

# God is Our Refuge and Strength in Times of Trouble

Psalm 46 on June 29, 2025

Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

*Please read Psalm 46 before going further in this transcript.*

Well Friends, we had originally planned to talk about communion today, but this past week has been a humdinger for our beloved little city of Bemidji, so we've changed course and we're going to look at Psalm 46 instead. I've had a number of old-timers tell me that they've never seen anything quite like the storm we had last weekend. In fact, before I go any further, if you or someone you know still has an urgent need for help, please stop by the church office today and let us know; we can't make any promises, but we'll see what we might be able to do to help.

Let me also begin by saying thank you to so many of you who've helped others out, including the many who've helped here at the church building. So many people have been cutting up trees, and patching up holes in roofs, and making meals for others, and helping Pastor Eric and I move our offices, and on and on. And even though we sustained some damage to our building, it was our absolute privilege to open up our church's Community Life Center to people who needed water, showers, and to take a break from the heat. *(What better way to use our newly paid off building!)* And I know many of you have opened up your homes as well, and helped in so many other ways with your personal time and energy and equipment; that's fantastic! PRAISE GOD for the way He's taught us to love one another, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Let's all continue to be in prayer for those who've suffered significant damage from last week's storm.

There are many spiritual lessons that can be learned from a storm like this one, and we're going to talk about some of those lessons today. But in addition to the sermon, I hope that many of us will also learn from one another, as we visit with one another during our refreshment time in the gym. Right after this service everyone is invited to head down for a time of fellowship and encouragement; let's share with one another one of the lessons that we've learned, or been reminded of, over this past week. God is glorified when we honor Him and give Him praise for the things He's brought us through! So let's do that today, and let's continue that practice throughout the week as we visit with friends and neighbors. After a storm like the one we had last weekend, it's wise for us to take note of the lessons we've learned, and the truths about which we've been reminded. We're going to consider some of this as we look at Psalm 46 together.

There are many great spiritual lessons that can be learned from a storm like the one we had last weekend, but one of the most comforting is found in verse 1.

**Times of trouble teach and remind us that...**

**1) God is always present.** (including and especially in times of trouble)

Psalms 46:1 begins, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” During last week’s storm, as Debbie and I were hunkering down together in one of the rooms in our basement, we couldn’t help but be in an attitude of prayer. We were both so incredibly thankful for the Lord’s presence there with us, and that we could call out to Him, not only for ourselves, but also for our friends and family, and for our entire community. God is always present, even and especially in the midst of our storms, whether they be literal storms, or metaphorical ones. This comforting message of God’s ever-present help is sprinkled all throughout Psalm 46. We see it in verses 7 and 11, “The LORD Almighty is with us.” We have a heightened sense of God’s presence when we experience it right in the midst of a raging storm. We gain a fresh appreciation, and an awareness of God as our refuge and strength when we literally feel Him strengthening us and carrying us through. So even though one of the best and most common ways of getting to know God is through His written Word, there’s something palpable and tangible about going to Him as our refuge and strength right in the midst of the storm.<sup>1</sup>

God’s presence with His people is also described in verses 4-5,

“4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

5 God is within her, she will not fall;

God will help her at break of day.”

The reference in verse 4 to “the city of God,” likely refers to the city of Jerusalem, which is especially precious to the Jewish people. In fact, we can rightly envision this psalm being sung at the temple in Jerusalem, either by its citizens or by its Levitical choir. As they sang, they were proclaiming their confidence in God as their refuge and strength even in the midst of whatever threat they were facing.<sup>2</sup>

Reading this psalm from our perspective as Christ-followers today, can provide us with a similar confidence and comfort in the midst of our times of trouble. As God’s New Testament people, we experience God’s presence and we’re aware of it, not within a particular city, but within each particular believer. Each deeply devoted follower of Jesus, who has been saved by

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<sup>1</sup> Consider Psalm 34:17-18.

<sup>2</sup> See *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 907 footnotes on Psalms 46-48, and Psalm 46.

grace through faith, becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, made holy by His indwelling presence.<sup>3</sup>

Verse 4 also mentions “a river whose streams make glad the city of God.” But there’s no river in Jerusalem, so the psalmist seems to be using symbolism here to indicate God’s nurturing presence, which constantly sustains and provides for His people. This gladdening river stands in stark contrast to the turbulent waters in verse 3 which “roar and foam.”<sup>4</sup> God is ever-present, and He’s not limited to one particular place; He is present everywhere He dwells. God dwells in many places: He dwells in Jerusalem and in other cities (like the city of Bemidji), and He dwells in the hearts of His people all around the world.

