



St Barnabas Cray

Honest Prayers: Whatever Your Mood

Weekly Devotional Journey

Monday - The God Who Never Sleeps

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

He will not let your foot slip — he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. (Psalm 121:3-4 NIV)

Devotional Thought

There is something quietly extraordinary about the opening of Psalm 121. The psalmist begins with a question — almost a moment of searching, of looking around for help — before arriving at the most grounding of answers. 'I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.' It is worth pausing on that phrase: the Maker of heaven and earth. This is not a small god, a regional deity, or a divine force that operates only within certain boundaries. This is the one who spoke the cosmos into being, who fashioned every mountain range the psalmist could see on the horizon, who set the stars in their courses and breathed life into humanity. And this same God, this immeasurably vast Creator, watches over you.

The word 'watches over' appears again and again in this short psalm — in verses three, four, five, seven, and eight. It is almost as if the psalmist cannot say it enough. The repetition is not careless; it is deliberate and pastoral. We need to hear it more than once because we are prone to forget it. We are prone to live as though God has turned away, as though the universe is indifferent to our small lives, as though we are navigating the days alone.

But the radical claim of Psalm 121 is that God neither slumbers nor sleeps. In the ancient world, neighbouring peoples believed their gods required rest, that they could be caught off guard or simply unavailable. Not so the God of Israel. Not so the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is perpetually, attentively, lovingly present. There is no moment of your life — no 3am anxiety, no quiet Tuesday afternoon, no crisis that erupts without warning — in which God has momentarily looked away.

This is not merely a comforting thought. It is a theological anchor. When life feels uncertain, when the ground beneath us shifts, we are not left to our own resources. The God who made the hills is the God who holds us. Begin this week by letting that truth settle deeply into your soul.

Reflection Question

In what area of your life do you most struggle to believe that God is genuinely, attentively watching over you — and what might it mean to trust him there today?

From Sunday's Sermon

"My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. And having started with that great declaration about the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, the thoughts go on to remind ourselves, to remind each other what that maker of heaven and earth is like."

Today's Application

This morning, before the day gains its full momentum, take five minutes to sit quietly and read Psalm 121 in full, slowly and aloud if possible. As you read, identify one specific area of your life — a relationship, a worry, a decision, a fear — where you have been operating as though God is absent or indifferent. Write it down in a journal or on a piece of paper. Then, beside it, write the words: 'He who watches over me will not slumber.' Carry that phrase with you today. When anxiety rises or uncertainty presses in, return to it. This is not positive thinking — it is theological remembrance. You are training your heart to locate itself in the truth of who God is rather than in the turbulence of circumstances. At the end of today, notice whether holding that truth made any difference to how you moved through the hours.

Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are the Maker of heaven and earth, and yet you watch over me. I confess that I often live as though you have turned away, as though I must manage my life in my own strength and wisdom. Forgive me for the smallness of my trust. Today, I choose to lift my eyes — to look beyond my immediate circumstances and to fix my gaze on you, the one who neither slumbers nor sleeps. Watch over my coming and going this day. Be my shade and my shelter. And when I am tempted to forget your presence, bring me back to this truth: my help comes from you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

He Was There All Along

Evening Reflection

As this day draws to a close, it is worth pausing to look back over the hours with honest and unhurried attention. Where did you sense God's presence today? Where did you forget him? The promise of Psalm 121 is not only that God watches over the grand, dramatic moments of our lives — the crises, the crossroads, the catastrophes — but that he watches over our 'coming and going,' the ordinary rhythm of daily life. The commute, the conversation, the meal, the moment of unexpected frustration or unexpected joy. He was in all of it, even where you did not notice him.

There is a quiet discipline in learning to look back at the day and ask: where was God at work here? It is the ancient practice of what some have called the examen — a gentle review of the day in God's presence, not to audit your performance, but to notice his faithfulness. The God who does not sleep was with you through every hour of this day. Rest now in that reality. You do not need to strive or worry your way into tomorrow. He who watches over you will keep watch through the night.

Evening Reflection

As you reflect on today, where — even in a small or unexpected way — did you sense God's presence or provision?

