

An Ever Present Help in Trouble
Psalm 46

Pastor Tom
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It's a message that most of us have heard many times. It's a message that can save our lives. Yet most people ignore it partially or completely. What message am I talking about? The safety presentation at the beginning of a flight. You know how it goes. The plane begins to back up and the attendant at the front asks for your attention. The other attendants stand in the aisle. They show you how to put on your seatbelt. They point to where the life jackets are and where the oxygen masks will come out in case of a loss in cabin pressure. They also instruct you to locate the nearest exit closest to your seat so you will know where to go if the flight goes down. And they point to the lights on aisle that will illuminate if you need to evacuate.

These messages contain critical information we need to know in case the plane gets in trouble. Yet most of us pay little attention to it. Why? It is very unlikely that we will go on a plane that crashes on land or at sea. In fact the odds of us being in a plane crash at worst are 1 in 5.4 million or 0.0000019%. That means that 5,399,999 flights will give their passengers a safety message that they will not need to act on. Only 1 flight will provide information actually needed for the trouble to come. So though the airline does its job in preparing us for trouble, we most often don't even listen to it because we're convinced that kind of trouble won't happen to us.

I wonder if we take the same approach to life in general. We live hoping we won't have trouble. Then if it comes we try to get through it as quickly as possible so we can resume our trouble free lives. But is that a wise way to live? What do you think the odds are that we will experience trouble in our lives? Well, Jesus Himself tells us the odds. They are 100%. He reveals this in John 16:33. "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world."

So in light of this probability, how are you preparing for the trouble that will come along in our lives? As we go into September and the new school and ministry year, what can we do to be more prepared for trouble than we might be right now?

Well many of the Psalms speak about this. One Psalm describes the help we can find in trouble. We've sang portions of it already today. It's the Psalm that inspired Martin Luther to write the Hymn "A Mighty Fortress is our God." It's the Psalm that contains the line "Be still and know that I am God." It will show us ways God can help us in times of trouble. So we will work through the Psalm to discover these ways. And then we will flesh out how to apply this to our

lives. My hope is that if you are currently going through a time of trouble, you will gain encouragement as you discover the ways God can help you. If you're not going through trouble, you will be better equipped to prepare for the next bit of trouble that comes into your life. So please find Psalm 46 in your Bibles or on your phone. It's found on page 412 in the Bibles in front of you.

Psalm 46 (ESV)

To the choirmaster. Of the Sons of Korah. According to Alamoth.^[a] A Song.

46 God is our refuge and strength,
a very present^[b] help in trouble.

²Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
³though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

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

⁵God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.

⁶The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

⁸Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.

⁹He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.

¹⁰"Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!"

¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

How can God help in times of trouble?

1 - God is a refuge, strength and very present help in trouble. This comes from the first phrase of the Psalm. It provides great reassurance and comfort. A refuge is a safe, protected place like a cove with quiet water that a ship could go in to for safety during a storm. A refuge does not mean that there is no storm. It is a place or in this case a person we go to while the storm rages.

Strength is power or might. One with strength can exert or withstand great force. It gives the ability to do what is desired, intended or necessary. God's strength is God's power that empowers the weak for action.

The Psalmist declares that this God who is our refuge and strength is also a very present help in trouble. He is an exceedingly available helper in trouble. So this gives us a picture of a God who does not stand far off with His arms folded when we go through trouble. Nor does He dribble out His support one drop at a time. This picture paints God as being right there with us walking us through the troubles we face.

Then the Psalmist shares how this reality of God's help can impact our lives. Verse 2 – "Therefore, we will not fear." The more we discover, internalize and experience God as our refuge, strength and very present help in trouble, the more we will not fear no matter what comes. "Oh, but you don't know that kind of trouble I face Tom." No I don't. But look at the trouble this Psalmist describes. Verse 2 again – "Therefore we will not fear though the earth give way." That pictures the earth on a foundation that shifts. Imagine a balcony held up by some pillars and then the pillars give way. The balcony will collapse. But here they say we will not fear even if the earth's foundations give way.

