Good morning, everybody! It is so awesome to be at First Presbyterian worshipping this morning and seeing a lot of familiar faces and Bible study friends. I really appreciate Peter and our relationship over the last 7 or 8 years now. It's been awesome! We're all on this incredible journey with God. Peter asked me this morning to share a bit. He's preaching through a series this summer known as “Impossible Possibilities” and the topic today is trust. What I need us to know is that God wants us to know is that if we'll trust Him, we can have complete confidence and insurance in Him regardless of what life sends our way. We will know that we're in His providential care and we'll always find a way to His peace, comfort, and contentment.

 Today we have the pleasure of taking that journey through the psalmist eyes in Psalm 121. However, before we read that would you pray with me?

Father God, good morning. Thank you for this beautiful opportunity to be with you Father. We pray this morning, Lord, that You will meet each and every one of us where we are. We bring all of the things that we need to give up to You God, and to trust you with our every need. We ask You to bring us deeper into Your providential care. Let us take in Your word, Lord, and enjoy the journey. Bless this day, Amen.

So, if you'd like to follow along our text this morning again is Psalm 121 and it's found on page 571 in your pew Bibles. Let us hear God's Word:

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

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

 So, we're all familiar with the concept “I've got this”. It purports confidence, assurance, and trust that you can get it done. All of these things typically fall in our power zones. It reminds me of our granddaughter, Harper. She's 11 now. When she was 3, she was a flower girl in a wedding down at the beach. I don't know how I found my way in there, but I was in the room with all the bridesmaids and here's little Harper with her little shoes on and her curls. I can still see it today. It was a little bit complicated where she had to walk out the steps and walk down front to the outdoor wedding. I could sort of see the bridesmaids going. Oh my gosh! Is she going to be okay? They start trying to coach her and bring her along. And they say, “Harper, here's what you need to do.” I saw a little Harper cross her legs and she said, “Girls just relax. I've got this.”

 It takes me back to uh I guess it was fifth grade maybe, and we had a spelling bee at school. It was the fifth grade versus the sixth grade, and it came down to a deadlock. The teacher said you have to have a spell off. A student from each class was to be picked to represent the class in the spell off. The most timid, mild-mannered young man, albeit pretty daggone smart, he steps forward and he said, “Mrs. Oliver, pick me! I've got this.” You never thought it would happen, but he won.

What about a project where all of a sudden in four days you've got to put together a dinner function for 50 people? All the logistics? A five-course meal? Not many of us would be that good at that. But somebody steps forward that's really talented in that area and says, “I've got this.” Or how about organizing and putting together a historic library? It's got to be done in 4 months. “I've got this.” The list goes on.

All of these things depend on our ability, and they're within our control, weren't they? But what about as we journey through life when things aren't in our control? Life

circumstances come our way. When your world turns dark, and the journey turns rugged where do you turn for help? What is your source for the confidence you need to face the inevitable headwinds of life? I'll offer you a little clue in a true story of a man that loved to shop for his wife for her birthday. He loved to find unique gifts. He finds himself in a store with a rack of shirts that goes around in an oval, and he spins it around. He says, “Gosh! That looks like a unique shirt. A little different.” He checks the size. He picks the shirt up and he turns it around and, on the back, it says, “I'm God… I've got this.” Well brothers and sisters that's exactly what psalm 121 is all about. It's exciting! You can hear and feel the Psalmist’s confidence. He knows without a doubt that he's in God's providential care.

So, that's what Psalm 121 invites all people and invites each of us this morning to do. To consider our source of help. Of course, that source is God, but to speak it is one thing to believe it is another. It comes down to a basic question of trust. Do you really trust and have confidence that no matter what life throws your way you'll be in God's providential care, and He'll embrace you?

