

When Life Falls Apart

Psalm 46

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We're going to read all of Psalm 46, and then we'll come back and read the three stanzas of this psalm.

The psalmist says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah."

"There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah."

"Come, behold the works of the Lord, Who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah."

The phrase "falling apart" is a frequently used idiom or figure of speech. People will often say, "My car is falling apart; I need to get a new one." Or they'll say, "This house is falling apart; I may need to get a new house," or "My clothes are falling apart; I need a new wardrobe." And the list goes on. We talk about things that are falling apart. We may not be using the words literally, that things are falling apart, but we basically mean that it's coming unraveled, that we are seeing things deteriorate.

We often use that phrase for our own lives, when everything in our lives is going wrong. We'll hear people say, "My marriage is falling apart," or "My health is falling apart," or "My finances are falling apart," or "My relationships are falling apart." In general, we'll say, "My life is falling apart." We've all been there; when we face that time when we feel that everything is falling apart or becoming unraveled.

If that's your situation, Psalm 46 is for you. This psalm has been called "a prescription for confidence." I like that. You go to the doctor, you get your prescriptions filled and you take your medicine for a malady. But this is really a spiritual malady that God gives us a prescription for in Psalm 46. It's what we need to do in times when life is falling apart. Psalm 46 has also been called "the sublime expression of quiet confidence in God amid the upheavals of life."

Psalm 46 is not only a famous, well-known psalm, but it is also a famous, well-known psalm because it was the beloved of Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer. It is said that whenever he heard a discouraging word or was facing a difficulty in life, he would say to his assistant,

"Come, let us sing Psalm 46." You're familiar with the song he wrote, A Mighty Fortress is Our God. It goes,

"A mighty fortress is our God,

A bulwark never failing...."

The song was based on this very psalm, Psalm 46.

Who wrote or penned Psalm 46? We don't know; it is an author who is unknown. But we do know that it was given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. All Scripture is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Some think it was written by King Hezekiah or one of the scribes or musicians. But we know for certain it was given by inspiration of God.

What is the background and setting of this psalm? Again, we don't know. Good Hebrew scholarship—and it is my conviction, as well—believes that it was actually composed just after the terrible crisis of the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah in 701 BC. The story is found in 2 Kings 18-19. It's a marvelous story of God's deliverance in a time when everything was falling apart for the nation. They were being attacked and would have been overrun and destroyed. It seemed there was no hope, and there was no future for Judah. So they turned to God, and He sent deliverance in a powerful, wonderful way.

We, too, often face times when everything seems to be falling apart. But this psalm answers the question, "What do we do and where do we go when life falls apart?" There are three things we need to do when life falls apart. They are simple, but they are super important. Number one, we need to run to God. When life is falling apart, we need to run to God. As a matter of fact, even when we're staying close to God and in fellowship with God, it will seem like life is unraveling, but the reality is that life will not fall apart. If we walk closely with God, we won't have a life that is falling apart. The important thing is that we need to run to God.

Notice verses 1-3: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble..."—the word means "tight, hemmed-in spaces"—"...therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling."

There are a lot of things we can do in a time of crisis. But so often, people don't run to God. They run to alcohol, to drugs or to some other form of escape. They may turn inward and get depressed and discouraged. Maybe they lie in bed all day and don't get out of bed. They don't want to go to work. Maybe they don't know how to function with other people. Many times it leads to wanting to take their own lives, to just wanting to end it all; that life isn't worth living.

But the truth is that the Bible tells us that when we are in a time of crisis, run to God as our refuge. Notice how the psalm starts: "God is our refuge." It starts with "God," or "Elohim"; not Jehovah or Yahweh but "Elohim." Genesis 1:1 says in the beginning God..."—Elohim—"...

created the heavens and the earth.” This is the God of all creation. It’s interesting that the same term for God is used here. But in the Hebrew, it is even stronger; it is “God, and God alone.” We need to learn that God is our only hope in times of need, that God is our refuge. So we need not to run to man, to money, but we need to run to God.