In light of God’s comforting presence, Psalm 46:2 goes on to say, “*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way....*” Now admittedly some of us weren’t directly impacted by this particular storm, so we may not have felt much reason to fear, but many of us felt like we were right in the teeth of this storm, and it really did feel a bit like “the earth was giving way.” Given the broad impact of this storm throughout the Bemidji area, many of us are navigating some significantly troublesome times. In addition to the thousands of trees we lost, and the significant damage to many of our buildings and vehicles, many of us lost power, some of us for days, including our local businesses. (*A few of us may still not have power!*) It’s hard to do much without power, particularly when the grocery stores and gas stations lose power. And particularly when there’s no way to charge our beloved cell phones! Or to make our precious coffee! (*1<sup>st</sup> world problems right!? But problems nonetheless!*)

All kidding aside, many of us have been feeling out of sorts and unsettled by the chaos, and by the uneasiness of how different the landscape looks all around us. Bemidji just doesn’t feel right with these few trees, which deeply grieves many of our hearts. Our little city probably won’t look right again for another 40 years, once a new generation of trees has time to mature. This leads right into our 2<sup>nd</sup> point >>>

## **Times of trouble teach and remind us that...**

### **2) Creation itself is groaning.**

(as it waits to be liberated from its bondage to decay)

Psalm 46:2-3 goes on... “2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.” You see, we

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<sup>3</sup> See 1 Corinthians 6:19 and its surrounding context.

<sup>4</sup> “There is no river in Jerusalem, so the reference here is symbolic: such a river would sustain Jerusalem (in contrast to the raging waters of verse 3).” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1039 footnote on Psalm 46:4,

often think of storms metaphorically, but today we're talking about an actual, literal storm. And this one was a doozy! Many of us have stories that resonate with verse 2, "though the earth give way." The power and ferocity behind this storm to bend and break trees, and to blow away our siding and shingles and other materials, was both stunning and sobering. This horrific damage is further evidence of sin's destructive nature. We live in a fallen world, and this is demonstrated by destructive storms like ours. Romans 8:20-22 teaches us, "20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been *groaning* as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

Friends, this storm was a manifestation of creation's groaning. The hurricane-force, straight-lined winds,<sup>5</sup> and the damaging rains provide evidence that God's creation longs to be liberated from its bondage. This decay began in the Garden of Eden back when humankind first fell into sin. In Genesis 3:17, God told Adam: "...Cursed is the ground because of you...." You see, before humankind's fall into sin, this planet was perfect, and there were no dangerous storms; the Garden of Eden was a paradise. Yes, the garden needed water, but it came softly and gently, not in the catastrophic ways that we see it damaging God's good creation today.<sup>6</sup> We look forward to our time in the new heaven and the new earth, when once again God's perfect order will be re-established, and there will no longer be any more destructive storms.<sup>7</sup>

All of this being said, last week's storm is creation groaning for its liberation from decay; declaring its longing for final redemption. This redemption parallels the final redemption of mankind. This is what Romans 8:21 is referring to: "...the creation itself will be... brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." So this storm reminds us that this world, in its current state, is not our final home. Our final redemption is yet to come; a redemption that will bring every deeply devoted follower of Jesus, along with all of physical creation, into a freedom and glory the likes of which we've never seen.<sup>8</sup> (*The final end of our salvation: our glorification.*)

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<sup>5</sup> A new term I've learned is "derecho." Google AI overview says: "A derecho is a widespread, long-lived windstorm associated with a band of rapidly moving thunderstorms. It is characterized by damaging straight-line winds, heavy rains, and sometimes flash floods. The term "derecho" comes from the Spanish word for "straight ahead" or "direct," reflecting the straight-line nature of the wind damage."

<sup>6</sup> This reminds me of the words from the old Irish blessing, "May the rain fall softly on your fields."

<sup>7</sup> We see a hint of this in places like Revelation 13:1 and 21:1, which mentions that there will no longer be any sea. In eschatological writings, the sea was often a symbol for "the realm of evil and chaos." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, 2015, p. 2608 footnote on Revelation 13:1.

<sup>8</sup> Read more in 2 Peter 3:7-13;

Most of us can relate to creation's groaning this week, because we've been doing some groaning of our own (there are ibuprofen available in the church office). But this groaning, and the struggle that's caused it, has helped us to gain a whole new level of empathy for those who've been impacted by ferocious tornadoes and hurricanes down south. Storms like these are things we usually just watch on TV, and in our social media feeds, but this one was right here in our own hometown, so it feels very different, and it helps us to more fully understand and sympathize with the sufferings of others. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 comes to mind, "3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

Today I can't help but mention the EFCA's ReachGlobal Crisis Response Teams: <https://crisis-response.ministries.efca.org/>



A few of us have been to Lake Charles and other locations where storm clean-up has become a ministry opportunity, and an active expression of the gospel being lived out. God's people have shown up in force to help and serve, and to display the love of God through tangible acts of service. (Most of us have gotten a front row seat this week to just how meaningful this kind of ministry can be.)<sup>9</sup> All of us have also been reminded once again to be thankful for the little things, like water and showers, and electricity. Not to mention chainsaws and excavators and trucks and trailers. I'm not gonna lie, there is something about the sound of chainsaws buzzing all throughout the neighborhood that does feel kind of good. There's a certain cathartic effect, especially when accompanied by the purr of gasoline engines and brush hauling machines in the background.