Until a couple of weeks ago, I would have said with 100% authenticity and realness that God, I trust you with every ounce of my being in my life. But I had a little bit of a health scare. Turns out everything checked out and everything is fine, but during that 2- or 3-day period, that interlude, I was incredibly surprised at how I was

reacting. It was like I was playing ping pong in my mind. On one side of the table, I said, “God, I love you so much. This journey we're on is awesome. I appreciate our relationship.” Then the ping pong ball went back to the other side of the table, and I said, “God I'm feeling anxious. I have fear.” I worried that my mind was asking questions that maybe it shouldn't be. I found myself, in all honesty, apologizing to God and asking for forgiveness. In the midst of all that, I realized, “Wait a minute, Eric, God's just teaching you.” I could feel God saying, “Listen to Me Eric. Talk to Me. Tell Me what's bothering you. Eric what I need you to know is you've come a long way, but you've got a long way to go. There's another whole level of trust in Me that I need you to embrace, and if you embrace that level of trust, we're going to have a level of intimacy that continues to grow. That's what I want, Eric, is a deeper love relationship with you. It doesn't have to take a health scare, does it?”

 We can all relate to times of being worried and burdened. Anxious and worried about life. I read a story of a young couple. They couldn't have children. They tried and they tried, and finally they were blessed with twins. The mother kept waking up in the

middle of the night for the first 3 or 4 months going into the twin’s room, reaching down, and making sure that they were breathing. What about a marriage that might be disintegrating? Worrying about our parent’s health or our children's health? Maybe we're just down on life and we can't find any optimism with where we are. A strained friendship or maybe we've lost a job. Constantly asking, “What are we going to do? How am I going to support my family?” Trina helped me. She has a great devotional. I'm sure a lot of you've seen or heard of Sarah Young's “Jesus Calling”. It's written as Jesus is talking in the first person. There's great solace in these words. This is Jesus speaking to us saying, “When something in your life or thoughts makes you anxious or worried, come to Me. Let's talk about it. Bring Me your prayer and petition with thanksgiving saying thank you Jesus for this opportunity to trust You more. Though the lessons of trust I send you sometimes comes wrapped in difficulties where the benefits will far outweigh the cost. Well-developed trust will bring you many blessings. One of which is My peace. I promise to keep you in perfect peace to the extent you trust Me.” It reminds me of Jesus in Matthew 11 when Jesus says, “Come to me all of you who are wearied and burdened and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart. You'll find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy

and My burden is light.” The yolk is a wooden harness that went on the back of the oxen that carried the heavy load. Jesus is saying take all that you're anxious about, all your fears and all your worries. I'll take those. Put them on Me. I will give you rest for your souls.

So, you see to have faith that God will protect us it's a pretty basic math equation. Faith equals trust. The deeper our faith becomes with God, the more our circumstances can be trusted with His providential care. We don't understand the mysteries of God's providence. He's going to put things in our lives that we've got to trust Him more. The more that we trust God, the more our faith grows. The more our faith and trust grows the more intimacy we have with God. You see the Bible informs us all throughout that we've got this incredible encompassing protection of God, but if we're honest as humans we see God's protection, at times, as a magic force field that'll keep us from harm. Yeah, God can prevent harm and destruction. We know He can. But many times, God works in ways we don't understand. Sometimes His protection comes in the form of peace and strength in the middle of despair and in a storm of life. Other times God's protection comes as an ending. It might be a test or a challenge in your life that God's asking you to trust Him because He sees something more on the horizon that He has planned for you that we could not see for ourselves. As believers we're promised this new life covered under the protection of God in which nothing can separate us from God's love. In Romans we hear these beautiful words from Paul. I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, and listen to this neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow, not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below, indeed nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Friends we can have confidence that no matter what hardship we face in life

