

HOW DOES GOD AFFECT MY LIFE? (Part 1)**PSALM 46**

What would you do to feel safe and secure? The Survival Condo Project is not your ordinary condo development. It's housed inside a missile silo built to withstand a direct nuclear blast. It actually contained a nuclear warhead from 1961 to 1965. Larry Hall got the idea to convert the missile silo into the ultimate bomb shelter after the attacks on September 11th. He purchased the silo for \$300,000 in 2008. Though the exact location is top-secret, Hall says it's north of Wichita, Kansas, surrounded by rolling hills and farmland. The construction costs were nearly \$20 million. The once-vacant chamber now has 15 floors divided into 12 single-family homes, as well as common areas and space for operations. A full-floor unit covers about 1,800 square feet and can accommodate six to 10 people. The typical full-floor apartment includes three bedrooms, two baths, a kitchen, a dining room, and a great room. Tenants will hardly be roughing it. The homes each have a dishwasher, washer and dryer, and windows fitted with LED screens that show a live video of the prairie outside. A full-floor unit is advertised for \$3 million, and a half-floor unit goes for half the price. Good luck getting in. The units sold out before construction ended in 2012. But don't lose heart! Hall has a new, second silo that's supposed to be completed this fall. About half of those new units have been sold so – quick - check it out this afternoon at survivalcondo.com.

Feeling safe and secure is important to us human beings. You could even say it's a necessity. Nevertheless, we live in a world of countless threats that seems to be getting greater every day. I still remember when your family and friends could escort you right up to the gate onto the plane before your flight. Now there are several levels of security and your family and friends are better off just dropping you off at the front door of the airport. Besides terrorism, we share very real threats with humanity in general: nuclear holocaust, economic meltdown, pollution of various kinds, wildfires, tornadoes, pandemics, hurricanes, just to name a few. Then there are other kinds of threats that present great, diverse dangers to us personally or individually: a troubled marriage heading for divorce, a rebellious child from whom we feel increasingly estranged, addiction, sexual abuse or harassment, chronic illness, racism, loss of a job, bankruptcy, terminal disease, the death of someone we love deeply, just to name a few.

This summer we've been considering several psalms all of which answer some big questions about life and living. A relationship with God affects our lives in so many ways. Psalm 46 is a reminder that God provides a kind of safety and security found nowhere else in all of the universe. Let's read it now and think about it together. Psalm 46 reminds us that, first of all...

GOD PROVIDES SHELTER.

"God, you're such a safe and powerful place to find refuge!" (Ps. 46:1 TPT) If you've been a follower of Jesus for a while, you're very familiar with that kind of statement. The claim itself isn't surprising. It's truly living into it and believing it that's challenging. Whoever wrote the psalm used images which his original audience could understand. Here he compares God to a walled city or a great fortress. "The LORD of Heaven's

Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.” (Ps. 46:7, 11 NLT) Cities back in those days had 40 foot high walls 3-6 feet wide. People from the surrounding villages fled into these walled cities when an enemy army approached. A walled city was the safest place people could imagine back then. God is like that said the psalmist. He builds walls around you. He’s a place of refuge, a great shelter, a walled city where you will be protected from your enemies. Perhaps, if the psalmist had lived today, he would describe God as the ultimate bomb shelter or the ultimate doomsday shelter.

The psalmist implies the kind of shelter, security, and safety God provides is unmatched by anything and anyone else. Again, it’s easy to accept that claim as a wonderful theological truth, but not so much on a practical, everyday level. When it comes to those big threats that affect everyone, most of the time we want the government to do far more for us that it can ever really do. It’s supposed to protect us from nuclear holocaust, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, poverty, as well as disease, and expensive health care costs. And when it comes to the more individual, personal threats – let’s face it – we’re more likely to look for shelter in our own financial resources, family and friends, or our own intelligence or abilities. Yes, we know God is there, but accessing Him as our shelter in any meaningful way can be kind of a stretch.

