

## **The Answer to Anxiety and Fear**

Psalm 46

Series: Summer in the Psalms

*Pastor Jarrett Stephens*

Last week I had the opportunity to preach at the Southern Baptist Convention Pastors' Conference. I want to thank you for praying for me...it sounds crazy, but it was kind of a surreal moment for me.

I have been going to the pastors' conference since I was nineteen years old. I preached my first sermon when I was 17, but it was at 19 that I went to my first SBC Pastors' Conference, and it was there that God really just lit a fire in my heart to preach. I had NEVER heard men preach like that before.

In fact, I bought all the tapes – do you remember the cassette tape days? I bought all the tapes of the sermons these preachers preached, and I would listen to them so often I had them memorized!

And this just began for me what has been a lifelong journey of loving preachers and pastors...studying how certain men preach, reading old preachers' biographies. I know it's nerdy and sounds crazy, but it was such a cool "full circle" moment to preach at the first place that the Lord really used to inspire me to preach.

One of the old preachers that I've studied through the years, and you've heard me quote him often is the great Charles Spurgeon.

His nickname was the "prince of preachers". He pastored the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London in the mid to late 1800's. It was really the first megachurch of its kind, seating 5,000 people with standing room for another 1,000 - just unheard of back in that day. The London Times actually printed his sermons and ran them in his newspaper each week.

I love Spurgeon, and there was no one quite like him, but he did have a contemporary on the other side of London – a man by the name of Joseph Parker. And Parker's preaching was the exact opposite of Spurgeon. Spurgeon was detailed in his preaching...he had points...and it was relatively easy to follow.

Parker on the other hand preached extemporaneously, which simply means he got up and let it rip! Now, he was prepared, but no one including him knew what was going to come out of his mouth or what direction it would take.

It wasn't lazy preaching, he worked hard and meditated long on his sermons, but unlike me who gets up with a full manuscript, he got up with half a page! Amazing!

My fear is if I did that we'd be done in about 12 minutes! And I know what some of you are thinking right now! Shame on you!

I bring Parker up today because he is probably most famous in preaching circles for a quote that is attributed to him. He said this and it's a great intro for where we are headed today in the message.

As it relates to preaching, Parker said: **“Preach to the suffering, and you will never lack a congregation. There is a broken heart in every pew.”**

You know, through the years I have found this to be true. There are some sermons I study and prepare for and just because of the nature of the text or the topic we are dealing with on a given day, you know it's going to speak to SOME and you just have to trust the Lord to somehow apply it to others.

THEN there are sermons that you study for and preach like we're doing today, and there is NO DOUBT, it's going to apply to EVERYONE in the room – BECAUSE ALL of us at one time or another will go through hardship, trial, and pain and therefore experience worry, anxiety and fear.

And that's why the title of the message today is: **The Answer to Anxiety and Fear**

The text today is going to answer this question: What happens when a worst-case scenario becomes a reality in your life? What do you do? How do you endure it? What gets you through?

For some, you don't have to imagine worst-case...you're walking through it right now. Friday, I attended the funeral of Bruce Young.

The Youngs have been long-time members here at Champion Forest. They served in our children's ministry, our student ministry...members of the Biblical Literacy Class. Bruce was just 50 years old and in a turn of events that no one could've seen coming, died and went to be with the Lord all too soon!

And now his wife of 25 years and children are without this godly man they loved, and guarantee you they would say that right now they are walking through their worst-case scenario.

I spoke with another family this week requesting prayer as they go through cancer treatments. Another asking for prayer because of the premature death of a child. You watch the news and you see the storms and tornadoes that rolled through the US this past week destroying homes – people lost everything! Multiple people died– it's worst-case scenarios!

It's events like this and the ones previously mentioned that cause anxiety and fear that can cripple someone's trust in God and even cause them to question their faith.

What does God's word say for times like this? Does it offer any answers for the anxiety and fear that just going through life often generates?

I believe it does and I think the Psalm we're looking at today is a great place to start.

**Psalm 46:1-10 – “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.<sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,<sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah***

**<sup>4</sup>There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. <sup>5</sup>God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. <sup>6</sup>The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. <sup>7</sup>The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah***

**<sup>8</sup>Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. <sup>9</sup>He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.<sup>10</sup> “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”<sup>11</sup> The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*”**

This psalm was written by one of the “sons of Korah”. We don’t know too much about who the sons of Korah outside of being descendants of Kohath, one of the sons of Levi and evidently they produced music and had responsibilities to lead in worship while at the tabernacle in the wilderness, and then later at the temple in Jerusalem once it was constructed.

