit to be able to hear your word and let all of us, oh Lord, not only hear from you, but have our affections inclined towards you and to have our wills changed so that we become people who learn to trust you and to look*

*to you for help and to rely on you for all things. Do for us all the things that we can't do for ourselves. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.*

Popular music always reflects the values of the people. The themes and the lyrics tell us what people care about during a particular moment in history, so the more they reflect the things that a culture likes, the more popular they tend to be, which is kind of how it works. It's actually pretty unfortunate for us, to be honest. Apparently, people in our day mostly value and care about things that aren't great to mention in polite company. The so-called country music genre shows us that the values of the people are recreational drug use and extramarital liaisons down by the river, which, you know, the current number one actually is about airing relationship troubles publicly and spitefully. We don't live in an era when there's a ton that's being written about valor or virtue or honor or beauty or goodness, at least not popularly. It hasn't always been that way. There are other times in history, and, you know, maybe it'll swing back that way some other time, but other times in history, the popular songs speak of great things, great deeds that have been done. That's particularly true during war times or right after war times. One of the only songs that Americans actually still sing together is the national anthem, which is a war song, literally recounting seeing the flag still on Fort McHenry after battle indicating victory. We still sing that. Especially if a culture has gone through something that could have destroyed them, but they made it. They might find themselves singing about it, writing songs about it.

Our passage this morning is, it's a psalm of remembrance, but not really a psalm of military strength or human valor. It's a song of remembrance that shines a light on some ultimate things. It helps us understand that we live in a world where destruction constantly lurks, and the Lord is our help. So it's a triumphal remembrance song about what the Lord does to help us in all of the various and sundry destructions that come our way. So we're going to talk about lurking destruction and how the Lord helps so that we might find ourselves able to sing about it. In the world of sermon points, if you made a list of weird ones or strange ones that we've had here, lurking destruction has to be on the list somewhere. So let's talk about

lurking destruction.

We don't actually know exactly what David had in mind when he wrote this psalm. It's clear that he's reflecting on a time when God delivered his people in the past. In David's time, it could have been any number of tangles with the Philistines. He was a man of war, he knew warfare well. Most likely, this is a very general psalm, he's thinking about some combination of moments in the history of God's people. In every situation where there's been conflict, look at verse 2, *people rose up against us*, us meaning those who belong to God. Consider the list of the enemies of God's people over time? Canaanites, Egyptians, Amalekites, Edomites, Moabites, Midianites, Amorites, Philistines, we haven't even really started yet. It just keeps on going. People rise up against the people of God. It's always been that way. Verse 3 tells us that they're angry. They're usually angry and so they invade, they're angry and they attack, they're angry and they carry out raids. In fact, if you read through the entirety of Old Testament narrative history, what you find are precious few periods of time when there's peace.

War is the rule, peace is the exception. There's always an angry group that wants to destroy the people of God.

Verse 6, he describes them, *bless be the Lord who's not given us as prey to their teeth. We've escaped like a bird from the snare of fowlers.* A fowler is a bird hunter, not with a shotgun like we might have in our day, but they're trying to trap and ensnare birds. The animal that has teeth that wants to have God's people as prey is a predator. So here's what we need to understand.

Those who oppose and try to destroy the people of God are not passive. They're incredibly active. They are hunting God's people with ill intent.

I honestly don't know that we believe that in our day. In our live and let live culture, our assumption is the only reason anybody would ever come after me is if I violated them or offended them somehow first. And sometimes that happens. Scripture tells you that if you suffer for doing evil, implied, if you suffer for being an idiot, don't call that Christian persecution. It's not. Sometimes you suffer because you're an idiot or because you do something wrong. But scripture also gives us this category that sometimes people attack you for no clear reason except the fact that you align yourself with the living God and are trying to be faithful to him. And it's also a tandem attack. It is people, but then there's the enemy who co-ops people for his own nefarious purposes. You see, at some point every Christian has to grapple with what Peter says in one of his letters, that you have an adversary that is not waiting for you to offend him so that he can come after you, but no, he is a roaring lion prowling, seeking someone to devour.

Brothers and sisters, if you belong to God in this world, you will be hunted by the enemy and by angry people because you belong to God and want to be faithful to him.

Now, to make matters worse, it's not just that there are people who might try to come and get us and snare us. It's that we're susceptible to being snared. See, the problem isn't always just out there. We have hearts that are tempted. We get seduced. We are able to be captured. That's an implication in verses 6 and 7 that we could become prey in a predator's teeth because we're not always very strong, because we don't always resist. We could be snared like a bird because we fall for traps. See, there are actual enemies that want to hunt the people who belong to God, and then there are the moments when I am my own worst enemy. I see the shiny thing, and I go to try to get the shiny thing, and when I reach out my hand, I'm caught.

