

## **When Life Falls Apart**

### **Psalm 46**

#### **Pastor John Miller**

In Psalm 46, the psalmist says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” That’s being in a tight place. “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”

This word “Selah,” which is mentioned three times in this psalm, literally means to “stop and meditate” or “pause and think.”

Continuing with 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. God is in the midst of her...”—I like that—“...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”

A story is told of Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, that whenever he heard a discouraging word, he would call his friends around him and say, “Come, let us sing Psalm 46.” And when he wrote the song, “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing,” it was based upon Psalm 46.

Psalm 46 has been called “a recipe for confidence.” I like that. When you have a malady, you go to the doctor. He diagnoses you and may give you a prescription. You go to the pharmacy to buy your prescription. You take your medicine, and it hopefully helps you. Well, God has given you a prescription. Psalm 46 is a prescription to take when life falls apart. This psalm is about what we do when life falls apart.

We do not know who penned this psalm. But we do know that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” We are in the book of Hebrew poetry, Psalms, and the Spirit of God moved the human authors to write these words. So it doesn’t really matter who the human author of this psalm is; we know who the divine author is—the Spirit of God.

It is believed by scholars, in light of this psalm, that it was penned after the tragedy when Judah was invaded by the Assyrians during the reign of Hezekiah, King of Judah, in 701BC. It is recorded in 2 Kings 18-19. It sheds background on the writing of this psalm.

Judah was being attacked by the wicked Assyrian empire. Sennacherib was the King of

Assyria, and his army surrounded the city of Jerusalem. Then King Hezekiah went to Isaiah, the prophet, and asked him, "What shall we do?" The prophet said, "Trust the Lord. Look to the Lord. Wait on the Lord and He will deliver you."

Then Hezekiah took a blasphemous letter that had been given to him by Sennacherib. In this letter, Sennacherib had said, "You think God can help you? Look at all these other nations we have conquered. They trusted their gods, but their gods did not deliver them. Your God will not help you." So Hezekiah took the letter, went to the temple and laid it on the altar. He said, "Lord, have you read this?! Have you heard what they're saying about You and about us, Your people? Lord, You have a problem. It's not our problem. It's Your problem, because we belong to you. We're Your people."

That's a great way to approach your problem. "God, I am Yours. You are my God. I belong to You. You have a problem here. You need to provide for me. You need to protect me."

So Hezekiah poured out his heart before God. And when Hezekiah woke up the next morning, he looked out over the walls of Jerusalem and saw 185,000 Assyrians that were slain by one angel of the Lord. That was a "Praise the Lord" moment!

That's why the psalmist said, in verse 9, "He makes wars cease....He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two." God is on the throne, and He will protect us and take care of us. So this is a psalm written after a time of great deliverance.

We often face times when everything seems to be falling apart. Maybe it's your marriage, your family, your children, your health, your finances or your emotions. But when life falls apart, there are three simple—but not simplistic—things that we need to do.

The first thing we need to do when life falls apart is to run to God. Not run from God; run to God. Verses 1-3 say, "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..."—that would be a frightening thing to see—"...though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah"

The word "Selah" is repeated in verses 3, 7 and 11. This word breaks up the strophes of Hebrew poetry of this psalm. It means "to pause and meditate."

So this first section says we should run to God and not run from God. "God is our refuge and strength."

What is one of our first, natural responses to a problem? We want to run away, we want to hide or we may get depressed. We pull the bed covers over our head. "I don't want to get up. I don't want to go to work. I don't want to be married anymore. I don't want to be a parent anymore." You just want to drop out of life. People commit suicide.

When life is falling apart, run to God. Don't forget that. When your marriage is struggling, run

to God. When your children are having difficulties, run to God. It's so very important.

The psalm starts with "God is our refuge and strength," so the emphasis or focus is on God. In the Hebrew, the word "God" here is emphatic; it means "God and God alone" or "God and only God."

I know that we can call friends or other people to help us and that's good. But we must first learn to go to God. He alone is our helper. God can use other people to help us, but we need to look to God and trust in God and run to God in a time of difficulty and adversity. So not man, not money, not food, not alcohol, not drugs, not some other form of escapism. Some people say, "I'm just so depressed, I'm going shopping!" Wait 'till you get the credit card bill! They say, "I'll just eat and eat." Or "I'll just sleep." Or "I'll drop out." Or "I'll take drugs." No. Run to God and to God alone.