In this text, I want to give you four reasons to run to God when life is falling apart. Number one, because God is our refuge. Verse 1 says, “God is our refuge.” In verse 7, “God...is our refuge.” In verse 11, “God...is our refuge.” At the end of each division of the psalm, we have that repeated statement, “God is our refuge.” The word “refuge” literally means “high tower.” I like Proverbs 18:10 where it says, “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.” In the ancient world in warfare, one of the best things you could have was a tower. And you wanted a strong tower.

Basically what it is saying is that in a time of trial, testing or warfare, God is our defender and protector. From up in the tower, you could shoot down onto the enemy, and when they tried to attack, they couldn’t reach you. God is a safe place. God is a hiding place. God is a place of protection.

In my life, many times when I’m overwhelmed, I turn to God in prayer. I run to God and hide in the place of refuge. I like to go to the beach, to the mountains. I like to get alone; sometimes I just get in the car and drive and don’t take my phone. Just talk to the Lord. You may have to get in your car and go to Target or Walmart and park out in the corner of their parking lot and pray to God, just talk to God. If you want to come by the church, we’ll find a quiet place for you to pray.

So we want to run to God and not to man. God, and God alone, is our refuge. What an important thing that is.

I like the song, Rock of Ages. It goes,

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me.

Let me hide myself in Thee.”

Learn to run to God to hide in Him.

The second reason we need to run to God when life is falling apart is because God is our strength. Notice it in verse 1: “God is our refuge and strength.” We don’t run to God to escape life; we run to God for strength to face life. God is not a form of escapism. We run to God for help to go back to face our problems. So you don’t want to run from your marriage or run from your problems; you want to run to God. And when you come to God, He will be your strength. What a marvelous truth that is. Not only does God protect us, but He also strengthens us. He is our stronghold and our strength.

Proverbs 30:24 says, “There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are

exceedingly wise.” Then the writer of proverbs mentions the ants, the rock badgers, the locusts or grasshoppers and the spider or lizards. Why are these creatures important? The ants gather food in the summer to get through the long winter; they’re smart. The locusts fly in groups and flock together; they’re smart. And the spiders or lizards live in kings’ palaces. We don’t live in palaces.

But verse 26 says, “The rock badgers are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags.” It’s kind of like a rabbit. A rabbit has no natural defenses, so it must hide in the rocks. The strongest predator cannot get that rabbit, because it’s in the rocks. When you’re hiding in the rocks, you’re as strong as the rocks. Even in your weakness—you could be a feeble foe, but if you crawl into that rock—the Rock is Christ—and trust in Him, He’ll protect you from the enemy.

I like the story of Paul’s thorn in his flesh, in 2 Corinthians 12:10. He said, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” Why? Because his weakness drove him to God for strength. So when you’re running to the Rock, it doesn’t matter how strong you are. It doesn’t matter how together you are. You become as strong as God, because He is your high tower and He is your strength. So the times you are overwhelmed, you run to the Rock that is higher than you.

Thirdly, we should run to God when life is falling apart because God is our help, verse 1. He’s our “refuge,” our “strength” and “a very present help in trouble.” Not only is He our helper, but He’s our “very present help in trouble.” It’s interesting that in verse 7, God “is with us”; and again in verse 11, God “is with us.” So He’s present to help us in our times of trouble. God is not a God who is far off. God is not at a distance. You may be walking in a dark place, but God is always near.

The word “trouble,” by the way, in verse 1, means “tight place.” It reminds me when Israel came out of the exodus in Egypt, and they finally came to the Red Sea. You talk about a predicament! At the front of them was the Red Sea, at their sides were the mountains—they were in a deep canyon—and at their back coming at them was the army of Egypt. It was freak-out time! If I were writing the Scriptures, I would say, “And the people of God freaked out! They went ballistic!” They screamed at Moses, “What are we going to do?!” And what did Moses say? “Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.” That’s verse 10, by the way, of our text. Moses lifted up his rod, God, in His power, parted the Red Sea and the Israelites walked across it on dry ground.

