SESSION 5

THE SHELTER OF GOD’S PEACE
The Point
God is the source of peace in the midst of turmoil.

The Passage
Psalm 46:1-11

The Bible Meets Life
I could have some peace in my life if it wasn’t for . . . . We could all complete that statement with something that, at best, is an irritant or, at worst, causes great turmoil in our lives. Peace is not the absence of irritating or turbulent problems, but we can experience confidence and assurance in the midst of turmoil. Psalm 46 points us to the source of such peace—God Himself.

The Setting
Based on the inscription of this psalm, it’s a choir anthem for congregational worship. Based on the content, it’s somewhat akin to the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (which was inspired by this psalm) or “It Is Well with My Soul.” The psalm celebrates God’s great ability in all situations and identifies why His people can experience peace and security, specifically in times of trouble.
Psalm 46:1-11 (HCSB)

1 God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble.

2 Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas,

3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with its turmoil.

4 There is a river—its streams delight the city of God, the holy dwelling place of the Most High.

5 God is within her; she will not be toppled. God will help her when the morning dawns.

6 Nations rage, kingdoms topple; the earth melts when He lifts His voice.

7 The LORD of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

8 Come, see the works of the LORD, who brings devastation on the earth.

9 He makes wars cease throughout the earth. He shatters bows and cuts spears to pieces; He burns up the chariots.

10 “Stop your fighting—and know that I am God, exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth.”

11 Yahweh of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Key Words

Refuge (v. 1)—This Hebrew word literally means a “place of refuge,” and can refer to a place of shelter for animals (Psalm 104:18) or humans (Job 24:8).

Stronghold (vv. 7,11)—Technically, this means a high point, like a cliff or rock outcropping (Isaiah 33:16) or high walls (25:12) that serve as a defensive position.

Yahweh of Hosts (v. 11)—One of the frequent names for God, this phrase is often translated LORD Almighty or LORD of Hosts. The phrase proclaims the Lord’s authority as King over Israel.
GET INTO THE STUDY

**DISCUSS:** Question #1 on page 61 of the PSG: “What have been your most successful New Year’s resolutions?”

**Note:** Encourage group members to use their own definition of “successful” when answering this question.

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 62 of the PSG. Introduce the theme of turning to God as the only source of true peace by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Help your group experience a moment of peace after the turmoil of the holiday season. Instruct group members to put away their phones and other portable devices, along with their Personal Study Guides. Encourage everyone to close their eyes and simply rest—both physically and mentally—for two minutes.

**Note:** If time permits, unpack this experience by asking, “How would you describe what you experienced during the last two minutes?”

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “The Point” at the top of page 62 of the PSG: “God is the source of peace in the midst of turmoil.”

**ENHANCEMENT:** Use Pack Item 5, “Always Open,” to reinforce “The Point” of this session and emphasize our access to God.

**PRAY:** Transition into the Scripture discussion by thanking God for the opportunities He provides you to experience peace. Ask that His Spirit would help everyone present to recognize their need for the kind of peace only He can provide.

**TIP:** Some people grasp truth more easily when visuals are used. That’s why the BSFL Leader Pack offers a number of visual resources.
Psalm 46:1-3

1 God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. 2 Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with its turmoil.

READ: Psalm 46:1-3 on page 63 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask for a volunteer to do so.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 64 of the PSG: “Where do you go to experience peace?”

Note: Encourage group members to resist any pressure to answer this question in an overly spiritual way.

GUIDE: Use the numbered list on page 64 of the PSG to introduce the three terms that describe God in verses 1-3: refuge, strength, and helper.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 64 of the PSG: “God is our refuge, strength, and helper. Which of these three resonates with you right now?”

Note: Use this question as an opportunity to remind group members that there are no “correct” answers for most discussion questions. You are asking for their personal thoughts and ideas.

