

# A Reflection on Psalm 121- A Song of Ascent to Jerusalem

## Who is this for?

A time of prayerful reflection for individual or groups to deepen their understanding of the impact of abuse, and to pray for victims, survivors, their families and communities; and to consider our part in the parish and wider church response.

## Gathering Prayer

O Holy Mystery of God, you are here with us now as we gather,  
Listening, waiting, hoping.  
Help us to do the same.  
May we listen with love; wait with patience;  
and hope with deep trust in your everlasting goodness.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen

## A word about the Isaiah Journey to introduce this reflection

- The Isaiah Journey has grown out of the need for a pastoral-spiritual response to the suffering of victims and survivors of abuse in the Church. Inspired by the writing of the prophet Isaiah, it has three strands: seeking truth; bringing hope; finding healing.
- The logo's green line conveys the idea of 'journey', at times jagged and mountainous, or halted at a cliff face; at other times, a manageable 'stretch'. Green, is the colour of hope and new life.

## Psalm 121

When I think about what the Isaiah Project stands for, and how that mission is reflected in the logo design I am instantly transported into Psalm 121 — A Song of Ascent to Jerusalem.

I lift up my eyes to the mountains:  
from where shall come my help?  
My help shall come from the Lord  
who made heaven and earth.

May he never allow you to stumble!  
Let him sleep not, your guard.  
No, he sleeps not nor slumbers,  
Israel's guard.

The Lord is your guard and your shade;  
at your right side he stands.  
By day the sun shall not smite you  
nor the moon in the night.

The Lord will guard you from evil,  
he will guard your soul.  
The Lord will guard your going and coming  
both now and for ever.

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Prepared by the *Isaiah Journey* Working Group of the Bishops' Conference © 2022 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales. Text from *The Psalms, a new translation* © 1963 The Grail (England) administered by HarperCollins. [www.cbcew.org.uk/prayer-for-survivors-of-abuse-2022](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/prayer-for-survivors-of-abuse-2022)

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## Stop and think

- What word or phrase or image in this psalm catches your attention?

## Survivors on a journey

Survivors of Abuse are, unwillingly, thrust into to this journey, that for every moment of life after abuse, will always be mountainous at times, steady and more settled at others and also near on impossible at others.

## Some of the challenges they face

The survivor journey can often feel lonely and isolated, and whilst always trying to move forwards, that sense of loneliness, of feeling fragmented, facing that steeply impossible mountain is often accompanied by a silent cry of 'Who will help me?'

## Who will help me?

This question is often left unanswered, as the very nature of abuse can make it impossible to trust anyone to have your best interests at heart, to want to help you with your heavy load. Life lived in a paradox of needing help, but not being able to trust enough to accept it. This paradox means that the psychological impact continues to be perpetuated long after abuse ends.

## Stop and Think

- How does hearing about these challenges on the journey touch you? What is your initial response? (Think on your own. If in a group, then share briefly in 2' and 3's or whole group if small)

# The Voice of a Survivor on the Journey

*Permission has been given to share a survivor's reflection on their journey, the role of the church in that journey and the impact that Psalm 121 has for them.*

## Survivor Reflection

'I find it a great comfort to know that God is watching over me through the difficulties of my journey. I have been through what is unimaginable to most and there have been times, back in the early days, where like Jesus, I have cried out "Lord, why have you forsaken me". How could God let this horrific abuse happen to me? I admit that I have been cynical and untrusting of the Church's reputation.

Then one day, I was brave enough to admit to a Priest, that I was a survivor of abuse. My perception being that I was this shameful being stood before him and would be ushered away faster than the speed of light.

But that didn't happen. In that moment, I was cared for with words, humanity and empathy. I was accepted for who I was. Signposted to support. The time was taken to explain the safeguarding practice and structure that is in place in the Church today and it was acknowledged that the Church has needed to improve and is on its own journey, striving to protect those who are vulnerable and have been harmed. The church I was witnessing on this day was such a contrast to what I had expected it to be.

That moment changed my future and I found a new hope that helped me with my healing.

I found my way back to journeying with the Church and upon reading the words for Psalm 121 on the search for a Psalm for a family occasion, the words struck me. Thinking of this journey, from an unsafe place, a journey that would be difficult and heading somewhere new and unknown, I recognised the experience of being a Survivor in what the writer of this Psalm was facing.

To know that whatever dangers lie ahead, God will be watching over, always and forevermore at my side, is such a powerful force of encouragement in my healing. To trust in God rather than be angry with him that the journey exists, gave me a freedom that I never expected to feel.'

## Stop and Think

*On your own first. Then share in 2's/3's or small group.*

- What stays with you having heard the voice of this survivor speaking about their journey?
- What has helped them? What has not helped? What do they indicate that they need whilst on this journey? What is your initial response? How might you/others support this journey?

# Intercessions

*An opportunity for a quiet moment of individual thought/prayer, followed by intercessions.*

We pray for our victims and survivors of abuse, their families and communities:

O Holy Mystery of God,  
whatever dangers survivors face on their journey,  
may they come to know your watchful presence encouraging each step.

Lord in your mercy.

**Hear our prayer.**

O Holy Mystery of God,  
help them to trust you,  
as they move in hope towards the freedom you promise.

Lord in your mercy.

**Hear our prayer.**

O Holy Mystery of God,  
we ask your comfort for families of victims of abuse in our church —  
for your gentle healing from betrayed trust and broken faith

Lord in your mercy.

**Hear our prayer.**

O Holy Mystery of God,  
you call us together and make us one Body in you.  
May we come to recognise our belonging together  
and our shared responsibility to do our best to love and care for each person,  
especially those who are suffering in any way.

Lord in your mercy.

**Hear our prayer.**

Grant us, O merciful God,  
that the gifts we have received through listening,  
sharing and prayer with one another,  
may deepen our resolve to do your will as members of your Body,  
and make us living witnesses to your love, truth and healing power.

Through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**