There are moments when we are tempted and we fall.

Israel was attacked without cause, and sometimes they were foolish and sinful and fell prey to their own stupidity. And God is gracious, there's no doubt, but it's also a cause and effect world, and if you go for something that is a trap, don't be surprised when you are, in fact, trapped. This is life in a fallen world with fallen enemies and our own remaining corruption, but then there is a worse destruction apart from God's grace. Look at verses 3 and 4. So David says, people rise up against us, and then he says, and they might, had God not intervened, *they would have swallowed us up alive.* Their destruction could have been like a flood sweeping us away, like a

torrent of water going over our head. Now, is that just idiom? Is that just hyperbolic language to communicate a point? Or has the earth ever actually swallowed someone up? In fact, it has. Read in the book of Numbers when a man named Korah, who was one of the people of God, rebelled against Moses, didn't like his leadership, said that the Lord was wrong to appoint him. Opposition from inside the people of God, an angry person leading an angry mob in rebellion, seeking to usurp God and Moses, and the Lord told Moses and Aaron, tell Israel to get away from their tent. And then he caused the earth to open up and swallow them alive.

So people oppose the people of God, yes, but what's more terrifying, a man who's leading a rebellion, or a God who causes the earth to open up and swallow his enemies? You tell me. What's more terrifying, wicked people on the face of the earth during the time of Noah, or a God who has the ability to judge the wicked by sending a flood? David knows. There is danger in the world. He's surrounded by Philistines, and it's bad. But there's a God who judges Philistines and Israelites, and he's to be feared above all.

The point in highlighting these dangers, it will surprise you, isn't to stir up fear, though it sounds like that's what we're doing. We're not the Weather Channel, right? We're not trying to invent terminology designed to terrify. I'm not here to talk to you about bomb cyclones, and atmospheric rivers, and microbursts. It's not what we're after. What David is describing is our reality, whether we notice it or not, and whether we feel it or not. He's trying to help us understand, these are the things that God's people face, lurking dangers every day. Just as much as they did when David wrote this, you and I have enemies, we're susceptible to trouble, and there's a God who judges all, and is to be feared above all. Sometimes we can see that, and sometimes we can't, which is why it's really interesting that this psalm is written from the perspective of somebody who's gotten through it and is able to look back. Did you notice that? It's a retrospect. Had God not been on our side, this is what would have happened.

You have times like that when you can't see something until you get through it, and past it a little ways. What appeared to be a confusing conflict in the moment that was just hazy, and you couldn't figure out what was going on, you get through it, and you realize, that person hated me and was trying to destroy me. Or you have what appeared to be just a relational conflict between humans, and you get past it, and at some point, you look back and realize, that was actually a spiritual conflict. It was a spiritual battle, not just a human conflict. Something that you thought was just a period of personal difficulty, you look back, and you realize, that was difficult because I was ensnared by something. Something had its hooks in me, and I couldn't move. The point in being able to look back is to be able to rejoice in the God who delivers, but to notice the dangers and to realize that, oh, those things are still happening. They're still here.

There's a reason that John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was the most popular book in America for many, many years, second only to the Bible. But one of the reasons is because he so vividly, accurately describes the dangers that people face as they walk through this life to the next, and he uses terms that are memorable. It's an allegory, so it's by design. But you don't have to wonder what he's talking about when he says, avoid the vanity fair. When I was a kid and I saw the slew of despond, I could not possibly tell you what a slew of despond was, but I could tell

you that I don't want to find myself in it, to be avoided at all costs. I was reading an article about Pilgrim's Progress that began this way, malevolent giants, abusive captors, and danger on the road to heaven don't project a safe for the whole family vibe. And that's pretty true, which is probably why it stood the test of time. It's probably why children like it, too. It gives us the categories of danger in our culture that is absolutely, unequivocally bent on creating something that is safe and detached and risk-free.

How can we possibly expect our children to weather a spiritual attack when they have no idea that spiritual attacks are to be expected?

Dads, it is Father's Day, and one of your and my jobs is to help our children understand what they should expect. Help them understand dangers that are most certainly on the way. Surely our obsession with safety at all costs is one of the reasons why, when our kids leave our house and face a little bit of opposition, they fall absolutely apart, because they are completely unprepared for it.

God's Word calls us to clear-eyed reality, not so that we can cower in a corner, but so that we can actually see the dangers and know what to do.

Are you sober to the realities that you should expect in this life? Do you realize that God did not promise you a path that does not have predators with teeth? And he didn't promise you a path that has no snares. And he didn't promise a path where there won't be people who pose as the people of God and even invoke his name to do their terrible deeds. He didn't promise us a world where those things don't happen. Rather, he says, get your eyes open and see it.