Undoubtedly, there will come times in your life and mine when all we can do is hide in God and ask Him to shelter us from some great adversity raining down upon us. Who was it that said, “You will never know God is all you need until God is all you have.” In those moments we will have to trust God to intervene and do something to help us face insurmountable odds. There’s an amazing story in the Old Testament that some scholars feel is actually the historical background to or inspiration for Psalm 46. It’s found in Isaiah 36-37 if you want to read it for yourself some time. At the time, the Jewish people lived in two separate kingdoms right next to each other: Israel and Judah. Hezekiah was the king of Judah. The kingdom of Israel had already been overrun by Sennacherib, the king of the mighty Assyrian Empire. He was on his way to Egypt conquering every kingdom and nation along the way. The little kingdom of Judah stood in his way. He sent a letter to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem which was an arrogant ultimatum. He was prepared to invade the city and make all Judah subservient to him. Other nations had trusted in their gods to deliver them, but they’d been unable to withstand Assyrian power. Yahweh, Judah’s God, would face the same result. King Hezekiah could save a lot of lives if he just gave up. Sennacherib demanded an unconditional surrender or else much destruction and many deaths.

To Hezekiah’s credit, he quickly figured out this was a crisis only God could avert. What was the first thing he did when he received Sennacherib’s letter? He laid it out before the Lord and he began to pray. That’s exactly what you and I should do when trouble of any kind comes into our lives. Pray first. Not second, not as an afterthought, not as an “add on” to whatever else you’re doing. Find a place, lay out the issue before the Lord like Hezekiah did, and stay there until you sense God’s presence surrounding you. Hide in God. Take shelter in the Lord. Isaiah, the prophet, came to Hezekiah and warned him not to enter into any kind of political compromise with Sennacherib in order to save Jerusalem. Instead, he should trust in the Lord only. Hezekiah followed

Isaiah's advice although he must have been greatly tempted to ignore it. It was the defining moment in Hezekiah's reign. Would he take shelter in the Lord completely and fully to deliver Jerusalem and Judah or would he opt instead to work out some kind of political compromise in his own strength? The result is one of the most amazing stories in the Bible. The Assyrian army advanced, surrounded the city of Jerusalem, and prepared to attack it. Everyone in Jerusalem was gripped with fear waiting for the inevitable invasion. Then it happened! A mysterious plague swept through the Assyrian forces and 185,000 of them died of it in one night. 185,000! Sennacherib's remaining soldiers were forced to retreat. The Assyrians returned to the capital city of Nineveh thoroughly beaten and defeated – not by Hezekiah's wheeling and dealing, or Judah's armies, or Jerusalem's walls – but by the Lord's great and powerful intervention. Not long after, Sennacherib himself was assassinated by his sons.

When you think of that specific story, it fits in well with what the psalmist says here in Psalm 46. "...The city of our God, the sacred home of the Most High. (The psalmist is thinking about Jerusalem there.) God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed. From the very break of day, God will protect it. (Indeed, He did!) The nations are in chaos, and their kingdoms crumble! (Talking about you, Assyria)... The LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress." (Ps. 46:4-7 NLT)

What's the lesson here? What's applicable to your life and mine? God is our safe place. God is our shelter - our bomb shelter, our doomsday shelter. We discover God is our only real security when we put our faith in Him. The government's not your security. Your own intelligence and resources are not your shelter. I'm not saying God will deliver you from every difficult experience in life. The Bible makes it clear even God's people will suffer and struggle. But where are you going to find security, safety, and shelter in the ultimate sense of those words? We will live without fear when we know nothing can destroy our eternal relationship with Almighty God: not what other people say about us or do to us, not life's disappointments or train wrecks, not illness, and not even death itself. Over in the New Testament, the great Christian leader, Paul, came to the same conclusion as the psalmist. "And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:38-39 NLT) Because Paul knew God was his ultimate shelter, safe place, refuge, and security in life, no prison could ever silence him and no threat could terrorize him. We don't know for sure, but many historians think Paul was executed by the Roman Emperor, Nero. Beheaded. If so, I'm quite certain Paul had a powerful sense of God's presence that no ax could ever touch. How does God affect your life and mine? Well, He provides shelter – a kind of shelter you will find nowhere else. I also hear the psalmist reminding us that...

GOD PROVIDES STRENGTH.

