

# Family Service

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Okay. I've got a question for you, for the children especially, and I want you to just think about the answer. You don't need to shout out the answer. And the question is, how well did you sing? You might think, well, that's a bit rude even asking the question.

And I'm sure the grown-ups will be saying, well, you sang really, really well. I think you did sing well. But you know, there's only certain things that I can know about how you sung this morning.

And I'm thinking especially about Psalm 121, because we're going to be thinking about that. There's only certain things I can know. I can know just by looking if you know the words.

Now, I was up there and you were facing this way, so even that I couldn't know for sure. But then when we sang it again, I could watch and see if you know the words. So I could know that and say, oh, yes, you sung really well, you know the words, and you sung it well. I could also know if you knew the tune well. You were singing the tune, and I would say, yep, tick that box. You know the words.

You know the tune. I could know if you all sang together at the same time. So not some singing before and others after. And I could say, yep, you got that right. You sung really well.

[ 1 : 3 4 ]     I could also know, I think, just by looking at you, if you sang with enthusiasm and you did it with all your heart, maybe that's a bit more difficult. But I think I can have a pretty good idea just by watching or singing with you that, yes, you did that, and that's good. So for all those reasons, I could say, yes, you sung really well. But there's one thing that I don't know, or I can't know for sure just by watching. I can't know if you sung with understanding. Now, what's that about? Is that an instrument? You sing with understanding? No. You know what that means, doesn't it? It means, did you understand what you were saying? Did you understand the meaning of the words that you were singing, singing to God? Now, I'm sure that you did. I'm sure you did. But I want to help you and me and everybody to think about that and to understand really well what it is we're singing, especially this morning. We want to think about those two verses of Psalm 121. And what we're going to do is, once we've thought about it and once we've answered a few questions about that, we're going to sing it again, the first two verses. Now, Rob didn't know about this either, but there you go. So, and then we can all sing with, I hope, even greater understanding, because that's really important, not just to repeat the words because they sound nice and we enjoy doing it. That's good, but to sing with understanding.

I want to tell you about a man we read about in the Bible called Philip. Now, Philip did something very strange. It seems strange to us. He was running really fast to catch up with a chariot. And in the chariot, there was a very important man from a country called Ethiopia, which is in Africa. And this very important man had been visiting Jerusalem, and he was heading back to his own country in his chariot. And Philip ran after him. You can just picture the scene, or maybe you can't, but it's a very strange picture of this man running after the chariot. And as he ran, he could hear that the man in the chariot was reading from the Bible. He was reading from a passage in the book of Isaiah. And when Philip managed to catch up with him, I guess the man saw him and slowed down. I don't know what happened.

But Philip had a question for the man in the chariot. And his question was this, do you understand what you're reading? Now, isn't that interesting? Philip knew it was very important for the man to understand. So, that's our question. Do you understand what you're singing? We're going to change it just a wee bit. Do you understand what you're singing? Now, the way we're going to try and work that one out, or the way we're going to help ourselves understand better, is by asking three questions of the two verses that you've sung. And let me just give you a wee clue here, or a wee hint, that these three questions are very useful for any passage of the Bible. So, if you're singing another psalm, or you're reading another part of the Bible, and you're thinking, well, what does this mean? These three questions we're going to use are good to have stored away in your head to use.

That's good for the children. It's good for all of us. So, the three questions are as follows. And I want you to try and remember these three questions. In a way, the questions are even more important than the answers, because you might forget the answers, but if you've got the questions, well, you can ask them again, and hopefully come up with the right answer. So, the three questions that we're going to use to try and understand better what we've sung are these. The first question is, what do these verses tell us about God? What do we learn about God in the verses that we've sung? Okay, that's the first one.

And the second question is, what do these verses teach us about ourselves? That's interesting that we would learn something about ourselves in the Bible, something that was written so long ago, but that's the second question. And the third question is, what do these verses encourage us to do? Is there anything we need to do having sung or read these verses? Okay, so these are the three questions. Shall we try and make sure we've worked that one out? I'll start by saying the question. See if you can finish it, finish it. Okay, the first question is, what do these verses tell us about God? Okay, that's the first question. The second is, what do these verses tell us about ourselves? And then the third question is, what do these verses encourage us to do? Well done. Okay, so these are the three. Now, let's see.

[ 6 : 31 ] So, the first one, what do these verses teach us or tell us about God? Well, let's have a look. I need the, I want to just use the same words that you sung. So, let me just have a look here in the Psalm book.