Now, we also don’t know much about the context of this specific Psalm although it’s referred to as a “Psalm of Zion” – it highlights, and we’ll see this in just a moment the glory of Jerusalem and even more specifically the Temple and Holy Place where God’s presence dwelled.

Look at how it begins though: **Psalm 46:1-3 – “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.**

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

The psalmist begins by establishing for us...reminding us WHO God is. Now, this is important because typically, this is the first thing we forget when anxiety and fear begin to take over, isn’t it?

When (v. 2-3) “the earth is giving way...and the mountains are being moved into the heart of the sea” – this is worst-case scenario!

This is a scene right out of one of those movies depicting the end of the world. It’s a picture of natural disaster. We see a once stable and strong mountain crumbling into the heart of the sea! Oceans are roaring...this word carries with it the idea of a great commotion. It literally means to be at war!

Talk about anxiety...talk about fear! This is describing something that we would want NO part of! Mountains giving way and seas roaring – this imagery is meant to stun...it's meant to shock the emotions.

And yet in spite of this, the Psalmist has a quiet confidence. He's not going to be overwhelmed by overwhelming circumstances BECAUSE (v. 1) – “God is...”

Now, I love this because the psalmist uses the name of God that is the most frequently used name for God in the Old Testament. It's the Hebrew name, “Elohim”.

This is the name ascribed to God that describes his infinite power...his eternal nature. We first read this Hebrew name in **Gen. 1:1** – **“In the beginning, God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth.”**

It's THIS God that is our “refuge and strength”. It's THIS God – the creator of the heavens and the earth that according to the psalmist is “a very present help in time of need”.

In times of fear and uncertainty...in times that could cause anxiety and panic...look at what the psalmist is communicating here!

The God we serve is bigger...and stronger...and mightier than anything we may be up against!

Now, let's just pause a moment and attempt to wrap our minds around this! It's pretty simple, but it's incredibly profound. If we miss this, we miss the entire point of this psalm.

See, if you've been in church a long time, you've probably heard (v. 10) quoted over and over again. You see it on coffee cups...we put it on pictures and put it up in our homes.

**Psalm 46:10a – “Be still, and know that I am God...”**

It's a call to stop striving...it's a call to quiet ourselves...it's a call to contemplation so that we can fully understand and realize WHO and ALL that we have in God.

Elohim – the Creator of the heavens and earth...consider WHO he is!

The prophet Isaiah, in: **Isaiah 40:12, 26, 28** – **“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked of the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?”**

(V. 26) **“Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these (stars)? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing.”**

(V. 28) **“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.”**

You think a God that created the ends of the earth, holds the water of the seas in his hand and calls the stars by name can't handle whatever it is we are going through? Let's not think for a moment that the uncertainty we may be facing is greater than the one who doesn't need a nap!

Scott Riling is going to be preaching from Psalm 139 next week. It's a psalm for life...it speaks of God (v. 16) seeing our unformed substance...making us...knitting us together in our mother's womb...numbering our days before we even came to be!

Let's just pause and consider who we are talking about when we say THIS God is our refuge and strength...an ever-present help in time of need.

That word "selah" that is there at the end of (v. 3, 7, 11)...while there is debate about exactly what this word means, it's a division in the music that calls for "pause". Some believe it's a word that is meant to mean "meditate" or to "think about".

Put together, you could say it's built into this psalm so that after a series of verses, we pause and think about what was just written.

When our worship team leads us, sometimes there is a musical break...where there is no singing, it's just the music playing...it's a break built into the song to cause us to pause and reflect upon the words we are lifting up and who we are lifting these words up to.

This is what the psalmist wants us to do right here...he wants us to just take a little break and consider what he just wrote – that Elohim – the Creator God is our refuge...our shelter...our protection...a VERY present help in trouble!

See, the thought could be that God is so big and so powerful that he doesn't have time to involve himself in what I'm going through – he's got Putin and what's happening in Russia to worry about! He's got a presidential election on the horizon to think about...he's got bigger things to look after besides me and my issues – that's what SOME of us think!