Evening Prayer

Lord, thank you for this day and for your faithful presence throughout it. Forgive me for the moments I forgot you were near. As I rest tonight, I trust myself to your care. You neither slumber nor sleep, and so I can. Amen.

Tuesday - Honest Before God: The Permission to Lament

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

How long, Lord? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? (Psalm 13:1-2 NIV)

Devotional Thought

If Psalm 121 is the bright morning of the Psalter, Psalm 13 is its dark night. And the extraordinary thing is that both are holy. Both are Scripture. Both are given to us by God as the language of faith. That tells us something profoundly important: the life of faith is not a life of unbroken brightness. It is a life that holds together confidence in God and honest anguish before God, sometimes within the very same breath.

Psalm 13 opens with one of the most raw and arresting phrases in the entire Bible: 'How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever?' It is the cry of someone who feels abandoned, overlooked, worn down by suffering that has gone on too long. The psalmist does not dress it up. There is no polite preamble, no careful theological qualification before the complaint. He goes straight to the wound. And he takes that wound directly to God.

This is the crucial point that deserves our full attention. The psalmist is not complaining about God to someone else. He is not nursing his grievance in private, letting it fester into bitterness. He is not pretending everything is fine, putting on a brave face for the congregation. He is going to God with his pain, his confusion, his sense of divine abandonment — and he is doing so in the language of faith, not the language of unbelief. 'How long, O Lord?' is not the cry of someone who has given up on God. It is the cry of someone who still believes God is there and still believes God can do something about it.

There is a profound pastoral wisdom here for all of us. Many of us have been taught, implicitly or explicitly, that good Christians do not struggle, do not doubt, do not feel forsaken. We have learned to manage our spiritual image, to present our best selves to God as though he might be disappointed by our honesty. But Psalm 13 dismantles that pretence entirely. God is not fragile. He is not offended by your questions. He can bear the full weight of your grief.

Reflection Question

Is there a pain, a question, or a sense of God's absence that you have been reluctant to bring honestly before him? What has held you back?

From Sunday's Sermon

"You don't have to put on a show for God. You don't have to use clever words for God. You don't have to sugarcoat it for God. You don't have to think, oh, well, I can't say that because they'll be offended. God's not like that."

Today's Application

Today's application is an invitation to practise honest prayer — perhaps more honest than you are accustomed to. Set aside fifteen minutes in a quiet place. Begin by reading Psalm 13 slowly and in full. Then, in your own words — without polish, without performance — tell God what is actually going on in your heart. If there is grief, name it. If there is confusion, voice it. If there is anger or a sense of abandonment, bring it. You might find it helpful to write your prayer rather than simply think it, as writing can draw out honesty that stays hidden in our heads. This is not an exercise in venting; it is an act of faith. You are choosing to believe that God is present, that he hears, and that he welcomes you exactly as you are. Notice how it feels to pray with that degree of honesty. The goal is not to feel better immediately, but to practise the kind of real, unguarded communion with God that the psalmist models.

Morning Prayer

Lord God, I come to you today not with carefully arranged words, but with the truth of where I actually am. There are things I have been reluctant to say to you — questions I have been afraid to ask, pains I have tried to manage on my own. Forgive me for keeping you at a distance. You are not frightened of my honesty. You are not diminished by my doubts. So I bring you all of it today — the confusion, the weariness, the wondering. Hear me, Lord. I trust that you do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Courage It Takes to Cry Out

Evening Reflection

There is something quietly courageous about the psalmist's lament. It would have been easier, in one sense, to say nothing — to go through the motions of faith while the pain remained unspoken. Many of us know that temptation well. We sit in church, we sing the songs, we nod at the right moments, and all the while something inside us is crying out, 'How long?' But the psalmist refuses that kind of spiritual performance. He opens his mouth and lets the truth come out, straight to God.

As you reflect on today, consider whether you were able to bring more of your honest self to God — even in a small way. Perhaps you found words for something that has been wordless. Perhaps you simply acknowledged to yourself that you are struggling. That too is a beginning. Lament is not the absence of faith; it is faith refusing to pretend. It is love that still believes God is worth talking to, even when the conversation is painful. Rest tonight knowing that God heard every word — spoken and unspoken.