I can't tell you how many people have told me this week, "it could have been worse." These are often the first words out of people's mouths. And I know that many of us have been praying even more than we usually do. And some of us have been praying who may not usually pray, which is also a very good thing. It's also inspiring to see how many neighbors are helping neighbors, some who are well-acquainted, but some who are not. Some are complete strangers, who simply want to lend a helping hand. What a very cool additional blessing in the midst of this time of trouble! *(Let me just add, that in a time when our nation is severely fractured and polarized by political issues, it's been so refreshing to see all of us come together*

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<sup>9</sup> Learn more here: <https://crisis-response.ministries.efca.org/current-responses>

around a common cause. This is good for us as fellow human beings who've all been created in the image of God.)

### **Times of trouble also teach and remind us that...**

#### **3) The LORD Almighty is our fortress.**<sup>10</sup> (our refuge and strength)

Psalm 46:7 goes on... "The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." This very same refrain is repeated in verse 11 as the culmination of the entire psalm.<sup>11</sup> My *Study Bible* notes that this Psalm inspired Martin Luther's famous hymn: "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." (#43 in our hymnal)

Verse 1 begins: "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing..."<sup>12</sup>

Verse 2 then adds: "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing..."<sup>13</sup> Not bad for something written in the early 1500s! God is our refuge and our strength in times of trouble; He is our Mighty Fortress!

Now it's worth taking a closer look at this title: "The LORD Almighty." LORD is in all CAPS, which is how many translations indicate God's special covenant name, "Yahweh." For the Israelites, this name would have brought to mind the promises that were made between God and them; as in, God will keep His promises to us: "God is our fortress, and He will keep us safe." Almighty has to do with God's omnipotence; He is all-powerful over all things on the earth below, and things in heaven above, including the angelic forces.<sup>14</sup> Some translations say, "the LORD of hosts," meaning that Yahweh is the LORD of the armies of heaven and earth; Yahweh is the sovereign, Almighty LORD over all the other powers in this universe.<sup>15</sup>

Verses 8-10 then go on to describe the LORD Almighty's power,  
"8 Come and see what the LORD has done,  
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

9 He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

10 He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

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<sup>10</sup> Check out David Crowder's song, "Good God Almighty!"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCpVJ4hUO6s&list=RDxCpVJ4hUO6s&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCpVJ4hUO6s&list=RDxCpVJ4hUO6s&start_radio=1)

<sup>11</sup> The Hebrew term "Selah" is used three times in Psalm 46, after verses 3, 7, and 11, although the NIV tucks it away in the footnotes. We're not exactly sure what "Selah" means other than it's likely some kind of a musical term. So in addition to this same refrain being sung in both verse 7 and verse 11, the fact that Selah is used at the end of both of these verses, may very well suggest some kind of an emphasis on this particular point. Selah can be pronounced "SEE luh" W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 142.

<sup>12</sup> By the way, a bulwark is a defensive wall or rampart used for fortification.

<sup>13</sup> Consider Psalm 18:2.

<sup>14</sup> See *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, 2015, p. 1039 footnote on Psalm 46:6.

<sup>15</sup> *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, 2015, p. 1007 footnote on Psalm 24:10.

These verses make God's wide-ranging and all-inclusive sovereignty, crystal clear. Verse 8 says that even the desolations on this earth have been brought by God. Absolutely nothing catches God by surprise; He never leaves His post, and He never loses track of any detail in His universe. God is fully in control during any and every event, including times of trouble, even though, given our human limitations, it can be difficult for us to understand the mystery of why/how all of this works.<sup>16</sup>

Verse 9 says that the LORD has the power to make any war cease, and to defeat any army no matter how great their weapons may be. Back in verse 6 it says that nations are in uproar and kingdoms fall, but God lifts His voice, and the earth melts. So Psalm 46 is declaring that God sovereignly reigns over all *nations*, as well as all of *nature*.

Then, in verse 10, the LORD gives the command for us to be quiet and to listen carefully: "Be *still*, and *know* that I am God."<sup>17</sup> This pivotal truth establishes and validates all other truths: God is the great "I am."

We need to know that He exists, and that He is God...

...even when the nations are in uproar, God will be exalted.

...even when the earth is giving way, God will be exalted.

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<sup>16</sup> Consider Job 38:2 and 40:2.

<sup>17</sup> This makes me think of the classic OT story from 1 Kings 19:1-18 when the LORD appears to the Prophet Elijah. - There was a great and powerful wind which tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but "the LORD was not in the wind." - Then came an earthquake, but "the LORD was not in the earthquake." - After that came a fire, but "the LORD was not in the fire." - Then, after the fire, came a gentle whisper, and that's where Elijah encountered God.