“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.” (Ps. 46:1 NLT) Or, another translation puts it like this, “God, you’re such a safe and powerful place to find refuge! You’re a proven help in time of trouble—more than enough and always available whenever I need you.” (Ps. 46:1 TPT) It’s appropriate to think of God as a fortress, a bomb shelter, as Someone in whom we can hide and receive protection. But that analogy has a sort of defensive, passive connotation. God is more than Someone who simply provides us with protection against life’s troubles. He provides shelter, absolutely. But He also provides strength or helps us in an active way. He’s the One who acts on our behalf and empowers us. He goes on the offensive when it comes to our troubles in life. The literal Hebrew there in verse 1 tells us God is “a help in trouble He is found to be abundantly.” When we know God is on our side, we can confidently expect Him to intervene and do what we most need done in whatever trouble we face. We will see Him begin to work - circumstances getting rearranged, other people’s hearts being prepared and made ready, situations changing – so that the resolution of our troubles is eventually accomplished.

Because God’s strength and help is so immense doesn’t mean, however, that you and I can become lazy and irresponsible. It’s not a “let God do it all” attitude. That’s not the effect of God’s help or strength. No, the strength God gives produces confidence in us not laziness. It inspires our participation in whatever problem God’s strength is being applied to. It doesn’t mean we get all passive and expect God to do everything for us without our involvement. As we face the inevitable challenges of life, the obstacles, the hurdles, the big bumps in the road, God’s strength enables us to follow His direction and obey His orders - not go off and take a nap, so to speak.

So, how do we tap into God’s strength? Prayer might be the single best way. Prayer sounds a little passive, however, doesn’t it? Maybe that’s because we fail to see prayer for what it is – a powerful, effective weapon. The Bible says prayer is essential for what Christians call spiritual warfare. We’re told to put on spiritual armor. An essential piece of spiritual armor is prayer. Do you think of prayer as a weapon? It is. “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.... Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers.” (Eph. 6:10-11, 18 NLT)

Back in 2010 a group of eight people from two churches felt called to the Detroit Boulevard neighborhood of Sacramento. It was known as one of the most notorious crime-ridden neighborhoods in all of Sacramento. Each and every house in that neighborhood was a place of danger. Nevertheless, this group of eight decided to walk through the neighborhood praying over each home. They asked Jesus to exert His authority over violence, addiction, and satanic oppression. They walked through the neighborhood, praying over each home, and rebuking the demonic strongholds of addiction and violence. Each time they prayed over the houses, they felt the weight of oppression becoming lighter. A woman from one of the houses confronted them wondering what they were up to. When she discovered they were praying for the community, she asked for healing, and God healed her. The group soon physically moved into the neighborhood and started what they called Detroit Life Church. A couple

years later a local newspaper, the Sacramento Bee, reported there were no homicides, robberies, or sex crimes, and only one assault in Detroit Boulevard between 2013 and 2014. Detroit Boulevard had been transformed by a small group of Jesus followers who began their ministry in the neighborhood by praying around houses, streets, and parks for the power of Satan to be vanquished and for King Jesus to take control.

Do you really believe prayer is a powerful weapon in the hands of God? God uses our prayers to release His power, His help, and His strength into our troubles and the troubles of others. The psalmist was all about pointing us away from trusting in ourselves and getting us to rely consciously on God for His help. Prayer might be the very best way to participate in or partner with God's help as it gets released into your life and mine. How does God affect your life and mine? Well, He provides shelter. He provides strength. God is "a help in trouble He is found to be abundantly." At least one other way God affects your life and mine is mentioned here in Psalm 46.

GOD PROVIDES SERENITY.

"Be still, and know that I am God!" (Ps. 46:10 NLT) Now, there's a verse Christians like to quote to each other a lot! It's a marvelous statement, to be sure. We can rightly take great comfort in it. But it's important and interesting to realize it has a double meaning in Psalm 46. First of all, it's actually a rebuke to anyone who has no use for God. The psalmist had the pagan nations around Israel – including the Assyrians – in mind. "Be silent and stop your striving and you will see that I am God. I am the God above all the nations, and I will be exalted throughout the whole earth." (Ps. 46:10 TPT) But it can just as easily be applied to groups of people or individuals. Essentially, it means, "Enough! Stop chasing and striving after everything but Me. Stop being prideful and arrogant. I am God. I'm in charge. I am the One who was exalted, is exalted, and will be exalted. Be still long enough to realize what's what."