Evening Reflection

What did it feel like today to be more honest with God — or what has stopped you from doing so?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you that you are not offended by my honesty. Thank you that the Psalms give me language for the hard days as well as the bright ones. Tonight I lay down my pretence and rest in your presence. You know me fully and love me still. Amen.

Wednesday - Faith That Remembers: Holding On Through the Dark

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me. (Psalm 13:5-6 NIV)

Devotional Thought

Yesterday we sat with the raw anguish of Psalm 13's opening verses. Today we arrive at its extraordinary conclusion — and the journey between those two poles is one of the most instructive movements in all of Scripture. The psalmist does not arrive at hope because his circumstances have changed. There is no indication that the enemy has retreated, that the sorrow has lifted, or that God has dramatically intervened between verse four and verse five. What has changed is the psalmist's gaze. He has turned, in the midst of his pain, to remember.

'But I trust in your unfailing love.' That word 'but' is doing enormous theological work. It is the pivot point of the entire psalm. It does not deny the reality of the suffering that has gone before. It does not pretend the lament was unnecessary. It simply refuses to let the suffering have the final word. Instead, the psalmist reaches back into his history with God and draws forward the memory of divine faithfulness. 'I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me.' He is not singing because everything is good right now. He is singing because God has been good — in the past, in ways he can still recall — and that past goodness becomes the ground of present trust.

This is one of the most important spiritual disciplines available to us: the discipline of holy remembrance. The Christian life is not lived only in the present moment. We are a people shaped by memory — by the memory of what God has done in history, supremely in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and by the memory of what he has done in our own lives. When the present is dark, we are not left without resources. We have the accumulated testimony of God's faithfulness, stretching back across our own years and across millennia of his dealings with his people.

This is why the Lord's Supper is given to us as a regular act of remembrance. 'Do this in remembrance of me.' We eat and drink not only to look forward to the Kingdom, but to look back at the cross — and in that looking back, we find the courage to trust in the present.

Reflection Question

What specific moments in your own history with God can you recall where he was faithful, good, or present? How might remembering those moments help you trust him in the present?

From Sunday's Sermon

"In the midst of this despair, whatever it is, the psalmist has had enough experience of God to look back and to say, I will sing to the Lord, for He has been good to me."

Today's Application

Today's practice is one of deliberate, structured remembrance. Take a piece of paper and draw a simple timeline of your life — not every detail, but the significant seasons. On that timeline, mark the moments where you can say, with the psalmist, 'He has been good to me.' These may be moments of dramatic intervention or quiet provision. They may be people God placed in your life, prayers he answered in unexpected ways, or simply seasons where his presence was unmistakably real. Once you have your list, choose one of those moments and write about it in a paragraph — what happened, how you experienced God's goodness, and what it meant to you. Then, at the bottom of the page, write Psalm 13:5 as a declaration: 'I trust in your unfailing love.' Keep this paper somewhere visible this week. On the days when trust is difficult, let your own remembered testimony call you back.

Morning Prayer

Lord, I thank you for your faithfulness — not in the abstract, but in the specific, particular moments of my life when you have shown yourself to be good. Help me to remember well. When the present feels dark and your face feels hidden, anchor me to the truth of what you have already done. I trust in your unfailing love — not because I feel it fully in this moment, but because I have known it, and because you do not change. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

Singing in the Dark

Evening Reflection

The psalmist's declaration — 'I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me' — is not the song of someone whose troubles are over. It is the song of someone who has chosen, in the midst of continuing difficulty, to let God's past faithfulness speak louder than present pain. That is an act of will as much as an act of feeling. And it is one of the most profound forms of worship.

As you come to the end of this day, take a moment to notice: did you find it possible to hold both honesty and trust together today? Did remembering God's past goodness make any difference to how you experienced the present? The discipline of remembrance is not something that transforms us overnight. It is a practice — something we return to again and again until it becomes the instinctive movement of our hearts. Tonight, even if the day has been hard, even if the singing feels more like a whisper than a song, offer what you have. God receives it.

Evening Reflection

What is one thing from your history with God that you can hold on to tonight as evidence of his faithfulness?

Evening Prayer

Father, I choose tonight to remember your goodness, even when I cannot fully feel it. You have been faithful before, and you will be faithful again. I trust in your unfailing love. Help me to rest in that. Amen.