You know, the existence of the church after 2,000 years of persecution and internal fighting and heresy and capitulation and all manner of ridiculousness is a miracle. How are we still here when we have 2,000 years of kind of botching it? The answer is in the second point. There is a God who gives help. Otherwise, we have no hope. But thankfully, there's a God who gives help.

How does he help?

Let's look at that. David's looking back and saying, they would have been destroyed, swallowed, alive, flooded, had not the Lord been on their side. So what does it mean for the Lord to be on their side, our side? It's a statement of favor. It actually translates literally to if not for the Lord who was for us. And that phrase really has to be heard in the context of the covenant, meaning why is God for his people? He said he would be. That's why.

Why is God for us, not against us? Because he promised.

And he started way back in the beginning. Right after Adam and Eve disobeyed, he came to them and he promised he would send someone to undo the mess. He promised. And then throughout history, he promised Noah that he wouldn't flood the earth in its entirety again. And he promised Abraham that he would bless him and make him great and give him a family and bless the

nations of the earth through him and give him land and all of these great promises. And he promised. He promised David he would have somebody from his offspring that would reign over his people forever. He promised a new covenant where sinners get new hearts. He promised.

What that means is that even when God sent his own people into exile, even when he disciplined them for his rebellion, he did those things without ever ceasing to be eternally and ultimately for them. When we realize that the Lord is on your side, it's a reminder of his promises to be for us, not against us. The New Testament word for that kind of favor is the word grace. There's a reason Christians understand after the fall into sin, all of God's promises to work out our salvation, redemption, it's called the outworking of the covenant, the promise of grace, favor. And that's why he's our protector. Verse six, David blesses the Lord because he hasn't given us as prey to the teeth of the enemies. That's protection language.

How many enemies and destructions and traps could you have fallen into, but God protected you from them. Most of them we will never know.

He knows your enemies better than you do. He knows your weaknesses better than you do. He knows where the snares are laid, even when you can't see them. And very, very often he protects us from the sin that would destroy us, from the decision that would send us into oblivion, from the enemy that would devour us. We can look back sometimes and see the hand of God's protection in our lives. And when we do, we bless his name and give him thanks, especially when it was worse than we thought. We do get caught in snares at times, but did you notice verse seven? *The snare is broken and we have escaped*. Who broke the snare? David didn't break the snare. I don't break the snare and neither do you. Think of it this way.

God does protect us from so much. He's gracious. And yet sometimes we do find ourselves drug through the forest in the teeth of our enemy or caught in a snare. And in the mystery of God's providence, he didn't prevent that and somehow has purposes for our good.

And I'll be the first to tell you that none of us understand the mind of God fully. We can trust ourselves to his providential care. But if you are his people and you find yourself in a snare, he is the snare breaker. He's the deliverer. And if somebody finds themselves out of a snare and free and escaped, he's the only reason it would ever happen.

What's the sin that would kill you?

I ask our officer candidates that when we train up new officers. What's the sin that would take you out? Not just out of ministry and out of being an officer. Out of your marriage and your family, out of your job, out of life itself. What's the thing for you that would get you? And is it possible that the Lord is for you to the point where even if it got you, he could break it? Do we believe that about him? He has the power to protect us. And in his providence, he actually has the power to break the snares that we fall into.

Whatever he may use to help us, however he does it. At the end in verse 8, David calls us to say *our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth*. This is an acknowledgement of his exclusivity that whatever help he sends your way, whatever protection, whatever deliverance, whatever restraining of your enemies you have in your life, ultimately it comes from the Lord who made all things. He uses the personal name for God here, Yahweh, all caps Lord in our Bibles. This is the personal name of God to be used by his people. It's the name that would remind them of his covenant, his loyal love to them, his identification with them. So it's not just that your help comes from the creator who made heaven and earth and has power. That's true.

It comes from the creator who has power who actually knows you and cares about you and knows your business and shows up and gives you the help that you need yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

David is helping us understand he was on our side and he helped us. Blessed be his name and today and for all eternity. Our help is still in his name and it's still true for us and we know more than they did in David's day. When Jesus showed up on the earth and began his ministry and is walking around, people began to call him something. What did they call him? Thomas called him my Lord and my God. Throughout the New Testament, you see these places where they quote an Old Testament passage that references Yahweh, all caps LORD, and it applies it and it's talking about Jesus saying that the Lord, Yahweh, it's him, he's here. God came among us.

Really the only reason that we can say our help is in the name of the Lord, the only reason that we can believe that when we come to him, we won't be swallowed alive or flooded in his judgment has everything to do with what he came to do for us. The Lord Jesus died and was buried, in a sense swallowed.

The Lord Jesus on the cross underwent the torrent and flood of God's eternal wrath in our place.