God is our provider, and He is our protector. When we're wearied and we're burdened, run to the Psalms. God is reminding me don't just read them pray them earnestly and they'll become a part of your inner fiber, and yes, they'll give you rest and peace for your soul. Psalm 121 is a beautiful place to begin the journey. It is from a collection known as the Psalms of Ascent which was Psalms 120-135 and it's about a traveler. He's about to embark on a journey. More than likely a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, maybe to a festival. Over time it's become known as the Sojourner's Psalm and the reason for that is that it's connected to life's journey. The Psalmist, he recognizes that there's potential dangers, so he looks to the hills, and he says where will my help come from. Such a question is pretty natural, isn't it? Whether we're taking a geographic journey into a dangerous territory or a lifelong journey through the ups and downs or a spiritual journey of discovery with God. Take a minute. Think about your own life. What threats and fears do you have for yourself or for loved ones? What about your spiritual connection to God? Where are you in that? Where are you? Where do you need to trust God more?

So, what this Psalm does is it invites us in to be the speaker. I'll look to the hill. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Absolutely, we have the confidence and trust that God's our protector. I love the language of the Psalmist. You can feel it can't you? It's incredible passion for Him. It's fair, complete, no doubt, 100 % God's got this! So much so, the Psalmist doesn't even

mention any of the dangers that might be along for the journey. So, after verses 1 and 2 the Psalm completely shifts. The remainder of it is about a blessing assurance, almost a benediction of sorts. The help God brings, He will not let your foot slip and He who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will not slumber nor sleep. So, not only does God not sleep, but He also doesn’t take a cat nap and He doesn't doze off in His chair in His office with the door closed. So, therefore nothing is going on in your life that God doesn't know about. The foot that can't be moved, it's the foundation God's infinite power and goodness on which we stand cannot be moved. God's our rock. He's our fortress and He is our shelter. Throughout the Psalm you hear the words He who keeps you. This is the first of 6 times in this short Psalm we hear the Hebrew word shamar. It's translated as keeps, preserves, and protects. So, the theme is about God's character in God's identity. Who is God? He's a keeper. God's identity is to protect, to shield, to watch over his people like a watchman keeping guard over a city, or a party of travelers, or a bird shielding its young in the shelter of his wings. So, with happy assurance of protection the Psalmist repeatedly says the one word that he knows protects him from all his foes and fears. In the close of the Psalm, it's powerful and reassuring. The Lord will keep you from all harm. He'll keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out

and coming in from this time forth and forevermore. So, the Psalmist is reinforcing and

extending the theme of God's attentive protective care with the repetition of the verbs from our, to guard, to watch, to keep. It's a crescendo moment. God promises brothers and sisters to keep and guard us on our journey of life as you go out as you come in. God is the guardian and keeper of all life.

In all honesty, intellectually, we understand that don't we? But how can we actually trust God more? Are there specific action steps that we can take and do our part? I’d like to offer a few. We've got to let go and let God. When things in our lives that we can't control, we've got to let God have them. That's what He wants us to do. To lay those burdens on Him. Why that's important? In a really good litmus test? As Christians I think we need to ask ourselves are we embodying that trust? Are we living it out in our lives? Because if we are, and the more we trust God even in the midst of storms, we should have, and people should see in us, as Christians, peace and contentment and somehow, in some way, joy in trials.

Secondly, it might seem obvious, but I’m going to say it anyway, is to memorize scripture. There is nothing better than to go and find there's multiple verses on trusting God and protection in the Bible. Go research. Find 3 that really strike your heart and put them in your journal. Don't just memorize them and don't just write them down. Pray them fervently, so they become a part of who you are, and God will fill you with His peace. A great starter is Proverbs 3:5-Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. The byproduct of that is what Paul tells us in Philippians-In the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

The third suggestion is read and study prayers for protection. There are some incredible prayers for protection if you'll do some research. Again, find 2 or 3 that strike your heart. Write them down. Commit them to memory. Pray them.

The fourth is pray that God will work out the math equation we talked about earlier that faith equals trust. Openly talk to God. He knows what your doubts are. Tell Him. He wants to hear them. He wants to have that dialogue with you.

