

Psalm 46

**¹ God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.**

² Therefore *we will not fear*, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,

³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.^[c]

⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

⁵ God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.

⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

⁷ *The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

⁸ Come and see what the Lord has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields^[c] with fire.

¹⁰ He says, “**Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.**”

¹¹ *The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

This psalm begins with the statement that *God is our refuge and strength*. Meaning He is the One we look to for security, provision, comfort, confidence. The challenge is that we are chronically tempted to allow something else, something less, something shaky, faulty, unreliable to be our refuge and strength. It could be money and investments; it could be our own skills, abilities, intelligence; it could be the military might of the country we live in; it could be our family, our job, etc.

Q. What are you tempted to allow to be your refuge and strength, your reason for security and confidence, what you put hope and trust in? What are the various ways anything less than God can let you/us down?

The first line of this psalm is followed by a parallel statement, that God is an ever-present help in trouble. Notice that it doesn't say that God keeps us from trouble. Nowhere in Scripture is that promised to us. God's promise to us is that He will be present, that He will be WITH us. His presence is our refuge and strength.

Q. What is presently troubling you? What are you doing to lean into God's presence with you during this time?

Q. In what ways are you tempted to secure and protect yourself?

Q. What are you doing, as a matter of practice/habit, to cultivate the awareness and enjoyment of God's presence?

When we allow ourselves, and our circumstance, to be the central reference point in our lives, our perspective gets all kinds of screwy. It can feel like the earth giving way, or mountains falling, waters roaring and foaming causing mountains to quake at their surging. This is poetic language from the psalmist to describe chaos, distress, disorder. That's how life can often feel when we are the chief/central reference point, and if we have anything less than/other than God as our source of help and security.

BUT, with God as our central reference point, we have no need/reason to fear. Notice in verses 4-7 that God is mentioned in every line. When God's loving, protective presence is recognized we can live in tranquility, serenity, peace, as opposed to trouble and distress.

We may wonder why there is a reference to a river in all this. There are a couple of reasons. In the ancient near east rivers were understood as the source of life and civilization. For example, most cities were developed near rivers. (Oceans and seas were considered big, scary, and were metaphorically considered dark and chaotic.) Also, as you'll notice the militaristic language in this psalm (see verses 7, 9, 11...by the way, "Lord Almighty" is better translated "Lord of Hosts" which means "Lord of Armies"). From a strategic warfare point of view, if a city had a source of water it could be defended for a long time, making it very hard to conquer/capture if under attack. So, if you were attacking a city, one thing you might do is dam up its water source up river. If you could manage to do that, the city became vulnerable, despite whatever sort of

walled defense it had. So, from a poetic/metaphoric point of view, the city of God, the place God dwells, has an everlasting source of life and sustenance...God Himself. All God has to do is lift His voice and enemies scatter.

Not only are we reminded in this psalm to make God our chief/central reference point as a matter of constant right perspective. We are also instructed HOW to do that. The psalmist uses the voice of God (poetry is very flexible this way) to instruct us (see verse 10). BE STILL...!!! To paraphrase, Stop the madness! Remember that I AM GOD...not y'all.

Everything in this world is about God...NOT US. Part of the reason there is so much trouble, distress, chaos in the world is because humans have made life on this planet about us instead of about God. Practically speaking, we need to be in the regular practice, the habit, (the spiritual discipline, if you will) of stopping, quieting ourselves, so that we can remember this ultimate truth.

Esteemed author Henri Nouwen stated that there are three lies that we are easily susceptible to, all three of which have to do with our identity.

- Lie # 1: We are what we have.
- Lie # 2: We are what we do.
- Lie # 3: We are what others think/say about us.

Q. Which of these lies are you most tempted to believe?

Q. How does this psalm speak to those lies?

Notice how communally oriented (as opposed to individualistically oriented) this psalm is:

- God is OUR refuge and strength...
- There WE will not fear...
- The Lord Almighty is with US...
- The God of Jacob is OUR fortress.

The role of God's people—be that ancient Israel in the past or the Church past, present, future—is to point out God's activity and presence to the world around us. One of the ways, perhaps one of the main ways, we as God's people can do this is by living in such a way that we aren't grasping at security and protection the same way the world does. The rule/rhythm of our lives should be structured in such a way that we don't place value or trust in things that can't deliver, nor pursue things that don't exalt God as supreme. We want to structure our lives in such a way that enjoying His presence WITH US, and allowing Him to transform us with His love, is our main goal.

Q. How do you engage in being still and knowing/remembering that God is the source of life, the central reference point of life, who life is all about?

- Q. What do you sense God might be inviting you/us into in regards to allowing Him to be your/our refuge and strength? What line/verse from this psalm would you like to commit to memory?**
- Q. How does the rule/rhythm of your/our life reflect that God is ultimately in control? How does the rule/rhythm of your/our life as a community demonstrate that?**
- Q. The perspective this psalm offers is a much needed (daily, perhaps several times throughout the day) reminder of what's most important. How are you allowing yourself to be reminded of this as you go through your normal day? What sort of things cause you to lose track of this ultimate truth?**