He did that such that when you and I face trouble, snares, dangers, angry people, we can know for sure this is not God's punishment for me because there's no punishment left. Jesus already took that. It means that we can look to him for help and expect it. The gospel gives us the freedom to come to God expecting his help and to believe that he'll actually give it. It's Romans 8 applied here. *Who can be against us if God is for us?* There's nothing that will ultimately take us out. Snares, sure, he'll break them. Enemies, predators that get us in their teeth, yep, gonna have that. All manner of danger, for sure. And none of it, none of it will separate you from the love of God that is yours if you are in Christ Jesus. We come boldly to the throne of grace to find help in time of need.

Where do you go for help?

What's your first move?

When you face an angry person or a conflict or you're overwhelmed or you are ensnared, whatever your thing is, what's your first move?

I think for many of us, a first move is to make a really good to-do list. Somehow I'm gonna project manage my way out of this.

For some of you, it might be your first move is to go make yourself a good drink or a good snack or some other substance-related thing.

Maybe it's when I'm in a conflict, what I want to do is go straight to litigation. We're gonna let the attorneys figure this out.

When you're overwhelmed, maybe your first move is toward a medical professional or counselor, which can be a very good move.

Maybe your first move is toward a Google search or an AI inquiry or to devise a new plan of attack or you go to a friend or a mentor or an adult child or you just try to get so busy that maybe you can just forget about it again.

I hope you can see some of those are better helps than others, right? And in God's providence, many of those may need to be used to get you the help that you need, but what's your first move? Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. Maybe it's always been this way and maybe it's just a modern people problem, but modern people are reluctant to get spiritual when we need help. Human problems need human solutions is the assumption that we have when we wake up in the bed first thing in the morning. Modern people, we are modern people, us, our friends, church people, we might ask for help from God if we really get into a pinch, but it will be a last resort, not a first move. And then if he does help, we might not like the form of help that he brings.

What about you?

And I ask that especially if you're here and you're not yet a Christian or you're wrestling through spiritual things. If the first half of the sermon is true, how will you make it? You live in a world where there are dangers lurking everywhere and no manner of self-sufficiency is just going to get it done. You're going to just try to rely on yourself, trust the government, trust your friend group. How will you make it? You live in a hostile world that wants you to die.

Could it be that the help you've been looking for is the God who made you?

If you can begin to see that, you're also going to have to see that you have to take him on his terms. So when he tells you the problem, you'll have to listen. When he says the problem is not out there primarily, but it starts in here with sin, we're going to have to listen. When he tells you that the only hope for sin is the work of the Lord Jesus, we're going to have to trust in the work of the Lord Jesus. We'd love to talk to you more about that, if that's where you're at. He really does give freedom and break snares, but it really is only in Jesus.

For those of you who know him, what will you do to make him the first call? What are the practices that need to take place in your own life to come to him first? You may go to all those other, well, maybe not all, some of those things I mentioned earlier for help, but what will you do to make him the first call?

How can you cultivate the habit of turning to him for help first?

You know that's what we're doing when we come here on Sundays. We're here to hear from God, to sing to him, to remember his past deliverances, to trust that he's here at work among us, to remind us of things that we've forgotten, to use each other in that process as well.

If you want to be practical about getting help from the Lord, come to worship.

It's the bread and butter. There'll be times when you need a mentor or a friend. You might need someone else to remind you of what God has done for you because you've forgotten. They can help you see it because you can't see anymore. Some of you have told me about creating something as practical as a prayer journal, where you actually write down the things that you're asking God to show up and do, and then you record when you see answers. For years to come, you can look back, and you can see what he's done. It's not for everybody, but that's a great practice to remember. What will you do so that you can remember his deliverance, so that you might actually turn to him first for help?

What are the themes of the songs of God's people? I think that we can do better than what our culture does. The theme of our culture's songs right now is, how can I numb myself from the lurking destruction of the world? You and I do not have to numb ourselves. We can sing God's past deliverances, so that we might trust him with current troubles. That's how the Christian life works. Realize the lurking danger, not so you can ball up in a corner in fear, build the walls, and ride out the storm, no. So that you can have alertness and sobriety, and see things rightly, and turn to the Lord who has ultimately helped you and me in the gospel of his son.

He loves it when we come to him and ask for help. It's what it means to have his favor. You can hear it in one of the other verses of John Newton's famous hymn. He says, *through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come. 'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.* In other words, if it had not been the Lord who was on our side. Let's pray together.

*Help us, our Father, we pray that we might be sober to dangers in our world and in our lives. Help us to move towards you and ask for help. Would you provide us with all the other things that we need to make it through this life, Lord? We need people and worship, and sometimes we need a doctor and a counselor and all the different things, Lord. But help us to come to you and to believe that our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. I pray for anybody who doesn't know you as their help today that you would open their eyes and you would turn them away from the other things and even from themselves and turn them towards you. We pray these things in Christ's name, amen.*