And we will not fear though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea. If you spent any time by the mountains this summer, you were hopefully awed again by their magnitude and strength. Yet imagine a disaster so widespread that mountains get moved to the middle of the ocean. The Psalmist says that even were that to happen, we will not fear because God is a greater refuge, strength and help.

Then he paints a picture of a violent sea. Verse 3 – "Though its waters roar and foam." You know when you're by the ocean and you can just hear its waves roar as they crash on the rocks or shoreline. Sometimes you see foam from the air that was just submerged by that crashing wave rushing up to the top again. It is an image of a threatening and surging sea.

So this is a talk about a disturbance of the earth on a mammoth scale. They describes the earth experiencing trouble. Yet because God is their refuge, strength and ever present help they will not fear. What about us when some trouble threatens our lives? How do we respond when someone or a group of people doesn't like us or we face a major change at work or in our family or someone causes havoc in our life or relationships or there's some significant health issues facing us or a love one? Students going back to school you face those initial challenges of wondering how you will do, if you will fit in, if you will find friends, if you will find your way. Will you live in fear? Or will you turn to God as your refuge, strength and very present help with any trouble you face?

Tim Keller writes "God is the refuge. God is a stronghold or city that cannot be bombed or destroyed. Though earthquakes and tidal waves dissolve the solid world and civilizations melt, his rule is unshaken. If God is with you, even the worst thing that happens to you – death – only makes you infinitely happier and greater." (The Songs of Jesus, 96). So God is our refuge, strength and ever present help.

Verses 4-6 show us more ways God helps in trouble. **2 - God is in the midst of His people and helps them.** The scene changes starting in verse 4. From a surging and threatening sea to a peaceful river. "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High." In the Bible, a river is often a picture of life flowing from God Himself. Here God is pictured as dwelling in a city. It is His holy habitation. We think immediately of the physical city of Jerusalem where God's temple was built. But "city of God" is another way of saying people of God. So if God dwells in His city that means He is present with His people.

Notice the description of God and the city in verse 5. "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved." Now in verses 1-3, something else got moved. "Though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea." So the earth can experience this tremendous upheaval. But when God is in the midst of His people, they will not be moved. They are secure in His presence.

The end of verse 5 says "God will help her when morning dawns." That's the image of coming through a dark night to suddenly see by morning light a deliverance from God. Some commentators think this refers to actual historical events. It may be 2 Chronicles 20 when Jerusalem was besieged by the Ammonites and Moabites. King Jehoshaphat prayed for the Lord's deliverance. When they went out in the morning, they discovered the enemy had slaughtered one another. Or it

may refer to the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem when Hezekiah was king in 2 Chronicles 32. One morning Jerusalem woke up to discover that the Lord had killed 185000 Assyrian soldiers. In both cases, the Lord is in the midst of His people and helped them when morning dawned.

He helps even in the midst of international turmoil. Verse 6. “The nations rage and kingdoms totter. He utters His voice. The earth melts.” There might be war and threats of war and trade wars and China gathering its troops towards Hong Kong and the Amazon forest on fire. Yet God is not moved. He simply has to speak and the entire earth would melt. That’s how powerful He and His word are.

Then we see another reassurance of God’s help in verse 7 which turns into a chorus or repeated phrase in this Psalm.

3 – The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Now for this to have any punch, we have to understand what these titles mean. The Lord of hosts refers to the Lord of many angels or angel armies. This is another picture of God’s strength. Though the Lord Himself is sufficient for all our needs, the fact that He has angel armies at His disposal further reassures me of His very present help when we face trouble. We will not know until eternity how many times God sent His angels to help us in times of trouble.