 The next part might be a little more difficult. Ask Him to expose areas of your life that you need to trust Him more that you don't even know right now. Because they're there and if we do that with determination, God will help you trust Him. Have more

confidence in Him. To know that you're under the veil of protection and that your intimacy with Him will grow and your faith and your trust will be perpetually something that he wraps you in his arms until he calls you home.

So, as a body of believers, as Christians, as First Presbyterian what are we called to do to help others? When we see family members going through trials? We see fellow brothers and sisters of Christ? What about at work? Some people are friends at work that we don't know whether they're Christians or not. They're going through a difficult time themselves or their families. College roommates? There are people all around us in this world going through trials, and as Christians we know as James tells us that it should be pure joy that we face trials because faith produces perseverance. So that when God will finish His work we will lack nothing. I might suggest that we do this. That we do pray but may be different than you think. At the end of Thessalonians Paul tells us how to pray. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. That's what we should be praying when we see fellow brothers and sisters going through difficult trials. Not that God will take them away. We don't understand why God put them there, but He did for a reason. To pray them through their trials, that whatever God is asking them to release,

so, they can trust Him more to come into protection of God's veil of protection. To grow because we know every time, we go through difficult times generally we get to the other side of it we're a much better person. So, as we help people through their trials with prayer, we should praise God and rejoice for all the growth that you'll have. That might well be that God is calling you home and our true citizenship, brothers and sisters, is in heaven.

I’d like to close this morning with a prayer of protection. Would you pray with me? Father, I want to live in the shadow of Your wing when life's hard and I don't know what to do. Help me remember that You are with me, and I am never alone. I cannot live without You. I cannot face tomorrow without the promise of Your presence. Today, I choose to walk and live under the protection of You the highest. Let all God's people say Amen.

Would you pray with me?

Father God, we don't tell You often enough, Lord, but You just need to know how much each and every one of us loves You and just to be reminded of the incredible sacrifice in Your determination to be in relationship with us. That You would send Your son Jesus. That He would voluntarily give His life to allow us to be in this incredible relationship. To give us new life in Christ pray lord that you will continue to mold us into Christ's character. As a part of that, we know that this journey, this earthly journey, that we're on we're never promised for it to be easy. So, Lord we pray that we can trust You more, feel Your protection and grow into an intimate deep love relationship with You. Father, we pray for those in this world that don't know You, and that by Your incredible grace You'll bring them to You through others. That they'll give their lives to You Father, so they can know the same protection. Lord, we pray for all of the famine around the world. All the people that need help that have no water no sanitation. We're so lucky in this country, Lord, to have it the way we do. But yet we find out this past week, Impact Week, that Alex led so well that we have all these care partners right here in our community and the wonderful people in these difficult times with gas prices and inflation that can't make their way and pay their bills. That we're able to help this right here in our own backyard, Lord. Yes, that is what church does. Our opportunity as a church is to touch the lives of those around us, Lord, and this week was just the beginning. Let us continue to extend the tentacles of our church to touch lives in Lynchburg and communities beyond. We pray this for Your church universal. When churches everywhere in this world, the United States and otherwise, Lord, we have to pray, and we want to pray. Because we don't understand how illness strikes, disease, loss of jobs, fractured relationships that, Lord, we would know that You're in the midst of all of those. Those today, Lord, that are in hospice I would pray that You would just cradle them in Your arms and bring them home to You. Lord, we pray for the leaders in this country and around the world, Lord, that they would be cloaked in Your character. Lord that You may eradicate evil. We pray for the Baltic Region. We pray for the season of the fall where hurricanes and tornadoes and the wildfires that are there. Lord, we know You're in the midst of that and we pray for Your protection. Lord, we pray that while we're on this earthly journey that You will continue to have the fruits of Your Holy Spirit pour through us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. We pray all this in the Name of the One who taught us to pray. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us as we forgive others. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom Our Lord.