RECAP: Highlight the final paragraph on page 64 of the PSG:

The psalmist also described some pretty serious threats. We may not be physically facing an earthquake, mountains toppling into the sea, or the ocean flooding over us—but sometimes it feels like we are. We can’t seem to get our footing. Stuff is crashing down all around us. Troubles show up like a flood against us. But the one who trusts in God does not have to be afraid.

TRANSITION: Psalm 46:1-3 describes God as a strong and reliable refuge in the midst of catastrophe. Verses 4-7 continue that theme.
Psalm 46:1-3 Commentary

[VERSE 1] The essential character of Psalm 46 is clearly seen in the opening verse. The psalmist, one of the sons of Korah, began with an affirmation that God is our refuge and strength. The rest of the psalm uses powerful imagery and metaphor to communicate this basic theological theme.

Psalm 46 starts off with a two-part confession of confidence in verse 1, followed by a statement of result or consequence in verses 2-3. The confession contains two statements about the character of God. First, God is identified as our refuge and strength. In the Old Testament the term refuge has the meaning of a “place of refuge” or “shelter.” The close connection of the term strength with refuge have led some to suggest that strength would be better translated “protection.” In either case, the picture is of complete shelter or protection in God. The theme reappears in the refrain in verses 7 and 11.

Second, God is described as a helper who is always found in times of trouble. God’s presence is an ever-present help. It’s the kind of help that can be found when you most need it. In this case, God is ready to be found (Isa. 55:6). The specific times of trouble are not identified, but the illustration of the calamity in the next two verses will suggest a worst-case scenario.

[VERSE 2] A statement of consequence and an illustration of a fearful calamity follow the confession of trust and confidence. The confession and the result are linked by a strong therefore. Since the confession (God is our refuge and strength) is true, then we have nothing to fear regardless of what calamity may befall the world around us. Indeed, God is our shelter and protection; therefore we will not be afraid. Why should we? If God truly is our refuge and protection, then our peace and protection are assured. Psalm 46 challenges us to have confident faith in God.

[VERSE 3] Here, the statement of consequence is followed by an illustration of calamity in the rest of verses 2-3. In this frightening word-picture, the psalmist depicted the demise of two of the most stable objects of earth’s geography. In this massive quake, the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the seas. The waters of the seas roar and foam, and the mountains quake in response. Such a cataclysmic event has been understood in different ways. Some scholars regard the poetic description of a natural catastrophe, a fearful earthquake. Some propose that the psalmist envisioned a moment of “uncreation” when the chaotic waters attempt to break the boundaries set for them at creation (Gen. 1:9-10; Ps 104:5-9). Regardless of the nature of the calamity contemplated, the psalmist presented a confidant trust that God is our shelter and protection. Even if the world should end, we will not be afraid because nothing is able to overwhelm God.

THE POINT  
God is the source of peace in the midst of turmoil.
Psalm 46:4-7

4 There is a river—it's streams delight the city of God, the holy dwelling place of the Most High. 5 God is within her; she will not be toppled. God will help her when the morning dawns. 6 Nations rage, kingdoms topple; the earth melts when He lifts His voice. 7 The LORD of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity "Water, Water Everywhere" on page 65 of the PSG.

The psalms are flooded with references to water in different forms. Write down any emotions you feel in connection with the images below.

What emotions do you experience when you read Psalm 46?

READ: Psalm 46:4-7 on page 63 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the third and fourth paragraphs from page 79 of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the psalmist's use of intentional parallels between verses 1-3 and verses 4-7.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 66 of the PSG: "How are you currently affected by the conflicts raging in today's culture?"

Note: These conflicts can include politics, morality, war, values, finances, temptation, and more.