Then we see the God of Jacob is our fortress. Well who was Jacob and what did God do for Him? Jacob was Abraham’s grandson. God saw Jacob through all his personal deception and sins. God saw Jacob through the lonely journey away from his family where at Bethel, Jacob witnessed a stairway to heaven. God was with Jacob who suffered the deceit of his uncle and was given a woman he did not love for his wife. God was with Jacob who loved Rachel but she could not bear him children. Yet God blessed Jacob with 12 sons and many flocks. God wrestled with Jacob and gave him the name Israel. God was with Jacob; who was bereaved by the apparent death of his favorite son; who later discovered his son was second in command in Egypt; who died in Egypt but was buried in the Promised Land. The God of Jacob brought Jacob through mistreatment, bereavement, trouble, his own character flaws and deception by his uncle and his own sons. Jacob experienced God as his refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

The fourth way God helps us in this Psalm is found in verses 8-10. **4 – God has the supreme power to overwhelm nations and end wars.** Verse 8 “Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.” How are desolations on the earth encouraging? Who has he desolated? Well it seems like it’s the warring nations or those at

war with Him. Verse 9 – “He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.” These are all images of stripping an ancient army of any power to fight. If you break their bows they can’t reuse them. If you shatter their spears, they can’t put them back together. If you burn their chariots they can’t use them again. These are not Chariots of fire but chariots on fire.

So the famous verse 10 may very well be directed originally to these nations or powers that wage war against God. “Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted on the earth.” So it’s useless to keep fighting God. He is the supreme God. It’s almost like God says to the warring nations what Jesus said to the roaring seas. “Peace. Be Still.” We need to stop fighting God and let Him be God in our lives. When might verses 8-11 happen? Likely it’s pointing to the end of time when God returns to defeat His and our enemies. This can encourage us today in that even though we see nations rage and kingdoms threaten and evil seeming to advance and the devil working away at his schemes, in the end they will all be defeated. We can rest in this future hope as a very present help of the Lord today.

This is the God who can help us in times of trouble. The New Testament picks up this theme again and again. Jesus said in John 14:1 - Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. John 14:27 – Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Romans 8:35 – Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble (tribulation) or distress or persecution . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort who comforts us in all our afflictions (trouble), so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction (trouble), with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

But some of you may not be convinced of this. Is God really reliable when it comes to trouble? Maybe you have experienced trouble and you didn’t sense God help through it. You didn’t get the answer you were hoping for. You’re not convinced. This happened to a man named Michael Shermer a former Christian who now edits the magazine “Skeptical Inquirer,” and does not believe in God’s existence. Lee Strobel in his book, Case for Miracles, interviewed Shermer and explored what led Shermer to abandon the Christian faith. He had a girlfriend in college named Maureen. He describes her as sweet and a wonderful girl from Alaska. She worked for an inventory firm. They would drive in the middle of the

night to take inventory while a business was closed. “One night in the middle of nowhere, the van veered off the highway and rolled over several times. She didn’t have her seatbelt on and she broke her back. She was paralyzed from the waist down and spent 6 months in hospital. Shermer says he visited her almost every day.

He had already abandoned his Christian faith at that time. But there was a point when he asked God to heal her. Strobel asked Shermer what his prayer was like. Shermer answered, “I took a knee and bowed my head. I was as sincere as I have ever been. I asked God to overlook my doubts for the sake of Maureen, to heal her, to breathe life into her. As best as I could, I believed. I wanted to believe. If there was a God who was powerful and loving, if there was any justice at all anywhere in the universe, then surely He’d help this precious, caring, compassionate young woman.” (Strobel – Case for Miracles 45). Strobel then asked, “What happened?” Shermer answered, “Nothing.” “So how did you react,” asked Strobel?” Shermer responded “I wasn’t very surprised. I thought ‘well there probably is no God. Stuff just happens.’ This was pretty much the final nail in the coffin of Shermer’s faith.