I would have loved to have been there. If I could enter into a Bible story, that’s the one I’d enter. I’d be checkin’ out the wall of water and say, “Wow! This is awesome!”

When the Israelites got through, the Egyptian army followed them and God brought the waters down and destroyed them all. So Mariam grabbed her tambourine—she got a little Pentecostal on the spot—started dancing around and hitting her tambourine and sang about the Lord’s triumph over the riders in the sea.

Whenever you’re facing an obstacle, you’re hemmed in in a tight place, God is your helper.

The fourth reason we should run to God when life falls apart is because He takes away our fears, verses 2-3. The psalmist says, "Therefore we will not fear." There are so many things that cause us to fear. We're afraid of earthquakes; he says, "...even though the earth be removed..."—We're afraid of landslides—"...and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea..."—We're afraid of storms, tsunamis or tidal waves—"...though its waters roar and be troubled..."—We're afraid of volcanoes—"...though the mountains shake with its swelling." He's using poetic language, by the way. He's describing poetically all these natural disasters that would cause our hearts to fear. But we need not be afraid.

Notice at the end of verse 3, the little word "Selah." We also see it at the end of verses 7 and 11. At the end of each division we find the word "Selah." We can't be absolutely sure what "Selah" means, but it is most often viewed as meaning "pause and meditate" or "pause and think about it." It's a good thing to do; stop and think, or stop and meditate.

What do we learn when we stop and think or we stop and meditate? That is, that we do not need to fear, because we have a refuge. "Though the earth be removed...though the mountains be carried into...the sea," though all these catastrophic events happen in the world, we don't need to be afraid, because we're trusting in God, we've run to God, we've found a refuge in God.

So what do we do when life starts to fall apart? Number one, run to God; don't run away from God. In a time of bereavement or loss or divorce or difficulty, you run to God. Number two, when life falls apart, we need to drink of God. Not only do we have a refuge in God, but God becomes our river, verse 4. "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High." And I like verse 5, "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her..."—describing Jerusalem and God's protection of the city and the people of God—"...just at the break of dawn." Verses 6-7, "The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge."

All great ancient cities were built next to or not far from rivers. Egypt was built at the Nile, Babylon was built at the Euphrates and Rome was built at the Tiber. But Jerusalem had no river. There was the Jordan River, but it was a long distance away to the east. There was the Mediterranean Sea, but it was far to the west. Jerusalem was built on a mountain, and it had no natural river or water supply.

But it's interesting that during the time that the Assyrians were attacking Jerusalem, King Hezekiah had a tunnel dug underground that was 1,770 feet long to the spring of Gihon. In the city, it was connected to the pool of Siloam. When you go to Israel, you can walk through this tunnel. What this tunnel did when Jerusalem was under siege, unbeknownst to the enemy, was that there was a stream of water flowing from Gihon springs to the pool of Siloam. "Siloam" means "peace." This constant stream brought strength and life into the city.

God is our river. God the Holy Spirit is that artesian well within the heart of the believer. When

verse 5 says, "God is in the midst of her," I believe it is describing our relationship with the Holy Spirit; how He comes to indwell us.

In John 7:37-39, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus says, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink....Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." Then John said, "But this He spoke concerning the Spirit," but "the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." So when Jesus ascended into heaven, He sent the promise of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Now we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer, which is a joy spring or well we can draw from. So God is not only our protector, our refuge, but God is a river. He is our supply.

When we drink from that river, what happens? First, He gives us joy, verse 4. I like that. "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God." The psalmist is speaking about Jerusalem, but when you drink of the Holy Spirit and are filled with the Spirit, joy comes into your life. Joy is an indication that you are a Spirit filled believer.

In Galatians 5:22, it says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." That is God's agape love and God's joy. That is God's shalom, God's peace. So God the Holy Spirit brings joy, even in the midst of trials.