Let me give you some reasons why we should run to God for help. Verse 1 says, first of all, that He is our "refuge." The word "refuge" in the Hebrew means "strong tower" or "high tower." In the ancient world, one of the best ways to defend yourself against an enemy was a tower, a walled city with a strong tower that was elevated so you could shoot down on the enemy and be protected from the enemy.

So God alone is our "high tower." And verse 7 also says, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" or "high tower." Then verse 11 says, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" or "high tower." It's a picture of how we can run in to God, and God will protect us and shelter us.

In Proverbs 18:10, it says, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." Whenever the Bible uses the phrase "the name of the Lord," it refers to His nature and His character. God's name isn't a high tower, but God is like a high tower. So it's a picture of what God does for us.

Picture yourself up in this high tower. The enemy can't reach you or get you. You're sheltered and protected by the Lord. We run to Him. So God protects us and He is our defense.

I note that in my life when I am distraught or overwhelmed or life seems to be unraveling, I know that I must get alone with God and seek His face. I like to get in my car, intentionally leave my cell phone behind and just drive and talk to God. Or my favorite would be to walk along a deserted beach. Or you could go to the mountains and sit on a rock overlooking a valley. Just get alone with God. That's what it means to turn to Him in prayer, to look to Him in faith and trust Him and run to Him. I like that picture. The Scripture says that He is our "rock," our "shield."

The second reason we should run to God is that He is our "strength." "God is our refuge and strength." Three times He is called our "refuge," but He is also called our "strength." I like that. God not only protects us, but He prepares us and strengthens us to go out to face the difficulties. So we don't run to Him to escape from the trouble; we run to Him to be equipped

and strengthened for the battle. It's not a form of escapism; it's a form of hiding in Him to get strength to go back to our marriage, to our family, to our life to face our problems and our difficulties. I like to think of it as He hides us in order to help us.

Proverbs 30:24-28 says, "There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise." Then he lists ants; rock badgers, which are equivalent to our rabbits; locusts; and spiders, or lizards, specifically geckos, in the Hebrew. Verse 26 says, "The rock badgers [rabbits] are feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags" or "rocks." I like that. When a rabbit hides in a rock, it's as strong as the rock. So when a predator tries to get a rabbit, if the rabbit is in a rock, it's as strong as the rock.

When we are feeble and weak, if we run to God and hide in Him, we are as strong as God. He protects us like a rock protects a feeble rabbit.

Paul the Apostle said in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 "Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me." But God allowed Paul to have an affliction, a trial, "a thorn in the flesh...a messenger of Satan to buffet" him, to keep him humble. God didn't take the "thorn" away from Paul. Rather He said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." So Paul then said, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me....For when I am weak, then I am strong."

So we may be feeble and the enemy is great, strong and powerful and our problems are overwhelming, but we pray, "Lord, lead me to the rock that is higher than I." I like that. In God I can find a place to be sheltered and strengthened in my weakness.

The third reason we run to God is that He is our "very present help," verse 1. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." I like that "present help"; He's not far removed from us.

I have a friend, but every time I call him I get his voicemail. I leave a message, but he doesn't call me back for three weeks! It's a good thing he's not God! Can you imagine calling God and saying, "God, help me!" and getting, "Sorry, I'm not here right now. I'm hangin' out with Gabriel. I'll call you later"?!

Aren't you glad that when you call the name of the Lord, you don't get His voicemail? God is always there. He's called Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." He's not far away. He's not unreachable. He never goes to voicemail. He doesn't wait to call you back. He's right there, ever present. He's a "very present help in trouble." In verse 7, He's "with us," and in verse 11, he's "with us." God is present to help us. So when you're in trouble—or literally, "a tight place"—God is your deliverer.

I think of Israel when they came out of Egypt in the Exodus. God brought the plagues and God

delivered them “with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm.” Then they faced the Red Sea. How were they going to cross it? There were mountains on the left, mountains on the right and an army attacking them from behind. They were in a tight place. It was freak-out time! “Moses, help us!” So Moses said, “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” Then Moses lifted up his rod and God parted the Red Sea.

That would have been awesome! Walking through the Red Sea as though on dry ground! There were like two giant aquariums on either side. You could see the fish swimming in them. The Israelites made it through safely, Pharaoh’s army went after them but God brought the waters down to destroy them. Then the Israelites danced and celebrated the deliverance of God on the other side of the Red Sea.

So when you’re in a tight place, stand still, look to God and watch God do a miracle of deliverance. What a blessing that is.

