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## Seeking Hope in Times of Despair

By Joy Kitanga\*

Advent is the four-week period before Christmas, also known as the waiting season, where the people of the world wait for their savior. Every Sunday during this four-week period, a candle is lit in recognition of the four virtues Jesus brings into the world: hope, love, joy, and peace.

During Advent, many people engage in different spiritual reflections. Some lift up a prayer, others read a psalm each day or begin preparing for the new year by reflecting on the past. There are many spiritual practices embraced to center one's self while waiting.

This year, I did not know which practice to use. 2016 has been overwhelming in so many ways: unprecedented presidential elections around the world, fires in North Georgia, the Syrian refugee crisis, Standing Rock Indian Reservation protests, hurricane devastation in Central America, ongoing brutal wars around the world, and the shooting of innocent people in the United States.

These questions stand out during my reflection: Where do I start and what should I pray for? How should I prepare for my savior's coming and the new year? Where do I find hope? In the middle of these overwhelming questions and the uncertainties surrounding them, [Psalm 121](#) is a pillar upon which I find hope.

The psalmist must have been overwhelmed and searching for hope in the midst of despair. He cried for hope and anticipated finding it in the presence of God. In a deep sigh, he expresses his lament with a question to the Lord saying, "I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?"

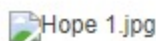
Today, we too, look to the mountains—marred with chaos or devastating stories—and ask, *where does our help come from?* Let us continue to lament to Jehovah and express our deep concern for our world.

I also hear the wisdom of the psalmist responding, "Help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." Something must have happened to the psalmist to realize that Yahweh was his help and hope. Alternately, what is happening around us can become a compass that leads us to find God in our midst.

Slowly, I begin to see a glimmer of hope: South Koreans came together peacefully demanding the president resign, the Gambian president conceded defeat in an election after being in power for more than two decades, and people continue to stand in solidarity with the Native Americans of the Sioux tribe in North Dakota to demonstrate love and respect for all creation in the fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline. There is hope in the story of the Chibok girls, Nigeria, who were found and reunited with their families. There are many other wonders around us that can point us toward God.

Like the psalmist, we do not lose hope but search for it and anticipate God to respond. The psalmist trusted Yahweh through the overwhelming mountains and found courage to keep on living and hoping.

In this Advent season, let us look to the mountains and not be discouraged or dismayed but continue living and hoping because Yahweh is with us.



### Psalm 121

*(New International Version)*

1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains—

where does my help come from?

2 My help comes from the Lord,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.

3 He will not let your foot slip—  
he who watches over you will not slumber;

4 indeed, he who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord watches over you—  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

6 the sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord will keep you from all harm—  
he will watch over your life;

8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore.

Amen.

*Photo: Ibrahim Dabo*

\*Joy Kitanga is Program Area Liaison for Global Ministries.