When Paul and Silas were arrested in Philippi and thrown into prison, in Acts 16, at midnight, they sang praises to God, and the prisoners heard them. I can imagine Paul turning to Silas and saying, "Let's sing a song." If I were Silas, I would have said, "No, no, no! You ask that again, I'm going to slap you! I'm not going to sing a song! This isn't fair; where's God?! Why did this happen?! We didn't do anything wrong, but we're in prison!" But they didn't say that; they sang songs of praise.

The Bible says that God gives us songs in the night. He gives you songs in your heart. He puts a new song in your heart. Joy is the flag flown high from the castle of my heart when the King is in residence there. It's an indication that the Spirit of God is alive and working in your heart. I believe that God, in the midst of our trials, when everything seems to be falling apart, can give us His joy.

The second thing that happens when we drink of this river is He gives us stability, verse 5. "She shall not be moved." Again, he's talking about Jerusalem, but in the Hebrew, this means that she "won't be shaken." Sometimes when we go through a trial, we'll say, "I'm really shook up right now." But God gives us the strength not to be shaken, but rather to be stable. So He gives us His joy and stability.

Thirdly, when we drink of the river of the Holy Spirit, He gives us help, verse 5. It says, "God shall help her." God the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Helper. When Jesus promised, in John 14, to send the Holy Spirit, He said, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter." The word "Comforter" in the Greek is the word "parakletos." A parakletos is someone who comes right up beside you and strengthens you and helps you to walk. It's

actually related to the word “advocate.” It’s where we get our word “lawyer” or “defense attorney” from. So the Holy Spirit is our advocate, our parakletos, our comforter. Those are the terms for the Holy Spirit.

When you’re facing life’s difficulties and life’s hardships, He comes along side of you. He does what no one else can do; He strengthens the inner man. He gives you His peace, His joy and His love. God is our helper. So we have a refuge—we don’t have to fear, and we have a river—we will rejoice.

Nehemiah 8:10 says, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” Again, in our text, verse 7, it says, “Selah,” or “pause and think about it.” You need more joy in your marriage? You need more joy on the job? You need more joy in your service for the Lord? It comes from drinking of that river, the Holy Spirit of God.

We run to God, we drink of God, and the third and last thing we need to do when life begins to fall apart is be still and know God, verses 8-11. This is an invitation from the psalmist. He’s winding down to his repeated conclusion in verse 11. He says, “Come, behold the works of the Lord, who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

Where he says, “He makes wars cease,” and weapons are destroyed, some feel this is looking ahead prophetically to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. I think that is very possible. When Jesus returns, He will put an end to wars. “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.” That was a prophecy from Isaiah, who was living at the time when Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem under King Hezekiah. It was Isaiah’s counsel to Hezekiah to trust in the Lord, that God would take care of the problem. Indeed He did. So it could be that this was looking out prophetically, as well as the immediate fulfillment of the angel of the Lord destroying the armies of the Assyrians. So it says that He will cease wars and destroy the weapons. What a glorious truth that is.

It’s interesting that when King Hezekiah and the people of Israel were under attack—this is the background for this psalm—the enemy was yelling over the walls, “God’s not going to deliver you. God’s not going to take care of you.” But Hezekiah stood strong and firm. Finally the enemy sent a letter to the King saying that God didn’t protect the other nations and He won’t protect them. The letter said that if they wanted to survive, they needed to surrender.

Then Hezekiah took that letter to the Temple and laid it on the altar. Then he prayed and said, “God, have you read this? They’re blaspheming You! They’re defaming Your name. God, we are Your people. You need to protect us and watch over us.” So he basically said, “Lord, read this letter. Who do they think they are?! God, You’ve got a problem.” Then Hezekiah turned and walked away, but he left the letter laying on the altar.

What we do sometimes is we take our problems to the Lord, we'll tell Him all about it, but then we carry the problems back with us. The Bible says, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you." It also says, "...casting all your care on Him, for He cares for you." Don't just tell God about your problems; leave your problems with Him. Sometimes I think He says, "Well, why don't you just leave the problems with Me?"