BUT the psalmist says just the opposite. He says, the Creator God is VERY present...these words "very present" could be translated "easily found"!

- He's not on vacation...
- He's not checked out...
- He's not aloof or uncaring...
- He's not attending to others, not having the bandwidth to attend to you!

Instead, the Creator God of the universe is available and present...quick to come by our side when we are in the midst of trials and troubles that cause anxiety and fear. He is our refuge...our hiding place!

**Illus. Corrie Ten Boom** – Her biography is titled - *The Hiding Place*.

Her story is amazing...if you've never read it, I encourage you to go to Amazon and buy it today! The Hiding Place is really a play on words. Her family was Christians from the Netherlands during the reign of the Nazi regime. And they famously rescued many Jews (800) by hiding them in their home – thus their home became *The Hiding Place*.

They were ultimately found out and Corrie's entire family was arrested. Her father died in prison and she and her sister were sent to Ravensbruck Concentration Camp – an all-women's labor camp in Germany.

She and her sister held bible studies in the concentration camp and ministered to many of the women there pointing them to the hope they had in Jesus. Her sister ended up dying in the concentration camp 12 days before they were set to be released.

Corrie, once released began to travel the world sharing the message of Jesus and talking of the importance of forgiveness and how she found in her worst-case scenario a *Hiding Place* in Christ...in her faith! Just listen to some of her quotes regarding anxiety and fear.

**“Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.”**

**“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”**

**“If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. If you look at God you'll be at rest.”**

**“You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have.”**

And then my personal favorite: **“There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still.”**

Corrie Ten Boom testified throughout her life the truth of this psalm – that when times are toughest...when the night is darkest, the Creator God is an “ever-present help” in time of need!

Now, there is a transition that takes place in v. 4-7 that is a bit hard to follow, but as we will see in a minute, it actually makes perfect sense. Psalm 46 as mentioned is known as a “song of Zion”.

These “songs of Zion” express praise to God, specifically for the city of Jerusalem – the city of God...this is where the Holy Place was...where God dwelled amongst his people.

**Ps. 46:4-7 – “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God (Zion – Jerusalem), the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”**

Here, we don't see raging oceans that prompt confusion and fear, but rather a streaming river, and it results in making people in the city of God glad.

Now, when you study this idea of a river, it's interesting because the city of Jerusalem is one of the few ancient cities that was not built on or near a river.

Obviously, in biblical times, a flowing water source was critical to the survival of a people. Often times, armies would surround a city that was not located near water and just wait them out until from severe thirst they simply surrendered themselves.

So, what does the writer mean when he says, "river"? What's actually being conveyed here? Well, we know that this "river" language is used elsewhere in scripture.. in the Psalms:

**Ps. 36:8 – “They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.”**

**Ps. 65:9b – “...the river of God is full of water...”**

Several passages in Isaiah speak of God's peace flowing like a river. (Remember that song: “I’ve got peace like a river?”)

What this passage is seeming to suggest is that because God’s presence is in the city...because the Most High dwells there – this is where his grace...his mercy...his goodness...his very character and nature is like a calming river to those who live in the city of God.

**Ps. 46:5 – “God is in the midst of her (the city); she shall not be moved; God will help her when the morning dawns.”**

See, it's one thing for a natural disaster to occur (v. 2-3). But you ask any follower of Yahweh what their biggest fear would be...what would further uncertainty, and increase fear and worry MORE than anything?

It would be for Jerusalem...for Zion...for the city of God to be destroyed.

But, look at the confidence of the psalmist - that's NOT going to happen! When the morning dawns...that's when opposing armies are most likely to strike...the city of God will NOT be moved BECAUSE God is “in the midst of her” and there to “help her”.

Now, while this text zoomed in has to do with Jerusalem, we can build an interpretive bridge and zoom out a bit and understand that this is speaking a bit more about us than we could ever imagine!

Think about it! In the Old Testament...under the Old Covenant, God's presence dwelt in the Holy Place in the Holy city. But in the New Testament, we know that because of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus - God now dwells in us!

This is what the New Covenant is all about! We are the temple of God!

Jesus on the cross, screams out, “It is finished” and then breathing his last, we’re told the veil tore from top to bottom in the temple, symbolizing that we now have access to God! And because of what Jesus accomplished in his death, burial and resurrection when we turn from our sin and put our faith and trust in him, God the Holy Spirit comes and lives in us.