Psalm 121. You know it off by heart, but I'm hopeless. I don't know it off by heart. So, let's see. Let's see. What do I find out here? What does it teach me about God? I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where am I to look for my aid? My help comes to me from the Lord by whom earth and heaven were made. Well, there's something right at the end there of verse 1. The first thing we learn about God, or one important thing we learn about God, is that He made the earth and the heavens, which is just a way of saying that He made everything. Wow. Just wow. Everything you see. Wherever you go, if you go on holiday, if you go to another country, if you go up in a plane and you're looking out and you're seeing everything, if you look up into the sky and see the stars, if you see tiny little insects, everything. God made everything. So, that's something really important about God that we learn when we sing these verses, that God made earth and heaven. What else do we learn about God? Well,

I think we learn something else. As we sing these verses, it says, my help comes to me from the Lord. So, another thing we learn about God is that He can help us. He can help us. Now, it's important when we think about God being able to help us to remember what we've just discovered, that He made everything.

So, He's very powerful, and being very powerful, He can help us in any situation. You know, I could say to you, maybe if you've got some problem or difficulty, I could say, well, I'd like to help you.

And I might mean it, or I might not mean it, but even if I did mean it, I might not be able to help you, even if I wanted to. But what we learn in this psalm is not only is God willing to help us, but because He's so powerful, He can help us. So, that's another thing we learn. We learn that He made everything. We learn that He can help us. And the other thing we learn, because of what the psalmist who wrote the psalm experienced himself and shares with us, is that He's willing to help us.

[ 8 : 58 ] The psalmist says, and you've sung it, he says that the Lord had already helped him, and we can be sure that He's willing to help us also. The second verse, you've also sung, tells us that He will not let your foot slide. That may seem a funny thing to say about God, that He won't let your foot slide. Now, the reason why that would have meant a lot to the people who first sung the psalm is that if they were walking or going on a long journey, something that we tend not to do, we jump in a car or a train or a plane, but then people tended to walk. And if they went on a long journey, and if something happened, if they slipped and fell and hurt themselves, maybe they broke their leg, that could be death. They couldn't phone on their mobile. They couldn't get help easily.

So falling down or slipping or sliding on a long journey was really dangerous. And so I think when the psalmist writes this, he's really saying, you know, even in the most dangerous situations, God is ready and willing and able to help us. So God made everything. God can help us. He's willing to help us. And let's just see another thing about God that we learn in these two verses.

We can say that He's always near us. What does the verse say? The second verse say, He says, your foot He will not leave to slide. His watch over you He will keep. The Lord over Israel keeps watch. He keeps watch. He's always close to us. He's always watching over us. I wonder, do you want to learn a really big word, a seriously big word? Who wants to learn a really big word?

Okay, let's go for it. How about this? Omnipresent. That's a seriously big word, isn't it? Omnipresent. You know what that means? It means that wherever you go, God is there. So if you go on holiday to, well, let's see, where might you go on holiday? To Disney World. Might be pretty crazy, wouldn't it?

Well, God's there. If you go on holiday to Lewis, He's there. If you go on holiday to Inver Gordon or Allness, He's even there. Wherever you go, He's omnipresent. So He can watch over you wherever you are. You don't need to think, oh, but I'm leaving home or I'm going somewhere I've never been to before. No, I don't know if God will be there. No, He's there. He watches over you everywhere. And He's always willing and interested in us. It says, and you've sung it, He will not slumber nor sleep. That's just a nice way of saying that He's always interested and aware of what's happening. He's not falling asleep. Like, oh, I don't mind what happens or who cares what happens to the children in Bonacord. I'm going for a snooze. No, He never slumbers.

[ 11 : 55 ] He never sleeps. He's always interested in us. So isn't that amazing? That question, when we think about it, and as we look to what we've sung, we learn and discover so many things about God. And I want you to have that in mind when you're singing, and then you'll sing with understanding. But we had a second question. Let's see if you've got a really good memory. What was the second question? The second question, I think, was, I'll begin it with, I'll begin, I'll start and say, the second question is, what do these verses teach us about ourselves? Well, what does it, what do they teach us about ourselves? Well, let's have a look. I think one thing it teaches us about ourselves is that we need help. The psalmist sings, and we sing as well, my help comes to me from the Lord. Well, you wouldn't say that if you didn't need any help.

If you said, well, I don't need any help. I don't need God. I don't need other people to help me. I can look after myself. Some people think like that. They think, I don't need any help. I can sort out my own life. I can sort out my own problems. I don't need any help.