Thursday - The Full Range of the Human Heart: Variety in the Life of Faith

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits. (Psalm 103:1-2 NIV)

Devotional Thought

One of the most liberating discoveries a person can make as they read through the book of Psalms is this: there is room in Scripture for the full range of human experience. Joy and grief. Confidence and confusion. Gratitude and complaint. Celebration and lament. The Psalms do not flatten human experience into a single acceptable emotional register. They embrace the whole of it — and in doing so, they tell us something vital about the God to whom they are addressed.

The sermon that has shaped this week's devotional drew our attention to two contrasting psalms — the soaring confidence of Psalm 121 and the raw anguish of Psalm 13 — as a way of illustrating this variety. But these two are not anomalies. They represent the breadth of an entire book that contains one hundred and fifty different expressions of what it means to be human before God. There are psalms of joy and psalms of fury. There are psalms of serene trust and psalms of bewildered questioning. There are even psalms that call down judgement on enemies in terms that make modern readers deeply uncomfortable. And all of it is there, in the canon of Scripture, as the inspired and authoritative word of God.

What does this tell us? It tells us that God is not only interested in our best moments. He is not only present when we are spiritually flourishing, theologically clear-headed, and emotionally stable. He is present in the mess, the muddle, the mourning, and the mystery. The Psalms give us permission to bring all of who we are into relationship with God — not just the parts we consider presentable.

This is also a word about community. The church is sometimes tempted to present itself as a place where everyone is doing well, where struggles are kept private and successes are celebrated publicly. But a community shaped by the Psalms would be different — a community where the full range of human experience is welcomed, where lament has as much space as praise, and where no one needs to pretend.

Reflection Question

Which emotions or experiences do you most struggle to bring into your relationship with God or your church community — and why do you think that is?

From Sunday's Sermon

"The psalms are realistic about human life and human experience. And that reminds us that we can take all that we are and all that we feel to God."

Today's Application

Today, consider both your inner life and your life in community. Inwardly: identify the emotion or experience you most habitually keep hidden from God. Is it anger? Doubt? Disappointment with how your life has turned out? Grief that you feel you should be 'over' by now? Name it honestly, and then bring it to God in prayer — using the language of the Psalms if your own words fail you. In community: think about whether there is someone in your church or friendship group who might be carrying something heavy and doing so alone. Could you reach out to them this week — not to fix anything, but simply to say, 'I'm here, and you don't have to pretend with me'? The gift of honest presence is one of the most Christlike things we can offer one another.

Morning Prayer

Lord, thank you that you are a God who welcomes all of me — not just the polished, composed version I sometimes try to present. Thank you that the Psalms give me language for every season of the soul. Help me to be a person who brings my whole self to you, and who creates space for others to do the same. May our community be one where honesty is safe and where no one has to pretend. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

No Season Is Wasted

Evening Reflection

As you look back over the summer months — or indeed over a longer stretch of your life — you will likely find what the sermon described so well: 'a range of feelings and experiences. Times when we felt good and happy and positive, and times when it's felt difficult, sad, frustrating, not at all positive.' That variety is not a sign of spiritual immaturity or failure. It is simply the texture of a human life lived in a fallen world under the care of a faithful God.

The Psalms tell us that no season is wasted — not the bright ones and not the dark ones. God is at work in both. He is forming us through the joy and through the struggle. He is teaching us to trust him in the sunshine and to cling to him in the storm. The variety of our experience is not an obstacle to spiritual growth; it is often the very means of it. As you rest tonight, receive whatever this day has held — the easy moments and the hard ones — as part of the story God is writing in your life.

And remember: you are not alone in the variety. The psalmists felt it too. The saints across the centuries felt it. And the God who watched over them watches over you.

Evening Reflection

What has the variety of your recent experience — the highs and the lows — been teaching you about yourself and about God?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you that no part of my experience is outside your reach or your care. You are at work in the bright days and the difficult ones. Help me to trust your purposes in all of it. I rest in you tonight. Amen.

