

Stop and Know God

Psalm 46:1-11

On our very first vacation, Robyn and I went white water rafter down in West Virginia. Much of it was a nice calm river where you could get out of the raft and float along with the current. That's how life can be. It's quite peaceful and problem free as you go with the flow of normal days and duties.

But the river we were on wasn't one of those lazy rivers like they have at the water park. There were sections where the rapids were rough. And while you see we are all smiling, they posed danger. There were rocks under the water that could easily tip us over. The raft could heave or pitch at any moment and cause a person to get tossed overboard. Fortunately, we didn't have to navigate the treacherous parts of the river on our own as novice rafters. We had an excellent, seasoned guide who knew the river and the raft and we trusted him to get us to our destination safely, even through troubled waters.

It's the same in life, isn't it? We can try to go through it on our own and hope for the best. But when trouble comes, all too often the boat of life capsizes and we're left floundering, hoping we can make it safely to shore with little harm.

We are looking today at Psalm 46. It is one in which the Israelites were facing trouble. It is another song committed to the music director by the sons of Korah whom we met last week. In the title, we are introduced to a new term. It is the word 'alamoth.' It means maiden or young woman indicating that this song was made for female voices.

As with other psalms, there is no inscription as to the reason for it being written. Some scholars suggest that it was written by King Hezekiah after God had delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrian King Sennacherib who threatened to defeat Jerusalem with a siege on the city.

You can find the account of this attack in **II Kings 18-19**, **II Chronicles 32** and **Isaiah 36-37**. At one point when Assyria threatened Israel, King Hezekiah sent a monetary tribute to Sennacherib hoping to appease him so that he would call off the raid. While it staved off the attack for a while, Sennacherib had

second thoughts about Jerusalem. It had a long and storied history of great military exploits under other kings. Not wanting them to rise up one day against him, Sennacherib decided money wasn't enough. He needed to control the city with his own military presence, so he sent his military commanders and vast army with a message hoping the inhabitants would see reason and surrender.

You can well imagine the sense of concern, maybe even panic among the leaders and inhabitants when the Assyrian army surrounded the city so that no one could leave or enter. Facing an uncertain future, Hezekiah did two things. He fortified the city walls making it more difficult to batter down. And he brought water into the city. While the city was located strategically up on a ridge with limited access, the one drawback was that unlike other cities which were built next to a source of water, Jerusalem had no natural water supply into the city except from the Gihon River down in the Kidron Valley. Some historians call what he did an engineering marvel.

Hezekiah's engineers tapped the Gihon River so that the Assyrian army could not utilize this natural resource themselves. Using two teams, they dug an underground channel over 1,700 feet long to carry water into the city to the pool of Siloam. They started at opposite ends and tunneled through the limestone with hammers and chisels only going about two feet per day. To meet in the middle, they banged on the rock so the other team could hear and set their course. In 1880, archaeologists found an inscription written on the wall of the tunnel describing how they made it. This water supply is still in use today in Jerusalem.

Some time after the invasion began, the Assyrian army was informed that Egypt was marching on its own land and left Jerusalem. Before leaving, they left a message for Hezekiah not to get comfortable because they would be back to finish what they had started. Hezekiah took this threat to the Temple and laid it out before the Lord, praying for God's help and deliverance. God answered his prayer by sending His angel to destroy the Assyrian army.

Sennacherib returned home in disgrace and later two of his sons murdered him.

So here we are at **Psalm 46**. We may not ever face extreme troubles like Hezekiah, but there will be those times that we don't know what to do or where to turn except to the Lord and that's what this psalm is about. It emphasizes that God is always with His people and the difference He makes when we trust Him during life challenges. He is in the boat with us as our guide through all the rough waters.

Consider with me from **verses 1-3** God as our refuge.

I. GOD AS OUR REFUGE – vv. 1-3

In **verse 1** the word refuge refers to a shelter. One definition defined a shelter as a place giving temporary protection from bad weather or danger. Another said it is a building offering a shield from something harmful like bad weather.

Years ago, I needed shelter when I was out on a run and got caught in a thunderstorm. Claps of loud thunder with streaks of lightning lit up the dark sky and hastened my journey home as heavy rain pelted me for the remaining miles of my run.

People who visit us for the first-time wonder if the little mound in our backyard is a bomb shelter. We have to tell them that it's a root cellar.

The author of one of the commentaries I read recalled living in England during WWII hearing the sirens and explosions from the bombing. Shortly after one raid where the bombing was particularly close, his dad built a bomb shelter for protection.