There's a strong whiff of judgment in Psalm 46. There's coming a day when God will put everything right – the guilty will be made accountable, the oppressor will be brought down, those who've abused power, any kind of power in a negative way – be it political power, military power, power in relationships with other people – will be punished. Judgment is coming upon a world and also upon individuals who've refused to acknowledge God and His power. Can you think of anything more terrifying than standing before Almighty God one day and knowing you never acknowledged Him? You rejected His love. You refused to surrender to the Lordship of His Son, King Jesus, over your life. And then you hear God say, "Be still, and know that I am God!" This is not a comfortable, peaceful stillness. No, instead this is a stillness of infinite regret. This is the awful quiet that descends upon someone who realizes he or she has missed out on life's one true essential: a relationship with God Himself. There will never be any kind of serenity for those who are content to live their lives without God.

"Be still, and know that I am God!" There's a second way we can interpret that verse. When we experience God as our shelter and as our strength, we can also discover Him as our serenity. It's as if God says here in this psalm, "Relax. Chill out. Let go. Rest.

Just be still. Realize who you're dealing with. I am God after all. I control everything. If I'm in charge of great ocean storms and earthquakes, if I cause nations to rise and fall, if I can bring an end to warfare, do you think I can handle the troubles in your life?" When we truly understand and receive it that truth, we receive a very different kind of stillness than those who reject God. Not the stillness of infinite regret, but the stillness of infinite peace. God's peace. Thankfully God doesn't say just to be still. He says, "Be still and *know* something. Know Me and something about Me."

There is something you and I can know – Someone we can know, actually - to help us have serenity – God's peace - even in the midst of great difficulty. It's a peace that can literally guard or watch over our hearts and minds day after day, year after year. Sure, this side of Heaven, troubles will still come. God's serenity isn't based on knowing how everything will turn out in the end. It's based entirely on knowing God. We know who's in charge and who has the final word. God. He is both great and good. We belong to Him. Therefore, as one translation renders this verse, "Surrender your anxiety! Be silent and stop your striving and you will see that I am God." (Ps. 46:10 NLT) One day there will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more war, no more tears, no more injustice, and Satan himself will be no more. That day isn't today and it probably won't be tomorrow either. But one day God will have the last word and it will be a very good word for you and me. "Be still, and know that I am God!" (Ps. 46:10 NLT)

Most of us here still remember the remarkable story of the US hockey team at Lake Placid in the 1980 Winter Olympics. A few years ago, Cheryl and I visited the facility where one of the most famous games in American sports history was played. Do you remember the mood of the country back then? Back in 1980, America was in kind of a ditch. The economy was in the ditch. American hostages were being held in Iran. Under the cover of night, we sent our crack troops to rescue them, and their helicopters crashed in a desert sandstorm. The Cold War was at its height. The Soviet Union seemed bigger and more powerful than us. Do you remember watching the Americans play the Russians? Nerve wracking beyond belief. After the first period, we were ahead. All through the second period we were ahead. Going into the third period, we were all half expecting the Russians to score five goals at the end of the game, beat us, and we would be embarrassed again. But, instead, we won! It was such a big deal that the national networks played it again. You could watch the whole thing later that evening. Only this time you didn't have a knot in your stomach. You could lean back on the couch and put your feet up. It was exactly the same game, same sequences, same everything. What made the difference? It was something you already knew that made the difference. You could relax because you knew the outcome.

You might be thinking, "Well, if God would just tell me the outcome of my crises, I'll relax, too." The psalm doesn't say we can be still because we know how it's all going to work out in the end. No, instead we can be still, because we know the God who will work it out. God says, "Relax because you can know that I am God." Knowing God is a whole lot better than knowing the outcomes of life's difficult moments. That's the kind of peace – the kind of serenity – God provides. He also provides shelter and strength. Those are just some of the wonderful ways God affects your life and mine.