TRANSITION: While turmoil will always rage throughout the world, verses 8-11 remind us that God is the supreme Authority.
Psalm 46:4-7 Commentary

[VERSE 4] The second unit begins with a surprise word (v. 4). It simply says a river. But this river is not like the roaring and foam of the menacing sea that seeks to topple the mountains. Rather, this river provides life-giving waters that satisfy and give joy. Indeed, its streams delight or satisfy the city of God. God provided this sustaining care for His city when He subdued the chaotic waters (Ps. 104:6-9) and transformed them into the life-giving waters needed by his people (Ps. 104:10-16; Ps. 65:9). The writer may also be thinking of the river that flowed through the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10).

The psalmist also identified the city of God with the holy dwelling place of the Most High. To the poet, the holy dwelling place referred to the tabernacle (the same Hebrew word is used here) or the temple and indicated that God resided in the city. This is confirmed in the first part of verse 5: God is within her. Literally, this means “God is in her midst.” Consequently, the peace and security of the city is not due to a well-trained army or strong walls; its tranquility is the direct result of God’s presence.

[VERSE 5] The use of similar verbs and phrases in verses 5 and 6, creates several connecting points with verses 1-3. Because God is within her, the city will not be toppled. In contrast to the stability of God’s city, the mountains (v. 2) and kingdoms (v. 6) topple in turmoil. God will help the city quickly at the break of day in the same way God is a “helper” who could be found in troubling times (v. 1).

[VERSE 6] In verse 6, the psalmist continued the use of parallels. Thus, the earth melts is parallel to “the earth trembles” in verse 2. Two different verbs are used here. However, in the same two verses, “the mountains topple corresponds to kingdoms topple and uses the same verb. Interestingly, the psalmist used the same verb in comparing the rage of the nations (v. 6) with the “roar” of the chaotic waters (v. 3). These parallels are not coincidental. Where the calamities envisioned in verses 2-3 are cataclysmic, the catastrophes of verses 5-6 are local. The psalmist added them here to contrast the turmoil of unstable human nations with the peace and stability of the city of God. The nations may rage (roar) and kingdoms topple, but God will judge their chaotic might when He lifts His voice. At the sound of His voice, the earth, the very base of human might, melts away (1 Sam. 7:10; Joel 3:16).

[VERSE 7] The two parallel divine titles the Lord of Hosts [or Yahweh] and the God of Jacob point back to Israel’s ancient traditions. The first refers to protective nature of the “hosts” of God (1 Sam. 17:45; 1 Kings 22:19), and the second to God’s protective promise of grace to the patriarch Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15). Like the divine titles, the second half of each phrase also echoes central themes of the psalm. The presence of God is affirmed in the preposition with us (Isa. 7:14), and His protection is declared in the phrase our stronghold. The use of the term stronghold implies inaccessible height.
Psalm 46:8-11

8 Come, see the works of the LORD, who brings devastation on the earth. 9 He makes wars cease throughout the earth. He shatters bows and cuts spears to pieces; He burns up the chariots. 10 “Stop your fighting—and know that I am God, exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth.” 11 Yahweh of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

READ: Psalm 46:8-11 on page 63 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE: Use the first paragraph on page 81 of this Leader Guide to reinforce the structure and primary theme of Psalm 46.

RECAP: Highlight the second paragraph on page 67 of the PSG:

It comes down to a choice. God has made peace possible between Himself and us. We were the enemies raging against His kingdom. We were the rebels making alliances with the chaos of the world. But God stands infinitely over and above all things. He is the true Hero of our battle, and He offers peace. But we must choose to trust Jesus rather than our stuff and our own willpower.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 67 of the PSG: “What steps can we take to seek God instead of our own ideas for peace?”

Note: Your goal for this question is to help group members think through practical ideas for approaching God in times of turmoil rather than relying on their own solutions. Therefore, encourage them to move beyond the usual answers such as “pray,” “read the Bible,” and so on. Help them go deeper.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” of this session: “God is the source of peace in the midst of turmoil.” As time permits, encourage group members to share any final thoughts or questions.
Psalm 46:8-11 Commentary

The third stanza of Psalm 46 renews the thrust launched in verse 1 and revisited in verse 7: that of radical trust in the Lord. We can have peace regardless of what natural or national calamity may fall because these things are not greater than our God. Psalm 46 highlights this last point by weaving together the themes of the previous two sections into this last stanza. This feat is accomplished poetically by using two sets of imperatives (commands) to set the stage for the final repetition of the refrain containing the confession of trust in verse 11. The first set of imperatives presents the psalmist inviting the faithful to consider the present and future reality of the confession of trust (vv. 8-9). The second set delivers the actual prophetic voice of God and His ultimate will (v. 10).