The writer is remembering a time when he needed shelter due to an enemy. But it wasn't just any place of shelter he sought. He begins by noting that God is the refuge he sought, that God was his refuge. Notice in the first part of **verse 1** that God as our refuge is personal.

A. God As Our Refuge Is Personal – v. 1a

During our recent Wednesday night study, we have been learning that God is personal, that He desires to have a growing relationship with us. He wants us to know Him. Among the verses we have considered regarding the personal nature of God is **I Peter 5:7**,

which invites us to bring our worries and struggles and trials to Him because He cares for us.

Paul states it a little differently but with the same idea in **Philippians 4:6-7** that when we are anxious about anything we can leave all our requests with Him. In return He settles our heart and mind with His peace. It's another example of how personal God is that He cares so much for us.

Psalm 23 is another passage that speaks to the personal nature of God as our refuge. Likening himself as a sheep following this shepherd, David recognized that even though danger was around, he was made to feel at ease because the presence of the shepherd gave him reassurance and rest.

In whatever troubling situations we find ourselves, whether it's internal with anxious thoughts or external with things that are out of our control, there is an underlying condition by which we can rest confidently in God as our refuge. We find it in **I Peter 5:5-6**. If we are to see and experience the personal nature of God, we must come to Him in humility. Pride cuts out the legs of trusting in God from under us. Pride says I can do it myself; I don't need anyone else. I don't need God.

At one of our staff meetings while I was serving as hospice chaplain, a nurse gave a report on a new patient. He was in his late 80's. As part of the intake assessment, she informed the patient of other services offered by hospice – social work, aide, and chaplain. When asked if he wanted the chaplain to visit him, he said rather brusquely "I haven't needed God all my life, I don't need him now."

The psalmist opens by recognizing that God is personal, and it is in Him and to Him he goes for refuge.

"God is our refuge" is not only a statement of affirmation, that there is no one else who can help in this time of crisis, it is also an invitation to place our full trust in Him; to set aside any notion of pride in ourself as the source of our safety and in humility rest confidently in God as our refuge. He is a personal God who desires a personal relationship with you.

Is He your refuge? You can do that today.

The psalmist continues by stating that God as our refuge is not only personal, as our refuge He is powerful.

B. God As Our Refuge Is Powerful – v. 1b

I jotted some notes in the column of my study Bible regarding this verse.

This verse tells us the psalmist called on God.

This verse tells us that the psalmist asked for help.

This verse tells us that God would always help.

This verse tells us that the psalmist asked for help because he was facing trouble.

The psalmist confidently affirmed that God was an ever-present help in trouble. That means always. Daniel knew that refuge when he was thrown into the lions den.

Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego knew that refuge when they were thrown into the fiery furnace.

Paul knew that refuge when he was beaten, shipwrecked and imprisoned.

John knew that refuge exiled on the Island of Patmos.

Homer Dowdy knew that refuge when serving as a missionary in the Congo. He recounts his experience in the book Out of the Jaws of the Lion. After the United Nations pulled out, missionaries were taken captive. They were lined up and executed. Somehow, he timed it just right and fell to the ground as the bullets murdered those on his right and left. He laid among the corpses of his fellow missionaries until night when he escaped by climbing over a wall and into the jungle. Even though other missionaries died that day, he knew that God was his refuge, an ever-present help in time of trouble.

Because He is always with us, there is nothing we need to fear. He strengthens us and gives us the courage to face the most daunting troubles we may encounter. The word **‘trouble’** literally means ‘tight places.’ We talk about being in a tight spot.

I’m not sure I could ever be a spelunker, a person who searches caves crawling through tunnels, sometimes having to squeeze your way through. I get creeped out just thinking about it.

Some of the troubles we may go through in life can feel like crawling through a tight space. And that’s when we need to remember that God is always there with us in our trouble. Gerald Wilson calls it **“help that can be found when you need it.”**

I think we have all experienced going into a store knowing what we need and where it is. Confidently we make our way to the aisle to get our item. Along the way we encounter a bunch of salespeople all wanting to know if we need help finding something. But we have also had the experience like I did this last week going into Home Depot to buy something and do you think I could find anyone to help me?

God as our refuge is powerful. We are safe in His hands knowing that nothing can snatch us from His grip. Nothing can separate us from His love for us. **If God is for us, who can stand against us?**

(Romans 8:31-39)

Psalm 20:7 “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” He is our ever-present help in trouble.

On different occasions, Israel was rebuked by God for going to Egypt for help when facing an enemy. We even read in **II Kings 18** that Hezekiah asked help from Egypt. God wants us to trust Him as an ever-present help in our time of trouble. **Whatever you are facing today or tomorrow, can you trust the promise of God that He is your ever-present help in trouble, the one who promised that He would never leave or forsake you?**

As our refuge He is powerful. The psalmist then says that God as our refuge is permanent.

C. God As Our Refuge Is Permanent – vv. 2-3

The psalmist identifies any number of natural disasters that in and of themselves are devastating and destructive. Earthquakes. Powerful storms. Tsunamis. Tornados and hurricanes. Floods.

As I was thinking about these verses, my mind went to several natural disasters.

There was Mt. St. Helens where a volcanic explosion literally blew the top off the mountain.

Hurricane Katrina flooded New Orleans.

The Tsunami that caused so much damage to Japan.

An earthquake in Shaanxi, China claimed the lives of over 800,000 people.

At the end of **verse 3** the psalmist used the musical notation ‘**Selah**’, which scholars believe means to stop and think about it for a moment. Some musical compositions have a rest in the middle of the score. It’s more than just a place to catch your breath. It’s an invitation to pause and ponder what you just sang.

The psalmist wants us to give some thought to the worst thing imaginable in regard to the destructive power of nature and yet he begins **verse 2** with a reminder that there is nothing to fear because in **verse 1** he says that God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in time of trouble. We are permanently under His protective shelter.

Quoting God, Isaiah affirms that truth. We have nothing to fear because He is with us strengthening us with His mighty right hand (**Isaiah 41:10**).

It is a truth that is echoed throughout the pages of Scripture that no matter what turbulent times we are facing God is a permanent refuge in times of trouble. **Will we trust Him?**

Turn in your hymnals to #693.

The Lord is our permanent refuge in the time of storms.

God as our refuge is personal.

God as our refuge is powerful.

God as our refuge is permanent.

He is always there to help us through our trouble.

Looking at **verses 4-7** we note God as our river.

II. GOD AS OUR RIVER – vv. 4-7

I want you to notice the contrast between **verses 1-3** and **4-7**.

In **verses 1-3** there is the chaos and problems of storms.

In **verses 4-7** there is calm and peace in storms.

Isaiah 26:3

But notice in both sections that where God is, there is no fear if we rest and trust in faith. God not only gives us help, He gives us hope.

Here is a beautiful description of Zion the city where God resides. It is where He has placed His name forever. As one author noted, “**It is a comforting declaration of His mighty, sustaining presence in the city.**”

The psalmist uses this river as a metaphor to speak of the continuous blessings poured out on them from God even when facing danger.

In **verse 4** we see that His river is satisfying.

A. His River Is Satisfying – v. 4

It is satisfying because it brings peace and joy.

When an enemy laid siege to a city it would stop their source of water. Without water, eventually they would be forced to surrender. Hezekiah made certain they had a source of fresh water flowing into their city. They didn’t have to worry about where it was going to come from. It gave them peace of mind and joyful hearts. When they trusted God as their source of living water, it brought them peace and made them joyful.

When God reigns in our heart, when we completely trust Him in our times of trouble, His presence is like a refreshing river. As **Philippians 4:7** affirms, it settles our heart and mind with His peace. We have nothing to fear when He is present.

As long as God was present in Jerusalem residing in the Temple, Jerusalem was secure and there was peace and joy. Several decades later, when God removed His protective hand because of their continuous rebellion and lack of trust in Him, the Babylonians swept in and took them captive.

He is the river of life and has given the invitation to come and drink freely so that we might know peace and joy. Jesus explained to the woman at the well that people attempt to be satisfied with the water that the world offers, water that will never satisfy what a person truly needs. But He went on to

explain that anyone who drank from the water that He offered would have springs of living water well up to eternal life (**John 4:14**).

God says that this river which comes from Him will result in gladness, a gladness that produces eternal peace. His river is satisfying.
His river is also secure.

B. His River Is Secure – vv. 5-6

Imagine that you are one of the eight people on the ark as God closed the door. All they knew was that God had determined to destroy the whole world with a flood. I am not sure they fully knew what that meant. They had probably never seen let alone heard of a flood. When it was time, God told them to enter the ark. After they were all safely on board, He closed the door and sealed them in. They were now at his mercy. And then it happened. The rain came. But not only the rain, we read that whatever waters were below the surface kept in deep reservoirs opened up and joined the torrential downpour to flood the earth.

Imagine sitting inside feeling the ark shift a little with the rising water. It begins to rock this way and that way. At first it gently rocks from side to side, the boards creek a bit, but as the waters rise and the ground begins to break up the boat rolls more and more. You wonder what's happening outside that would cause the boat to rock as it did. Unbeknownst to them the whole earth is in chaos as tectonic plates beneath them are shifting and moving creating a whole new land mass. The raging waters were moving land and rock.

