



OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

GOING TO GOD IN CHANGING TIMES

PSALM 46:1-11

MARCH 29, 2020

MAIN POINT

God is the source of peace in the midst of turmoil.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. What aspect of life most challenges your ability to be still before God? Busyness? Anxiety? Conflict? Something else?

2. How do you think a regular practice of being present with God would prepare you for the challenges of daily life?

Leader: Presence before God is something that happens in the middle of life at full speed with all of its hardship and unpredictability. Being present with God—recognizing His transcendence and intimate care for us—provides peace in situations that would seem to make peace impossible. As a result, our experience with God calms our fear and anxiety.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 46:1-3.

3. This psalm begins by describing God's presence with His people during a time of great chaos. How do you respond to threats to your livelihood or security? Is your default to try everything to handle the matter yourself? At what point do you typically look to God for deliverance?

4. The psalmist described God as "an ever-present help in trouble." Is that consistent with your experience? How does it shape your perception to realize that God never leaves or forsakes you?

Leader: As Psalm 46 opens, it is clear that it is not the psalm of serenity one might expect from just reading the often-quoted first part of verse 10. Rather, verse 1 begins

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with talk of God as a refuge that is found in times of trouble. The opening images of the psalm indicate that these words were written to God's people while they were fearful and in danger. Recognizing who God is and stilling oneself in awe of that understanding wards off fear.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 46:4-7.

5. These verses describe God's continual presence with His people. What daily practices or spiritual disciplines make God's presence most vivid to you? How do our wounds, our shame, or our pride prevent us from drawing near to God?

6. How should you approach the chaos of life differently knowing that God is aware of everything that comes against you?

Leader: The second section of Psalm 46 addresses the political turmoil that comes when nations battle one another. Each of the sections in Psalm 46 end with "Selah," which is a Hebrew word that signals to musicians the appropriate place for pause or reflection. The first point of reflection, or stillness, is focused on God's protection. The second point of reflection is the presence of God during political upheaval. Because of God's unceasing presence, His people will not be toppled. We can be confident because God is always with His people. Further, in His presence with us, He is not indifferent to us, but cares for us intimately.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 46:8-11.

7. These verses describe God's victory on behalf of His people. Everyone in the world is facing hardship right now in some form or another. What particular battle are you facing that you are ready for God to ultimately win?

8. How does being a part of God's people—for whom He fights—move you to praise? How can you draw strength from this and how does this change your perception as you face the chaos of life?

Leader: As Psalm 46 progresses, there is a growing sense in the reader that longs not just for the Lord to fight for His people, but also for the fighting to be finished. Verse 10's divine directive to stop fighting and know that God is God is a call to recognize God for who He is and to rest in that. **It is a call to stop everything** and focus attention solely on God and worship appropriately. Even in the most chaotic moments of life, we can remember that God is with us and desires to draw us deeper into relationship with Him.

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9. In verse 10, God says, “be still, and know that I am God.” How does it impact you to know that God calls you to come to Him in relationship, not with religion and request?

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

10. What is the top fear or concern you are currently dwelling on or struggling with? How do the psalmist’s words describing God’s power over all things offer you comfort?

11. During this season, what are some ways that you can build time within your schedule to be still before God? What impact would you expect that to have on your life?

11. How might focusing on relationship with God over religion and request change the way you view the chaos of life?

CLOSING THOUGHT

God and your church love you.

PRAYER

Close in prayer, thanking God for His strength and stability in the midst of trying and tumultuous times. Pray that God would be a source of encouragement and hope in the lives of our group.

MEMORIZE

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.” – Psalm 46:10

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

PSALM 46:1-11

46:1. Psalm 46 begins with a statement about God and about us, His people. God is not simply a refuge and strength but our refuge and strength. God alone is the source of His people's safety and power. People need a refuge. Those who take refuge in God experience His blessing (Ps. 2:12) and His salvation (17:7). The psalmist began this poem with a general Hebrew word for God transliterated Elohim. The poet then utilized some other specific titles for God as he continued the psalm. He described God in a defensive, protective role as our refuge. A refuge referred to a safe place where people might flee in times of danger. A walled city, a fortress, and even the temple could be such places of protection. God as one's strength, on the other hand, provided active help and encouragement to take action.