So when God doesn’t answer our prayers like we want Him to, does that mean He is only sometimes a very present help in trouble? But there are others who have responded differently when God’s answer to prayer is no. Lee Strobel’s wife suffers from the constant pain of fibromyalgia. She is a devoted follower to Christ and has not been healed. Yet both she and Strobel continue in faith. Strobel also interviewed Douglas Groothuis (Pronounced Grote-hice) professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary. His wife Becky suffered from a condition called primary progressive aphasia. It is a progressive, incurable and fatal brain disease. She gradually lost her mind forgetting how to talk. She passed away I think in the past year. He chronicles their journey in his book “Walking through twilight.”

When asked how he was doing during the worst days, Grote-hice would answer “I am hanging by a thread, but fortunately that thread is knit by God.” And yet he remains a committed Christian. He says some profound things about relating to God especially when we don’t get what we want. He writes, “I’m not giving up on my faith. I’m not walking away from God. I’m not leaving Becky, and I’m not abandoning hope. But sometimes the most appropriate step when your pleas for healing aren’t being answered is to pray a prayer of relinquishment.” (Case for Miracles, Kindle, Location 3723). And he also says this – “Faith is not measured by our ability to manipulate God to get what we want; it is measured by our willingness to submit to what he wants.”

None of this is easy. But if you're here today and question whether God is really an ever present help in trouble, know that there are many people who have walked through trouble and have seen God's help in different ways. Even though they have not gotten what they wanted yet they remain committed Christians. I encourage you to explore their stories and the way they have seen God's help through their trouble.

So now let's finish off with some practical ways to apply this. We started by asking the question "are you prepared for trouble in your life?" We've seen 4 ways God helps in trouble from Psalm 46. . Even if He does not give us what we want, He's still there in our trouble. **So build your life on God so you will be trained to rely on Him when trouble comes.**

I want to flesh this statement out by asking two questions about it. **How do we rely on God during trouble?** These will come quick with one Scripture example.

Call out for His help and intervention. 2 Chronicles 20:12 – O Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.

Run to Him for refuge and protection. Psalm 18:2 – "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge."

Lean on His strength in weakness. 1 Samuel 30:6-7 - David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord. Psalm 27:14 – Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

Trust in His wisdom when speechless. Luke 12:11 – When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say. Romans 8:26 – In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Turn to Him for healing. 1 Peter 2:24 – He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. Psalm 147:1-3 – "How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds.

So those are some ways we rely on Him in trouble. **How do we build our lives on God to gain experience in relying on Him?** It involves a daily walk of learning more about God and growing closer to Him. **3 Basic Christian Practices – Bible Reading; Prayer; Pursue Worship and Fellowship within Christian community.** The more we get to know God; the more we learn about His character, acts in history, faithfulness, dependability, the more we will trust Him. The more we pray, the more we will naturally turn to prayer. The more we fellowship with other believers the more encouragement we receive to continue to trust God when trouble comes.

We must acknowledge our dependence on God now. Most people don't admit their need for God until they are forced to in some time of desperation. But we depend God all the time to live every day. 1 Peter 5:6-7 state – "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." Admit fallenness; brokenness; need; wounds and weakness. Then when trouble comes we will much more naturally turn to the one we already depend on for His great help.

If you don't know God, our ever present helping God calls you to come into a relationship with Him. God created the world and humanity good. But through the first couple's desire to define good and evil by themselves, the world got messed up. The violence, conflict, hatred and bitterness that dominates our world today all comes from humanity's desire to define good and evil apart from God. Each one of us joined in this rebellion. But God didn't leave the world and humans to destroy themselves. He intervened by sending Jesus. He was God's Son and the only human who ever lived a completely obedient life. He also was willing to pay for the rebellion of humans. So He gave Himself up to die on the cross. God accepted Jesus self sacrifice as payment for our rebellion. So anyone who comes to God honestly and earnestly admitting the truth about their own rebellion and expresses the desire to trust their life to Jesus, He will receive. He will forgive. He will accept and adopt into His family. He will become your refuge, strength and a very present help in trouble. Please receive Him today.

If you are in trouble right now, turn to Him today. If you're not in trouble right now, please prepare for it with a daily walk of reliance upon Him. So let's come to God with our troubles now.