

## “UNTO THE HILLS”

Based on Psalm 121  
*A Favourite Passage of  
Howard Fisher*

I recently returned home from helping my parents celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary in the back yard of their home in Ontario! On a table off to the side Dad and my oldest daughter had prepared a display of the usual photos one takes at a wedding. There were lots of comments about how beautiful my mother was as a bride, and how handsome my father stood in his rented suit and Brylcreem hair slicked back. But what made this gathering a little unique, was the fact that as Mom and Dad stood to have their picture taken, it was in the exact same place that they had had their pictures taken fifty years ago. You see, my parents still live in the same house they purchased when they were

married: with borrowed money, youthful enthusiasm, and a dream to create a home. In this day of age, where a good portion of families move every five years, that might appear to be quite an accomplishment. Now, knick-knacks and clocks cover the walls, there is a crack in the basement floor and the gardens are full of colour, but the faded photos from years

ago, show the same house, the same maple tree in the front yard, the same river easing by in the back.

As I stood back and listened to Dad give his thanks to the guests for coming, I was struck by a feeling of how much things had changed for them over the last fifty years. But at the same time, stepping away from those emotions just a little, I realized that there was a steadfastness, a strength, a solid foundation of faith and family to be found in my soul, because of the last fifty years.

I imagine the writer of Psalm 121 might have been considering similar thoughts as he gazed up to the hills of his barren and dusty land. For the simple shepherd, days were filled with routine: of morning, noon, and night; of grazing and walking, a warm fire at night. The seasons would drift, one to the next, punctuated by stormy rains and unexpected hail. Without much thought, the years meandered by; the shepherd almost ageless, working with the rhythm of the animals and the land. For those in search of a more ambitious life, more adventure or excitement, it must have

seemed very dull and uninspiring.

But for the shepherd, his eye on the distant hills brought, strength, invincibility, unfailing assurance. And in his lifetime and for a man with no understanding of Plate Tectonic Theory, the mountains for him, would have seem to be an immovable force as the seasons travelled by. Whether rising to the dull skies of dawn or watching the sunset at night, his mountains remained where they were: dependable, solid, comfortable. Like his God.

*The Lord watches over you—  
the Lord is your shade at your  
right hand; the sun will not  
harm you by day, nor the moon  
by night. (v5,6)*

But the difficult thing in life, is that life does change. People change. Circumstances change. Opportunities present themselves. Tragedy takes things away unexpectedly. One day, the sun rose, and the shepherd did not. Life changes. And it is easy in the midst of the pain and anger and the bewilderment of those feelings, and in the shakiness and uncertainty of decisions which lie ahead, to become distracted from this God who watches

over you. It is easy to give up on yourself, on people, on life. It is easy to say, "All hope is lost. We are done for." It is easy to turn your back on happiness and laughter because you have lost sight of the mountain. You see only a rock, which either blocks your view of the sunrise, or prevents your view of the sunset. Either way, there is no comfort, no solace, no grace, no beauty.

But the aging shepherd had one more piece of insight we should consider.

*The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. (v8)*

Friends, we read this psalm often, when our lives are in moments of crisis, pain or grief; to bring us some comfort and balance, at a mixed up or confused time. But today we know that mountains do move.

Changes, big and small are happening every day: on our earth, in our community, behind closed doors of family homes, within our hearts. There is a bigger message here. Our God is not just here for the troubles of life. Our God is not just here for today and the decisions we make now. Our God is here forevermore. Our God is here for the dull days of the everyday. Our God is here for us as the years wander by. Our God is here for the long haul. Still today, He watches over you. You need not be afraid of what is to come, only know that

*The Lord will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life; (v7)*

As Mom & Dad's party began to wind up, I realized that much will change in the coming years. As my parents age, I suspect that grass will once again take over some of the flowerbeds.

The crack in the basement floor will continue to widen. The river may once again change her course as the water ebbs and flows. But the river will still be there. The maple tree in the front yard, or her offspring will still be there. The house may one day belong to another family to have their time with the view and the sunsets. But the steadfastness, and the strength of the last fifty years will remain.

Dependable, solid, comfortable. Like my God.

This is the promise. Change or no change. Big decisions, little compromises. Mountain hills or river streams. Today. Tomorrow.

*"The Lord will watch over [my] coming and [my] going both now and forevermore."*

Amen.