Friday - Coming and Going: God's Presence in Every Season

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

The Lord will keep you from all harm — he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and for evermore. (Psalm 121:7-8 NIV)

Devotional Thought

We come now to the final day of this week's devotional journey, and it feels right to end where the sermon ended — with an invitation. An invitation to come to God honestly, whatever our mood, whatever our season, whatever the state of our interior world. This has been the golden thread running through our reflections all week: the God of Psalm 121 and the God of Psalm 13 is the same God. The God who watches over our coming and going in the bright seasons is the same God who hears our 'how long?' in the dark ones. And he invites us — in every season — to come.

The closing verse of Psalm 121 is breathtaking in its scope: 'The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and for evermore.' Coming and going — the ordinary rhythm of daily life. Not just the mountain-top moments, not just the dramatic crises, but the everyday movement of a human life. The going out in the morning and the coming home in the evening. The beginning of a new chapter and the closing of an old one. The seasons of confidence and the seasons of confusion. All of it, watched over by the God who made heaven and earth and who loves you with an unfailing love.

And that phrase 'for evermore' stretches the promise beyond the horizon of our present experience into eternity. This is not a God whose care has an expiry date. This is not a relationship that depends on your performance or your spiritual consistency. The God who watches over you today will watch over you tomorrow, and next year, and in the last moments of your earthly life, and into the eternal life that awaits all who trust in him. The promise of Psalm 121 finds its ultimate fulfilment in the promise of Jesus at the end of Matthew's Gospel: 'And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

As you step into this day and into the weekend ahead, carry both psalms with you. Let Psalm 121 remind you of God's sovereign, sleepless care. Let Psalm 13 remind you that your honesty is welcome. And let the movement from lament to trust that the psalmist models become the movement of your own heart — not once, but again and again, across all the seasons of your life.

Reflection Question

As you look ahead to the coming weeks and months, what would it look like to bring your whole self — your confidence and your questions, your praise and your lament — to God on a daily basis?

From Sunday's Sermon

"As we come to the end of this series in the Psalms, that was what I wanted us to be encouraged to remember — we can take all that we are and all that we feel to God and remember what he has done in the past. If there are times when we know he's been good, hang on to those. Be honest about what else is going on."

Today's Application

As a closing practice for this week, take time today to do two things. First, write a brief letter to God — no more than a page — that honestly describes where you are right now. Use the language of whichever psalm feels more true to your experience today: the confidence of Psalm 121 or the lament of Psalm 13, or perhaps something of both. Let it be real. Second, make a simple, practical commitment for the weeks ahead: choose one specific time each day — morning, lunchtime, or evening — when you will bring your honest self to God in prayer, without performance or pretence. It does not need to be long. Even five minutes of genuine, unguarded conversation with God is worth more than thirty minutes of spiritual theatre. You might also consider beginning to read through the Psalms in order over the coming months, letting them teach you the full vocabulary of faith.

Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, as this week draws to a close, I thank you for the gift of the Psalms — for their honesty, their breadth, and their beauty. Thank you that you are a God who watches over my coming and going, both now and for evermore. Thank you that I can come to you in confidence and in confusion, in praise and in pain. Help me to keep coming — to make honest, daily conversation with you the rhythm of my life. Watch over me this weekend, and in all the seasons ahead. I trust your unfailing love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

Both Now and For Evermore

Evening Reflection

As this week ends and you move into the rest of the weekend, carry with you the two great gifts the Psalms have offered us this week. The first is the gift of confidence: you are watched over by the God who made heaven and earth, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, whose care for you extends from this present moment into eternity. The second is the gift of honesty: you are free to come to God exactly as you are — with your joy and your grief, your faith and your questions, your singing and your silence.

These two gifts are not in tension. They belong together. It is precisely because God is so great — so sovereign, so faithful, so unfailingly loving — that we can afford to be completely honest with him. We do not need to manage his impression of us. We do not need to protect him from our pain. We can come as we are, again and again, across all the varied seasons of our lives, and find him always present, always attentive, always good.

Rest in that tonight. And come again tomorrow.

Evening Reflection

What is one thing you want to carry forward from this week's reflections into your daily life with God in the weeks ahead?

Evening Prayer

Lord, thank you for this week — for the honesty, the remembrance, and the renewed confidence in your care. Watch over me tonight and in all that is to come. Both now and for evermore, you are my help. Amen.