[VERSE 8] The psalmist commanded the faithful to come and see the present and future works of the Lord. This is the first set of imperatives. The Hebrew verb translated see is one connected most often with the oracles of a seer or prophet. The faithful are to consider this—to “foresee” the works of God. The outcome of the invitation is peace, but the call to come and see is not a tranquil or gentle summons. Instead, it is to consider the process of God’s judgment. God will bring devastation on the earth. The word devastation is plural and refers to horrifying and atrocious events. The psalmist pictured Yahweh here as the Divine Warrior who will fight for His people.

[VERSE 9] Yahweh is the warrior who makes wars cease unto the ends of the earth. As a fighter, Yahweh shatters bows and cuts spears to pieces. He is the one who burns up the chariots. The psalmist was not implying that all nations bring their weapons to God and lay them in a heap for destruction. Rather, these are combat phrases. As the leader of the heavenly armies, God fights for and protects His people. The judgment comes in the battle when rebellious nations attack His people.

[VERSE 10] The second set of imperatives or commands occurs in verse 10. The conquering King raises His thunderous voice (v. 6) and demands the cessation of hostilities. “Stop your fighting,” God demands. This is a rebuke to the raging and restless world. No act of humanity, no rebellion is greater than God. In two short phrases, God declares Himself to be exalted among the nations and exalted on the earth. To speak of exaltation is befitting of kingship, particularly that of the Lord (Pss. 99:1-5, 9; 113:4-5; 145:1) The prophetic voice of God declares His ultimate will, and the peoples of the world will know that I am God.

[VERSE 11] The final repetition of the refrain underscores the primary theme of Psalm 46. Yahweh is the source of peace in the midst of the storm. He is our refuge, strength, and stronghold. We can trust in His protective care in any calamity or turmoil because nothing is greater than our God.
GUIDE: Direct group members to page 68 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following suggestions for allowing God to work in their lives and produce peace:

- **Dwell in God’s Word.** Read Psalm 46 daily for the next week. Choose one verse to memorize so you can remind yourself about God’s power during times of turmoil.

- **Take a retreat.** Spend a significant portion of time alone in prayer and worship this week. Ask God to give you peace.

- **Get involved.** Identify a group or ministry that seeks to bring spiritual peace into the lives of people. Determine how you can help that cause.

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**Wrap It Up**

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the conclusion from page 68 of the PSG: “You’re going to face turmoil every day. That’s not a pleasant reality, but it’s true. Fortunately, you can actively choose to make a resolution in the face of turmoil. Be intentional to let God work a revolution in your life—a revolution of His peace and presence.”

**PRAY:** Conclude the discussion by proclaiming with the psalmist that “God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble.” Ask again that you and your group members would experience peace as you trust in God’s goodness and power in the days to come.
My group’s prayer requests

Additional suggestions for specific groups (women, men, boomers, and singles) are available at BibleStudiesForLife.com/blog.

And for free online training on how to lead a group visit MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife.

Tulips for Traci

I’m 42 years old and am recovering from bilateral mastectomies, a hysterectomy, and radiation treatments for breast cancer. Over my lifetime, I’ve watched my grandparents, cousins, uncles, and most recently my father pass away from one excruciating form of cancer or another—bone, brain, breast, pancreatic, and prostate. The stages and original prognoses may have differed, but the outcome never did.

To continue reading “Tulips for Traci” from HomeLife magazine, visit BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles.