

Psalms Playlist

Week 6 | Psalm 46

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When you were a kid, who was the first person you ran to when you needed help or when something scared you and you didn't know what to do? I hope you had someone who would catch you in their arms and assure you that everything was going to be O.K.

Even as adults, we can sometimes long for that same assurance, because there are times when life feels out of control, when the bad guys seem to be winning, or when we're in such a mess that we don't know where to turn. We can feel helpless to address the problems in our own lives, much less the suffering we see in others. With so much wrong in the world, to whom can we turn? Psalm 46 shows us that God will always be a source of strength and comfort.

If, like me, you sometimes struggle with worry and fear, this might be your favorite psalm on our Psalms Playlist.

Day 1

Read

Psalm 46 (NIV)

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to alamothe. A song.

*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.*

*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 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.*

- What feeling is this Psalm meant to convey?
- What assurances does it give?

Reflect

When someone is sick, they need a doctor. While they could find people who would be kind and offer sympathy, without medical training, those good intentions only go so far. When people need help, they need someone with the ability to help them.

On the other hand, there is nothing more frustrating and heartbreaking than going to someone who has the power to help, but won't. In recent protests around the nation, many African Americans have insisted that not only have they been denied help, but they have been hurt by some of the people and institutions who were supposed to provide it. Power and authority need to be coupled with the will to use them for the good.

When it comes to God, Psalm 46 assures us that God both cares about our plight and is able to do something about it. He is our refuge and our help. With arms wide open, he welcomes us to shelter in his strength. He will use his mighty power to protect us in a place of peace and safety. There is nothing and no one who can stand against our Lord. He is our fortress.

If you find yourself worrying this week, whether it's over the state of our country, or the state of your own life, let Psalm 46 speak directly to your soul and turn to God for strength and help.

Respond

Psalm 46 is worth reading out loud. You may want to take some time to do so. In an attitude of prayer, turn it into proclamation and praise.

You may also want to memorize verses 1–2, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.” Write this down and put it somewhere you will see it frequently. Make it the screen saver on your computer or phone. Repeat it several times a day, especially when a worry or fear crosses your mind.

Day 2

Read

Psalm 46 (NIV)

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to alamothe. A song.

*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.*

- Use your imagination to picture verses 2 and 3. What would you feel like if you were standing on the shore? What if you were viewing these events from a boat in the ocean?

Reflect

I love a trip to the coast. There is nothing like the feeling of standing high on a cliff above the churning sea and watching the waves crash onto the rocks below. It’s a spectacular scene from the safety of shore. I would feel very differently if I were in the surf and at the mercy of those pounding waves. The ocean is stunningly beautiful, but also dangerous. To the ancient Hebrews, the sea represented chaos. Scholars tell us that what’s being imagined in verses 2–3 is an act of “un-creation” as a work of the sea.¹

Genesis 1:1–2 tells us that in the beginning, the Spirit of the Lord hovered over the waters when the earth was formless, dark, and empty. The rest of the chapter describes how God ordered and filled creation. Verses 6–9 explains how God separated “water from water” by dividing the sky from the land, and then the land from the sea. God created a stable and hospitable environment for the plants and animals he created to fill his new world.

In the great flood depicted in Genesis 6–9, God directed the waters of the earth to exceed their boundaries in an act of judgment. According to Genesis 7:11–12, “on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the

¹ Gerald H. Wilson, [Psalms](#), vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 716.

earth forty days and forty nights.” The flood brought creation back into a state that resembled pre-creation chaos — empty and formless under the waters.² In its description in verses 2–3, Psalm 46 calls upon this imagery of roaring seas, and disappearing land — chaos threatening God’s order.

Of course, the flood story ends with a promise. In his mercy, God closed the springs, stopped the rain, and sent the winds, so the submerged land would once again appear and life had a stable place to thrive. He sent the rainbow as a promise that he would never again unleash the waters to cover the land and destroy life.

Yet, we still fear the chaos. We struggle with it in the world, in our lives, and even in our own minds. But our God is not a god of chaos, but of order. He is our refuge when the earth quakes and the storms rage. He promises us that he is always present. As we saw last week in Psalm 139, there is no place we could go where our Lord would not find us.

The Lord also promises his help. We do not have to live in fear, even if the solid ground threatens to give way beneath us. His firm and sure hand will hold us, no matter what troubles come.

- How do these verses apply to your life? Has the world been feeling chaotic to you lately? How can remembering that God is your refuge and ever-present help give you stability?

Respond

In times of fear, we have to remind ourselves of the reality of Psalm 46:1. Pray that the Lord would give you confidence in his presence and strength and refuge when chaos threatens. Pray that you would feel his peace in when the ground beneath you shakes.

Day 3

Read

Psalm 46:4–7

*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.*

² Ibid.

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

- How do these verses remind you of God's power and reign?

Reflect

It's not uncommon to find major cities that have grown up on the banks of a river. Think of London on the Thames, Rome on the Tiber, or Cairo on the Nile. Particularly in dry climates, a river provides a source of fresh water that is necessary for life.

Psalms 46 gives us an image of a city with God as its source of life and protection. The nations outside its walls may be as chaotic and turbulent in their rise and fall as the waves of the sea, but the people of God are safe within his city. God stands over and above even the most powerful empire. He could melt the foundation on which it rests with a word.

Yesterday we considered verses 1–3 and how the image of a churning sea swallowing up the mountains would have been a symbol of chaos and “un-creation” to the ancient Hebrews. In verse 4, we see the menacing seas give way to a powerful, life-giving river directed by God into his holy city. God will not abandon this place. It is here that he makes his home. All those who dwell with him will withstand any attack from the outside.

Verse 7 encourages a feeling of certainty and security by reminding us that Yahweh, Commander of Heaven's armies, resides with his people. The God of the patriarchs, who made an unbreakable covenant with Abraham, and his sons Isaac and Jacob, will not fail to keep his promises. And as those in Christ who've been grafted into Abraham's line, we can share in their confidence, because he is our God too. The Lord Almighty is here with us. Imagine the most secure fortress with the thickest and highest walls and the most impenetrable defenses. That is who God is to you. You are safe with him.

At the end of the Bible we are shown another city and another river. Allow this image to sustain you with its promise of God's faithful presence and ultimate victory over any enemy. John the Revelator is shown a vision of a New Jerusalem:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22:1)

No matter what calamity we face in this life, our eternal future is secure and it's going to be more wonderful than we could ever imagine. Know that because of Jesus, come what may, you are safe in the presence of God.

Respond

Make a list of any concerns that are occupying your thoughts today. One by one, give them over to God in prayer. Turn Psalm 46:1–2 into prayer from your own heart, “God, you are my refuge and strength, my ever-present help in trouble. Therefore I will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.”

Day 4

Read

Psalm 46:8–11

*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 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.*

- What is the Psalmist inviting his hearers to “come and see”?

Reflect

According to the Bible, conflict and violence have plagued humanity ever since the first humans sinned and were banished from the Garden of Eden. Untold numbers of people have lost their lives in wars between tribes and nations. With war comes poverty, disease, and famine so that even those who aren't killed in battle face death. Weaponry has become more and more deadly until we've reached the point where a single atomic bomb could destroy an entire city and every living thing in its border.

God has not ignored all this violence and bloodshed. A judgment is coming, and Psalm 46 invites us to stand still in awe of what God will do. He will destroy the weapons we have used

to destroy one another. The ultimate King will put an end to all violent conflict and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord. There will be nothing left to say or do — no more justifications for the taking of life, and no more battle lines to draw. The king will command “Be still, and know that I am God” and the world will be still and know.

According to one scholar, there are a variety of Hebrew words that can be translated “be still.” The term used in 46:10 “has the sense of ‘cease and desist,’ like a parent separating two struggling children or a teacher breaking up a fight in the schoolyard. It does not mean to be quiet or calm as much as it means to stop what you have been doing and be still.”³ The King will speak, and peace will come.

While American armed forces are still deployed around the globe, most of us don’t have a sense of being “at war.” Yet stories of violence fill our screens. We experience conflict in our own lives. Our weapons may be verbal and not physical, but they have the power to wound and even destroy. Let’s lay down those weapons and turn to God. Let’s heed his command to be still and know him, so we can experience his peace.

We don’t need to fear any battle, literal or figurative, that comes to our door. Because it’s easy to forget, the psalmist reminds us one more time that Yahweh the Almighty is with us and he is our fortress.

- Do you long for an end to violence and conflict? How can you pray for and work towards peace in the here and now? What can you do to help the victims of violence?
- How can you learn to “Be still and know that I am God” in your own life? How can you exalt the Lord among the nations even now in the present age?

Respond

The Psalmist begins verse 8 by inviting the congregation to “Come and see what the Lord has done.” As you go before the Lord in prayer, ask the Spirit to bring to mind things the Lord has done for you and celebrate them with thanksgiving. Now think about someone who might be encouraged by something you’ve just remembered and share it with them. Invite them to “come and see” what the Lord has done.

Day 5

It’s Friday! Let’s take one last look at our Psalm 46 and invite the Spirit to speak to us through the Word.

Reflect

³ Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 721.

Read through the Psalm 46 one more time.

Psalm 46 (NIV)

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- What images from Psalm 46 are most meaningful to you? What promises will you hold dear?
- How can you turn Psalm 46 into a prayer for you or someone you love?

Connect

The events of 2020 have made many of us feel like we are adrift on a stormy sea in a flimsy life raft. We are holding on for dear life, hoping the seas will calm, but instead another wave washes over us. With COVID-19 cases on the rise again, it's not clear when the waters will be calm.

Psalm 46 won't help us predict an end to this virus and the upheaval it's caused, but it reminds us that we have refuge in the middle of the storm. God is our strength and our help. He is our fortress in the battle and our safe harbor in a chaotic sea.

We can read Psalm 46, be comforted by its words and feel better for a moment. But if we don't live in light of the reality it depicts, this psalm will be pretty words and little else. To enjoy the safety of a fortress, you must live inside it. To receive help, you must recognize your need for it and ask. To experience peace, you must stop fighting and be still. To experience the truth of Psalm 46, you must surrender to God in every area of your life. Yield to the Spirit, rest in his love, and walk according to his ways.

Respond

We're over halfway through our Psalms Playlist. Take a moment to look up and review the Psalms we've enjoyed so far:

- Psalm 1
- Psalm 19
- Psalm 34
- Psalm 91
- Psalm 139
- Psalm 46

Which ones have resonated with you? Are there verses or concepts that are sticking with you? How are these Psalms directing your prayers? Shaping your thoughts? Affecting your actions?