

Bible Study on Psalm 46:1–11
“What to Do When Life Feels Unstable”

Opening Prayer

God, we come to you as people who know what it feels like when the ground shifts beneath us as we’ve watched the news, read the blogs, and listened to the social media outlets. We are living with anxiety and instability. We have carried the weight of uncertainty in our finances, our families, our health, and our futures. We have held on so tightly to circumstances we could not control but we should be releasing it all to you. As we study and discuss your word of Psalm 46, help us to be still and listen for your voice in the midst of all the noise and anxiety. Remind us that you are not a God who watches from a distance, but one who is a very present help in the midst of whatever trouble we may find ourselves. You are our refuge and strength. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON SUMMARY

Psalm 46 was written by the Sons of Korah as a commemorative hymn following the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army under Sennacherib around 701 B.C. Facing the most powerful military force in the ancient world, King Hezekiah did not strategize his way out, but he prayed to God and placed the enemy’s threatening letter on the altar before God. That same night, the angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, and the rest of the army retreated. The Sons of Korah wrote Psalm 46 in a responsive celebration and praise to God.

Against that backdrop, the sermon called us to do three things when life feels unstable: (1) Start with God—anchoring our first words and thoughts not in our problems but in the character of God; (2) Stay with God or Retreat with God as our Refuge—knowing that God is not a refuge *from* the chaos but keeps us while *in* the chaos because he is a God who is present; and (3) Listen and Obey God’s Voice—particularly the command in verse 10 where God speaks over all the noise: “Be still,” which in Hebrew is the word *harpu*, meaning to cease straining and loosen our grip on what we cannot control. In this psalm, we are invited to find refuge, peace, and certainty in God’s enduring presence and word in the midst of life’s uncertainties.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS

INSTRUCTION: *Choose one or two questions to answer*

- What makes you feel safe and secure?

- What is one thing in this current season that has made you feel genuinely unsettled? Has it been a headline, a relationship, a decision, a person, etc? You don’t have to share details. Just name the feeling.

- Is there a verse, a song, or a phrase that has functioned as an anchor for you in a hard season? What made it hold you? What did it do for your spirit?
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INTO THE BIBLE

INSTRUCTIONS: *You do not need to cover every question. If in a group, read the passage together, then select the questions that best fit you or your group. The goal is depth, not speed.*

Read Psalm 46:1–3

The psalm opens with a declaration before it describes a single problem. Before the roaring seas and shaking mountains, the psalmist says something about God.

1. Verse 1 says “God is our refuge and strength.” The sermon noted that the psalmist does not begin with the problem, instead he begins with the person of God. Why does starting with God matter? What changes when we lead with who God is instead of what we are afraid of?
 2. The psalmist in verses 2–3 talks in images like mountains thrown into the sea, roaring waters, and shaking foundations. Images like these are the ancient world’s version of total catastrophe and instability of the most stable things in life. What is your version of that imagery right now? What does “the earth giving way” look like in your life? Naming it helps you to understand it and give it over to God.
 3. Verse 1 describes God as both “refuge and strength”, a place to run and a power that sustains. Which of those do you need more right now, and why?
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Read Psalm 46:4-7

The imagery shifts in verse 4. Amongst the surrounding chaos depicted in the verses, “there is a river whose streams bring gladness to the city of God”. This happens not because the chaos has stopped, but because there is a source the chaos cannot touch.

1. The sermon mentioned *machseh*, which is the Hebrew word for refuge. It is not a passive shelter you stumble into but a place or person you run toward, like a child running into the arms of a parent. Have you ever experienced God that way, or has God functioned more like a distant shelter in your faith?

2. Verse 5 says “God is in the midst of the city.” Where in your life do you most need to believe that God is present with you right now, and not just available?
 3. Verse 7 pairs two names side by side: the Lord of Hosts (a military title, commander of heaven’s armies) and the God of Jacob (the struggling, complicated, imperfect man who wrestled with God). What does it mean to you that the most powerful force in the universe is also the God of the broken and those with whom God wrestles? (*Read Genesis 32 if you don’t know the story of God and Jacob meeting and wrestling.*)
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Read Psalm 46:8-11

After verses of the earth speaking, the seas speaking, the nations speaking, and fear speaking, God finally speaks and cuts through the noise in verse 10.