The phrase "a very present help" means that God is a help who can be found easily and often. The phrase indicates that God is always ready for us to find Him and that He is more than adequate to help us deal with any situation we face. God is not remote from His people. The Hebrew word translated "trouble" comes from a verb basically meaning "to be narrow." Troubled times are times when we feel bound or confined.

46:2-3. We do not know the depth and strength of our faith until our faith is tested. How then could the psalmist claim that we will not fear in the face of the earth's shakings and the water's roarings? The poet was not boasting. Instead, he was stating the consequence of what he had just affirmed. Because God is a refuge, a strength, and a present help in trouble, we have no reason to fear.

Psalmists used the word "selah" 71 times. Outside of the Book of Psalms, the word occurs only in Habakkuk 3. Scholars are not sure what the word means. Probably it is a musical term. The word seems to be an instruction to singers or musicians. Since the word seems related to a Hebrew word meaning "to cast up," or "to lift up," some interpret selah as meaning to return to the beginning of the verse and repeat it (to lift up one's eyes to the beginning) or to increase the volume of the music or singing (to lift up one's voice). Most ancient Jewish traditions interpreted the word as meaning "forever."

46:4. Natural disasters can threaten us and so can people and nations. Verses 4-7 refer to God's protection in times of national or international catastrophes. The city of God generally has been identified as Jerusalem. The city was safe because it was God's city. Jerusalem was the holy dwelling places of the Most High. In this phrase the poet used a designation for God that perhaps reminded his audience that God the Most High had been worshiped in Jerusalem (Salem) since the time of Abram and Melchizedek, king of Salem (Gen. 14:18-24).

46:5. In the ancient Near East, gods often were linked to specific places and nations. The people viewed the defeat of a city as the defeat of the city's god. Who could hope to defeat the city in which God dwelt? God's poet emphasized his point by playing on the idea of movement. "Slip" (v. 2), moved (v. 5), and "tottered" (v. 6) all come from the same Hebrew root. Although the earth and its kingdoms may slip and shake, God's kingdom will endure because God is in it. At the dawning of the day, people would see God's hand just as Isaiah and Hezekiah did when the Assyrians threatened Jerusalem. Judah's King Hezekiah saw how God defended His city (2 Kings 19).

46:6. Perhaps this psalm reflects events referred to in 2 Kings 19. Certainly some historical event seems to have been in the background of this verse as the poet referred to what God already had done. Throughout history various nations and empires had sought to control the land God had chosen for His own. As a result, God's people knew the uproar of the nations too well.

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46:7. The poet, using two parallel statements, pointed to the Lord as a God of might and a God of grace. The “LORD of hosts” was one of various designations for God in the Old Testament. “LORD” is the English translation of God’s personal name Yahweh (YAH weh). “The LORD” is the dominant name for God used in the Psalms. The term hosts refers to a large number (Gen. 2:1; Ex. 7:4). The title could represent God’s power over the nations. The designation was particularly appropriate in times of military threat. This poet affirmed that the Lord of Hosts is with us.

46:8. The psalmist moved from declaration to invitation, but who was invited to come, behold? Certainly he invited worshipers to recognize the works of the Lord. Also he may have invited those nations who had made an uproar (v. 6), nations believing that their strength gave them the right to subdue others. The time had come for oppressive, disruptive nations to see God at work.

46:9. This verse points to God’s goal of peace as He destroys the instruments of war. Victors often burned the spoils of war, especially equipment such as weapons and chariots. The forms of the Hebrew verbs translated “breaks,” “shatters,” and “burns” imply that God takes these actions again and again as a way of making wars to cease to the end of the earth. Judgment of a nation, of a system, or of an individual is often painful.

46:10. You may be more familiar with this verse in the translation of the King James Version: “Be still, and know that I am God.” Many of us can identify with that rendering because we are often caught up in hectic, hurried lifestyles to the point that we seem to forget who God is. The psalmist was not telling people to be still, or silent. He was reminding them of God’s command for them to stop their frantic efforts and to recognize His character, nature, and purpose. These words may have been addressed to the nations who were demonstrating hostility against God.

46:11. The repetition of verse 7 was not simply for poetic effect. God had instructed people to “know that I am God” (v. 10). Who was this “I”? The poet again reminded his audience that the “I” was the Lord of hosts . . . the God of Jacob. He was with them in their worship, in their fears, and in their faith. He had been and would continue to be with His people.