"Oh, no, Lord. These problems and I have been down many a road together. I'll just carry them with me. It's enough for You to run the universe. I'll just carry my own problems."

Jesus said, "No; cast your cares upon Me. Come to Me, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you. Learn of Me."

Maybe today you're carrying a burden that God never intended you to carry. Throw it on the Lord, and leave it there. When we do that, we know that He is God.

The term "Be still," in verse 10, literally means "to let go," or "to take your hands off." Even when things go wrong, we throw our hands in the air. God says, "No; put your hands down." Strictly speaking, in the Hebrew it means, "Put your hands down." That means to take your hands off the problem.

Someone put it in a poem like this:

"With thoughtless and impatient hands

we tangle up the plans the Lord hath wrought.

And when we cry in pain, He saith,

'Be quiet, man, while I untie the knot.'

I like that.

So we get our hands in there and try to manipulate things and people. "My husband's all messed up," so you ladies want to fix him, work on him and whip him into shape. But you just make matters worse. "Our kids are freakin' out, so I'm gonna fix 'em, work on 'em and get 'em shaped up." Take your hands off.

This is the part we don't like. About 99.9% of the time when people come to me with their problems, these are the three things I tell them to do: run to God, surrender to the Holy Spirit and take your hands off. They don't like that last part. "Well, is there anything I can do?"

"No. Be still and know that He is God." Take your hands off. Let God deal with it. You don't think God is capable? Some say, "I just push Him away. Let me take care of it." We should trust in Him.

So King Hezekiah left the letter on the altar. The result was he saw God's glory and God's power.

The word "know" in verse 10 means "to admit; to realize; to acknowledge." So we take our hands off, and we "know" that He is God; we admit it, we realize it and we acknowledge it.

The problem is that we think we're God, and we're going to take care of the problem. One of the hardest things to realize is that "I'm not God" and then to let God be God. Knowing that God is God is a marvelous truth.

When we let God be God, what happens? Verse 10 says that God "will be exalted" and God will be glorified. "I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" You want to be glorified? Run to Him, drink of Him, take your hands off the situation and trust Him. Then God will be glorified.

In closing, notice verse 11: "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." I don't know if you noticed that verse 7 says the same thing: "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

When John Wesley, the great Methodist preacher, was dying, his last words were, "The best of all is God is with us." That's so cool. He died with a psalm on his lips.

When Jesus was born, Isaiah, the prophet, told us, "They shall call His name Emmanuel...God with us."

I want to break down verse 11. "The Lord of hosts" is one of the compound names of God. Remember we had in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd," and I pointed out that it means Jehovah Raah, the Lord my shepherd. In Psalm 46 it is a compound word meaning the Lord is the host of all the angels, Jehovah the host. It is Jehovah Shalom, the Lord our host and our peace. He "is with us."

Then He is also "the God of Jacob." It doesn't say He is the God of Abraham. It doesn't say He is the God of Isaac, even though He is. But it's encouraging to us to know that He's "the God of Jacob."

Jacob was the schemer, the conniver, the heel catcher. He tricked his brother, Esau, and stole his birthright. I'm encouraged by that; if He can be the "God of Jacob," He can be my God. There's hope for us. This Lord of angels can protect us and help us.

The story goes that when King Hezekiah prayed to God and set the letter on the altar, the Israelites went to bed that night, with the armies gathered around the city of Jerusalem. That very night, God, "the Lord of hosts," sent one angel, who destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. They lay dead on the ground. When the general got up and saw 185,000 of his troops dead, he said, "I think it's time to go home." Don't mess with angels. God is Lord of all the angels, and He will take care of us in our hour of need.

So there are three things to do when life begins to fall apart: Run to God, our refuge, and we will not fear; drink of God, our river, and we will rejoice; and we will be still and know that He is God, and He will be exalted.

Amen.