The fourth reason we should run to God is because He delivers us from fear. Verses 2-3 say, “Therefore we will not fear.” So we have a refuge, we have a strength from God, we have a helper in times of trouble. So we don’t need to be afraid. “...even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea...”—those are pretty scary thoughts—“...though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.” These are all natural disasters of earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis. It’s our whole life being shaken. Yet God is in control, so we don’t need to be afraid. He takes away our fears.

Then the end of verse 3 says, “Selah” or “pause and think about it.” You don’t need to be afraid. Faith and fear are mutually exclusive. When you’re afraid, you’re not trusting God. When you’re trusting God, He takes away your fear. So you don’t need to run to alcohol, to drugs or to another form of escapism. You run to God and He delivers you from your fears. “We will not fear.” The psalmist says, “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.” The psalmist also said, “In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid.”

Major Henry Livingston, Jr. put it in a poem:

“Should storms of sevenfold thunder roll,

And shake the globe from pole to pole,

No flaming bolt shall daunt my face,

For Jesus is my Hiding Place.”

I like that.

So no matter what happens in the economy, no matter what happens politically, no matter what happens in our nation morally, God is still on the throne. He is our strength, our refuge, our

shield, our defender. We do not need to be afraid.

The second thing we need to do when life falls apart is to drink of God the Holy Spirit. We run to God the Father and we drink of God the Holy Spirit, 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. 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."

You say, "Well, Pastor John, I don't see any reference there to the Holy Spirit."

I believe it is implied in the graphic imagery that is used here. Whenever the Scriptures speak of drinking, it speaks of the Holy Spirit. When we come to God to drink, we're drinking of His Holy Spirit. The Bible says we are to drink of the Spirit. In John 7:37-38, Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink....Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." Jesus was saying that in your innermost being shall be an artesian well called the Holy Spirit, who will strengthen you, comfort you and guide you in your hour of need. So I believe the imagery here is that of the Holy Spirit.

All the ancient cities of the world were built on rivers, because they needed water. Egypt was built on the Nile, Babylon was built on the Euphrates, Rome was built on the Tiber, but Jerusalem was not built on a river. There was no natural river for Jerusalem. It was built on a mountain called Mount Zion. But there was an underground spring known as Gihon Springs. King Hezekiah dug a conduit from the city of Jerusalem out under the wall to the Gihon Springs that brought the water over 1,700 feet from the springs to the city of Jerusalem.

Today when you take a tour of Jerusalem you can visit Hezekiah's tunnel. You can walk from outside the city through the tunnel and come up inside the city of Jerusalem where the pool of Siloam is, the pool of peace.

When the Assyrians had surrounded and besieged the city of Jerusalem, unbeknownst to them, the people in Judah had an underground, perpetual spring of water to sustain them.

What a beautiful picture that is of God the Holy Spirit living in us. We have a source of refreshment, of comfort and of strength that the world doesn't see or understand.

How can you handle life when things are falling apart? You just lost your husband. You just lost your wife. Or the grief of all griefs, when you lose a child. I've seen so many parents bury children. Their hearts are broken. At a time like that, only one thing will do: an inner, artesian spring or well of the Holy Spirit given to us by God.

Notice that when we have the Holy Spirit, He gives us joy, verse 4. "There is a river whose streams shall make glad..."—it speaks of the joy of the Lord—"...the city of God." So it's joy that comes from the Spirit of God inside the child of God. Galatians 5:22-23 says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-

control.”

When Paul and Silas were put in prison, in Acts 16, at midnight they sang praises to God, and the prisoners heard them. Job 35:10 says, “[God] gives songs in the night.” That’s what happens when we drink of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit also gives us stability, verse 5. “She shall not be moved.” The psalmist is talking about Jerusalem at this time of the siege. But the reason Jerusalem is not going to be moved is because it has those artesian wells. And if you have the Holy Spirit, you’ll not be shaken and you’ll not be moved. He’ll strengthen your marriage, your friendships and fellowships, on your job and in your trials.

The Holy Spirit will also give us help, verse 5. “God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.”

Did you know that the Holy Spirit is called “the helper”? He’s also the “Parakletos” or “the comforter.” He comes along side of you to help you. If you’re a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit; God is in you. You’re never alone; He’s always present. He’s there to strengthen you, to comfort you, to guide you and to help you through life’s difficulties and trials.

So we have a refuge—we don’t need to fear and we have a river—and we can rejoice. Nehemiah 8:10 says, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” God’s joy will strengthen you. “Selah.” So let the Spirit of God fill you, as a child of God, bringing you joyfulness, thankfulness and humility.