Were they afraid?

Did they clutch each other wondering what might happen to them?

Had they gone through the flight attendant checklist on what to do in case of emergency?

Did they put on life jackets?

Or did they trust in the promise of God that all who went into the ark would be safe because He was in the ark?

The psalmist says that the city would not fall because God was in it, God would help. Even

though nations would come against her, He would be their defense. No matter what natural or national disasters they may encounter, they were safe as long as God was with her. They could rest in confidence. And we can have that confidence that because God's Spirit dwells in us, we are safe from anything snatching us from His hand.

Alexandar MacLaren wrote that the city would not be moved unless its enemies could move God. That is security and a reminder that we can have the utmost confidence in God that like the city of Jerusalem, we **“will not be moved.”** Trust Him.

If we become fearful, like Peter, when we see the storms raging around us, remember it isn't God who moved. Stand secure in the river of God.

His river is satisfying.

His river is secure.

His river is sovereign.

C. His River Is Sovereign – v. 7

There is a second meaning to the word refuge. In **verse 1** it means shelter. Here in **verse 7** and again in **verse 11** where the word appears, it means fortress, a place to find protection, a place of security, a place that can never be overtaken because He is in control of it.

Now the verse says that the Lord Almighty is with us. It comes from the same root for Immanuel – God with us. The Creator God of the universe, the all-knowing, ever-present, all power God is with us to keep us safe.

I love this picture of a momma bear coming to the rescue of her cub being attacked by a mountain lion. It is a great picture of God always being there for us ready to defend those who trust in Him. He is our strong fortress, an ever-present help in time of need.

God has everything under control. He is satisfying. He is secure. He is sovereign.

Let me close with two thoughts from **verses 8-11** where we notice God as our ruler.

III. GOD AS OUR RULER – vv. 8-11

The first thought comes from **verses 8-9** where we see that it is an invitation from our ruler to behold God.

A. It Is An Invitation To Behold God – vv. 8-9

If it weren't for God's sovereign rule, we would wonder how much longer before the world totally collapses. Between civil war and unrest erupting in some countries and war between neighboring nations, the world is in turmoil. Then there is the ever-present threat of nuclear war.

Yet in the middle of the turmoil, God invites us to take a step back and witness His mighty power over the nations, to see how He has overruled by bringing wars to an end. Scripture has shown us how the nations are His puppets, that He controls who is in power for His own purpose setting up one and taking down another. We read that Cyrus was His servant and that Pharaoh was used through his hardened heart to let the people of Israel go from slavery and how he destroyed their entire army.

You may be wondering what's going to happen in our upcoming election. There may be some apprehension about what will happen to our nation. Go and exercise your right to vote but be reminded that God is the one who ultimately determines who will be elected as president. Do your civic duty, but stand back and behold what God will do.

Then in **verses 10-11** we are invited to believe God.

B. It Is An Invitation To Believe God – vv. 10-11

Believe in God's person – v. 10a

Believe in God's plan – v. 10b

Believe in God's presence – v. 11

The admonition to **"be still"** is more than resting and contemplating the presence of God. In the context of the passage, it's a call for those who are fighting to stop. The word means to cease. It carries the idea of someone stepping in between two people who are fighting and making them stop. It's a parent stepping in to separate two of their children. It's a teacher stepping in to stop a fight on the playground.

What the psalmist is telling us is that we need to stop our frantic activity that keeps us from depending on God or to stop trying to fight against or resist Him. It can also mean that we stop trying to depend on ourselves and instead trust God, surrender to His plan.

For three years Mom and Dad felt the call of God to serve Him in missions. Dad said when he retired. God said what about now. Dad said when all the kids grew up and were out of the house on their own. God said what about now. One day while hunting with a friend from church, out of the blue the friend asked if dad had ever thought about serving at Camp Barakel. The fight with God was over and he surrendered to God.

You may be wrestling with God about something that He wants you to do and you're coming up with all kinds of excuses resisting His plan for you.
I'm too old.
I don't have the resources.
I can't do that, I don't have the skills.
Who would do this if I go do that?

God is saying stop and know Me, believe in Me, Trust Me. Remember that He doesn't call the equipped, He equips the called. Believe God. He will be with you.

When we trust God, we will experience Him in new ways and see Him work through us and as the psalm ends, it will all be for God's glory. He will be lifted up and exalted by others.

Believe in God's person – that He is God.

Believe in God's plan – that it is perfect.

Believe in God's presence – that He is always with you.

It's an invitation to believe what God can do as a refuge, as our river, as our ruler. Stop striving with Him and see Him as an ever-present help in times of need. Let God be in control of your life.