

Lenten Devotional February 27, 2023

Scripture

Psalm 121

*1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
2 My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
3 He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
4 He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
5 The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
7 The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
8 The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.*

Devotional

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When I noticed several occurrences of the verb “keep” in this psalm, a translation of the Hebrew word *shamar*, I thought of the penalty shootout that climaxed the 2022 World Cup soccer tournament. With the kickers having a distinct advantage, the goalkeepers faced enormous pressure to prevent the ball from entering the goal. More often than not, they failed.

I struggled to imagine God that way—diving in front of evil, keeping us from danger. Sometimes deflecting it, sometimes not. Is that what “he will keep your life” means in this passage? Is a harried goalkeeper an appropriate image for God?

Perhaps Genesis 2:15 can help: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till and to keep it.” The word *shamar* occurs for the first time in Scripture in this verse. The image here is of a gardener, patiently caring for the soil, working to preserve its health and fruitfulness.

What would happen if we read Psalm 121 with that connotation in mind? We’d get an image of a God who tends us as a faithful gardener tends the soil, a God who keeps us—not diving to deflect every evil and pain, sometimes missing—but tending us despite pain, caring for us in the midst of a life where things sometimes go wrong, working faithful for our flourishing and fruitfulness.

Prayer

Gracious God, we pray that as we journey to the cross, we might understand ourselves as fruitful soil, kept by your grace, care, and love. Amen.