Not only do we run to God when life falls apart and drink of the Holy Spirit and let Him fill our lives, but we should also, thirdly, be still and let God glorify Himself in our trials and in our problems, verses 8-11. Verse 10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Verse 8 says, “Come, behold the works of the Lord, who has made desolations in the earth.” This was probably penned by Hezekiah after he saw what the angel of the Lord did to the Assyrians. Verses 9-11 say, “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...”—which is “Jehovah Sabaoth,” the host of angels—“...is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

How fitting that the psalmist refers to the Lord Jehovah as the Lord of host of angels. One angel slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers that day. The moral of the story is don’t mess with angels. The Assyrian General Schenker woke up the king, and he looked over his troops and said, “It’s time to go home.” God defended His people.

Now what does it mean when the psalmist says, “Be still, and know that I am God”? I like that. In the Hebrew, the phrase “Be still” literally means “Take your hands off.” Technically it means “Let your hands hang down.” Or it means “Quit messing things up.”

Many times we mess things up, because we think we’re God and we can work it out. “I’ve got

this husband who needs help! I'm gonna fix him." That's not a good idea. "I'm gonna roll my sleeves up and whip him into shape!" No. Take your hands off. "My marriage is a disaster. I'm going to fix it!" No. Run to God and yield to the Holy Spirit. Take your hands off. Let God deal with your problem.

The reason I like this picture is that the Bible says, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you." And Peter says, "...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."

When Hezekiah got the letter from the King of Assyria saying that God would not help them and he should surrender to the Assyrians now, Hezekiah took it to the temple and literally laid it on the altar. It is a picture of, "God, I give it to You. God, take care of it."

If you try to defend yourself, God will let you and you'll fail. If you lean on the arm of the flesh, God will let you and you'll fail. But if you'll abandon self-help, if you'll abandon man's help and you will look to God for your help, God will not fail you. He will not disappoint you. God promises you that.

I can tell you that in my own life when I've cried out to the Lord, God has answered and been there to help me and to sustain me. He is faithful and will deliver you. But you have to trust in Him.

So take your hands off your marriage, take your hands off your family problems, take your hands off your health problems, take your hands off your emotional problems and give them to God. "...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."

Someone said:

"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. He's saying, "Get your hands out of this situation. Let me take care of it." How marvelous.

Then notice what he says, in verse 10. "Know that I am God." So we have a refuge—we don't need to fear; we have a river—we don't need to faint; we have a revelation—we don't need to fret, because God will reveal Himself as God in our lives. And we will experience the glory of God.

What it means to know that He is God is that we admit and acknowledge that He is God, and we are not. It's as simple as to say, "I'm not God." The psalmist says, "When my heart is



overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” I like that. It’s to know that I am not God, that He is God, and that we can trust God with all of our problems. He will deliver us.

And verse 10 says, “I [God] will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth!” God will be glorified. In verse 10, twice the psalmist uses the word “exalted.”

What God wants to do in your life is to be exalted. He wants you sometimes to get so desperate, so down, that you come to depend on Him, so that He delivers, He is glorified, He is magnified and He is exalted.

Then in verse 11, the psalmist calls God “Jehovah Sabaoth,” which means “the Lord of angels.” The verse says, “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” So we have His presence.

Why does it say “the God of Jacob”? Why not “the God of Abraham”? Why not “the God of Isaac”? I believe it says “the God of Jacob” in this case, because Jacob was a conniver, a schemer, a “heel catcher.” He was always manipulating, always trying to work things out, always trying to scheme. Until he had a wrestling match with the angel of the Lord. He was crippled and walked with a limp. Then God changed his name from Jacob to Israel, governed by God. So Jacob goes from schemer, conniver, “heel catcher” to Israel, a man controlled by God. His crippling, his limp was the crippling that crowned him.

You may be walking with a limp—He may cripple you—but He only cripples you in order to crown you, to teach you about His all-sufficient grace. So the sooner you come to the end of yourself, the sooner you admit, “You’re God and I’m not,” the sooner you take your hands off the situation, the sooner you will run to God as a refuge. The sooner your drink of the Holy Spirit, the sooner God can work on your behalf and God will be glorified.

So we run to God—He’s our refuge, and we don’t need to fear; we drink of God—He’s the river and we rejoice; and we will be still and know that He is God—let Him be exalted in our lives.