1. “Be still and know that I am God.” The Hebrew word *harpu* means to cease and desist, or to let go of the tight grip of something. It is not primarily a meditation invitation like we’ve used over the years; it is that and more. What are you currently gripping so tightly that God might be asking you to release to him?
 2. The sermon pointed out that everything speaks in this psalm before God does: the earth, the seas, the nations, fear, anxiety, etc. How much of your inner life is currently dominated by those voices over God’s? What would it look like to give God’s voice more room from a practical, daily perspective?
 3. Martin Luther ran to Psalm 46 while sick, politically hunted, and watching everything he had built begin to collapse during the Protestant Revolution. Out of that retreat into God, he wrote the famous hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” He wrote it from the middle of the mess and high anxious time in his life. What is the difference between a faith that sings when things go well and a faith that sings loudest in the chaos and instability of life? Which type of faith might you be living right now or will live by when life feels unstable?
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LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. The sermon described a pattern most of us have: we begin with God, but the moment pressure mounts, we sprint back to everything else we can do and barely give God enough time to work. Some call it resilience or faith in action but Psalm 46 might call it self-reliance and maybe even self-delusion. Is there a circumstance right now where you have already tried handling it alone, and it hasn't worked out? What would genuinely retreating to God look like in that situation? How long do you give God to speak or work before you step-in?
2. Hezekiah took the enemy's threatening letter and placed it on the altar. He gave the situation and person producing the most fear in his life directly over to God. What would be your version of that letter, meaning that specific thing you have been rehearsing, strategizing over, or losing sleep about, that you have not yet placed before God?

GOING DEEPER

(For those ready to push a bit further)

- *Machseh* (refuge) in Hebrew carries the image of fleeing to a person, not a place. John Wesley argued that God's most essential attribute is love, and that every other attribute—power, holiness, sovereignty—is an expression of that love. If that is true, when you run to God for refuge in a crisis, are you running toward power or toward love? Is there a difference in how those two feel when you are afraid?
- *Harpu*—"be still"—means to release what you are gripping. There is a difference between the stillness of someone who has given up and the stillness of someone who has chosen to trust. Which kind of stillness do you most often bring to God? What does that reveal about what you actually believe about him?

FOR SPECIFIC SEASONS OF LIFE

The questions below are written for specific life experiences and stages. These questions may open doors that general questions do not. Choose to use them for group discussion or for personal reflection.

For Young Adults (roughly 18–35)

- You are making foundational decisions in an era of maximum uncertainty. Psalm 46 says "God is a very present help". What would it look like to build your adult life on that foundation right now, rather than waiting until things stabilize?

- Many young adults have experienced institutions and groups like schools, churches, employers, and even families, who promised things but failed to deliver. The psalmist tells us to trust the God who outlasts everything and everybody. Where have broken promises made it harder to trust God? Where have you seen God deliver on his promises from his written word?

For Married Couples

- Is your home functioning as a place where both of you can be held and feel stable. Or, has the instability of the outside world made its way inside your life and home? What would retreating to God together look like, and not just individually?
- Hezekiah did not face the Assyrian crisis alone. He sought out the prophet Isaiah (see 2 Kings 18-19), prayed for his people, and brought his fears to the Lord God. As a couple, where do you bring your fears together rather than managing them separately?

For Parents

- Your children are watching how you respond to anxious and unstable times. As you know, they are listening to what you say and to what you actually do when you are afraid or anxious. What are you modeling for them right now?
- Sometimes our children can take a nonchalant approach to things that we believe they should be worked up about. Could that be them trusting God, believing things will work out, avoidance, indifference, or something else?

For Those in Midlife (roughly 40–60ish)

- At the beginning of the sermon, pastor described a loss of easy trust that comes with age because of being hurt by people and systems you once believed in, and still having to live alongside them. Where has lived experience made it harder to trust readily and made you cynical? And where has that same experience given you a more tested, honest faith than you had at age 25...or your younger years of faith?

- Verse 10 says to “Be still and know.” What do you know about God from the last 20-30 years of your life that your younger self could not have known? How does that knowing anchor your experiences of instability to occur?

For Seniors (60ish +)

- You have lived long enough to have survived things you were not sure you would survive. What is the clearest example in your life of God showing up as a very present help in trouble? What would the people in your family or your small group need to hear from that story?
- Psalm 46 was a communal song, a hymn, written so one generation’s experience of God’s deliverance would strengthen the next generation’s faith. What testimony do you carry that the next generation needs to hear? Are you telling it?

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, you are our source of life and our strength in life. You also know what we are gripping too tightly. You already know what we need to place on your altar for you to handle. We hear you say to us: “Be still...Let go!” Help us to loosen our grip beginning today and to practice it all week. Give us relief and revelation knowledge about your power at work on our behalf as we trust you. Cut through the noise the way only you can. Let us seek you and find you as our refuge, and let that refuge give us peace and a new song to sing. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.