Well, this psalm tells us that that's very foolish. That's not true. We need help. We all depend on others. We can't sort out all our own problems. We need help. So, that's something really important that we learn about ourselves. And I've just said this. We need help. Another thing I think I've probably just said, but I just want to say it really clearly, is that we can't help ourselves.

Not in everything. Obviously, we can help ourselves in some things. I'm not saying we can't do anything, but we can't help ourselves in everything that we need help for. That's why the person who wrote the psalm asked this question, where am I to look for my aid? He says, I can't sort out this problem I'm in.

I can't help myself. Where will I find the help that I need? That's his question. And then he answers it. Well, the help that I need, I can find in God. And so, we need help. We can't help ourselves.

[ 13 : 59 ] We can't sort out all our own problems. And these verses tell us that we have someone that we can turn to. My help comes to me from the Lord. Okay? So, that's really important stuff that we learn about ourselves in these two short verses. But then we've got a third question. Okay? And this is our last question. And the question is this, what does the passage encourage us to do? Okay, well, let me say two things that this passage encourages us to do. The first thing is that we should ask for and find help in God. If we've learned that He is able to help, that He is the creator of heaven and earth, that He is all-powerful, if we've learned that He cares for us and watches over us, if we've learned that we need help, that we can't solve all our own problems by ourselves, then what we need to do is ask for help and get help. That's sensible, isn't it? It would be pretty silly to discover that this is true about God, to discover that we need help and say, but hey, I'm not going to ask for help.

We're sometimes like that, aren't we? I'm sometimes like that. I think, oh, I don't want to ask for help. It's embarrassing. I don't want people to know that I need help. I want people to think that I can solve all my problems. But that's not what these verses teach us. We should be like the person who wrote the psalm. He needed help, and he asked for help, and he got help. So this is what these verses teach us about what we need to do. We ask for help, and we find help.

Now, as we think about that, I want us to just jump back a bit to who we were mentioning just a few moments ago, Philip, who ran alongside the chariot and asked the Ethiopian in the chariot, do you understand what you're reading? And if we carry on in that story in the Bible, we then find how Philip helped the Ethiopian. Listen to what it says in the Bible as Philip got into the chariot and was explaining to the Ethiopian the meaning of what he was reading. And this is what it says, then Philip began with that very passage, the verses that he was reading, that very passage, and told him the good news about Jesus. What Philip was able to do was to show the man in the chariot that these verses in the Bible pointed him to Jesus. And that's true of all the Bible, and it's certainly true of the verses that you've sung and that we've sung together, the first two verses of Psalm 121.

They point us to Jesus as the one who can help us. We need to ask for help because we need help. And where do these verses point us? Well, they point us to Jesus. They point us to the good news that he can help us, that we can turn to him as the one who can forgive us, as the one who can guide us, as the one who can keep us safe, as the one who can help us live in a way that is pleasing to God and of help to others. So they point us to Jesus and the help that he can give us. So that's what we need to do when we read these verses or when we sing these verses. We need to ask for help, the help that Jesus can give us. And then another thing we need to do, a final thing we need to do, is to thank God for his help. We ask for help, we receive the help, and then we thank him for it. And really, that's what we were doing, that's what you were doing especially, when you sang the other psalm that you sang this morning, Psalm 134. It's a psalm of thanksgiving. It's a way of saying thank you to

God for who he is and for all the help that he gives us. And that's important. That's something we need to do. We thank God even in singing this psalm, but maybe especially that second psalm that you sang, is all about saying thank you to God. So by asking and hopefully answering these three questions, I hope that's helped us to be able to do what we're going to do now, is sing these two verses again, but to sing them with understanding or with greater understanding. And that goes for all of us.

[ 18 : 33 ] But I'd also encourage you to do one other thing before we sing these two verses again. I'd ask you to try and remember these three questions. Try and keep them well stored in your head so that you can use them whenever you're reading the Bible or singing a psalm to ask these questions. And when you ask these questions, I think you'll find that you can learn so much more about what God is saying to us and speaking to us in his Word, the Bible. Okay, so let's just remind ourselves of these three questions because it's not just for these two verses. Any passage of the Bible, one question we can ask is what do these verses teach us about? About who? About God. What do these verses teach us about ourselves? And what do these verses encourage us to? To do. Well done.

Okay, let's sing these two verses again. Let's all stand and sing the first two verses just of Psalm 121. Thank you.