**1 Cor. 6:19 – “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?”**

**2 Cor. 16:6b - "Your body is the temple of God..."**

So, look at what we have in Christ! If the world is falling apart...and let's just say your worst fear is actually becoming a reality - well, check this!

If you are in Christ, you don't have to GO to a walled city for refuge! God IS your walled city...and this “ever-present help” is “ever-present” because he is living IN You!

Outwardly oceans may be roaring and mountains might be crumbling...nations (v. 6) may be raging and the kingdoms may be tottering – BUT...if God is IN YOU then there is a river within of God's goodness and mercy and grace and presence – and it is a river that will NEVER run dry!

**John 7:37b-38 - "... Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"**

So, zoom in and see Jerusalem. Zoom out a little bit and see yourself! Zoom out a little bit further and all this talk of a river, we can see our future!

If you remember in Gen. 2 there was a flowing River out of the Garden of Eden whose very source was God! But because of sin, we were driven out of the Garden and cut off from that River.

Enter Jesus. Enter the gospel. Everything changes – the curse is reversed. And we discover in the last chapter of the Bible (Rev. 22), in the New Heavens and New Earth there will be a “River of Life” flowing right through the middle of the New Jerusalem...it will be as “bright as crystal” the Bible says.

And in this city, there will be nothing accursed...we will live forever in God's presence. And death – the ultimate worst-case scenario will be no more.

Notice the “Selah” at the end of these verses...pause...be still...reflect on what the psalmist just wrote!

The Creator God is an ever-present help...a hiding place...a refuge...our strength...and no matter what is taking place outside of us, if God is in us, we cannot be shaken. The “Lord of hosts” (v. 7), the God of angel armies is with us...the God of Jacob is our “fortress”.



God himself is our fortress! Psalm 46 is what inspired the reformer Martin Luther to write the hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God*.

The first line: **A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing...**

**Illus. Luther** – great reformer...sparked what we know of as Protestant Reformation. He would be forced into isolation...endure the threat of excommunication...at one time spent 11 months hiding from the authorities simply because of his stance on God's Word and this idea that one is made right with God by FAITH ALONE.

He was known in that time to get discouraged and fearful of the future. Sometimes he would grab his friend and co-laborer, Philip Melancthon and say to him, "Philip, let us sing the forty-six Psalm!"

Some of us need to be reminded today – "Let's sing the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm! "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing..."

A bulwark is a defensive wall...a fortification. This is who our God is, and Luther wanted to be reminded of this truth when fear and anxiety came his way!

There is NOTHING and NO ONE more powerful than God! The psalmist invites us to see his power in (v. 8-9).

**Psalm 46:8-9 – "Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire."**

Translation: God is in charge! He is in control! And while everything around you may seem out of control (wars taking place, evil seems to be reigning, injustice occurs – again mountains falling in the heart of the sea, oceans raging).

God, in a moment will one day put it all to an end and make it all right. He is all-powerful, and he is in complete control.

And so, the message of this text is, "don't let the twin towers of fear and anxiety move you. Instead let whatever it is causing the fear and anxiety remind you that God is on the move...and he is moving toward you to be a refuge and strength in your time of need.

What we need to do is slow down long enough to "selah" and do what (v.10) is calling us to!

**Ps. 46:10 – "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."**

The answer to anxiety and fear? Knowing God. But you have to be still long enough to accomplish this. We'll never know God apart from "being still":

- stop your activity...
- stop your striving to try to figure it all out...
- stop trying to be in control of the situation...

Just stop...be still. When you're facing your worst-case scenario – the call here is not to pace the room...don't google MD...don't try to make deals with God...and listen, I'm not knocking ANY of these natural reactions.

What I am encouraging is what this text calls for, is when your world is crashing in on you and your worst-case scenario seems to be becoming a reality, be still so that you can be reminded of who's on your side.

**Illus. Officer Friendly** – “stop, drop and roll.” I want to be officer friendly today and tell you how you can stop, so that you can know God. Stop!

**S – Slow down**

**T – Take time**

**O – Open up**

**P – Press in**

Knowing God...really knowing him is the answer to anxiety and fear. Let's pray.

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*Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.*