

Meeting God As Our Security

Rich Nathan

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Meeting God in the Psalms Series

Psalms 46

Back in the 1940's a psychologist named Abraham Maslow wrote a paper in which he proposed that human beings are motivated by the meeting of our needs. And so he had a pyramid, which at the lowest level had the category of physical needs.

SLIDE – Pyramid's Lowest Level = Physical Needs: Breathing, Food, Water, Sex, Sleep

And then the second level was safety and security.

SLIDE – Pyramid's Second Level = Safety and Security: Our bodies, Our Employment, Our Property

That included the security of our bodies, of our employment, of property. And you remember at the top of the pyramid, for those of you who took Psych 101, at the top of the pyramid is self-actualization.

SLIDE – Pyramid's Top Level = Self-Actualization

The idea is that until you get lower level needs met, you can't experience greater things. All of this speaks to our need for security.

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Our Need for Security

It doesn't take a psychologist to tell us that we human beings seek security. There are lots of things in life that threaten us. We have fears about our health, fears about the food we eat, fears about terrorism, fears about the economy, fears about fires and floods. And so we seek safety in an unsafe world. We seek certainty in an uncertain world. We seek security in an insecure world.

The reason we have insurance companies is to protect us against risks that we can't pay for. And insurance companies are selling us security, right? So we have the Prudential Slogan:

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Prudential = Own a piece of the Rock.

The Nationwide Slogan:

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Life comes at you fast.

The All-State Slogan:

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You're in good hands.

The State Farm Insurance Slogan:

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Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there.

You know, people want insurance on increasingly weird risks. There is a London insurance company that has tapped into what could only be called The Twilight Zone market. Some people are afraid of being abducted by little green men. You can insure yourself against that. There is a policy that will pay you in the case that aliens come in the night to take you away. You can also buy coverage against being injured by a ghost, or eaten by an alien. Now, that requires a rider to the policy of being simply abducted by an alien. But if you are eaten by an alien, you can buy coverage for that.

You can buy coverage to protect you in the case that you are hit by an asteroid. Pick a disaster, any disaster, and there is probably an insurance policy to cover it. There are disability insurance policies for your pets. For example, if you own a stallion that is unable to breed, there is insurance to protect you against that risk. You are worried about veterinary bills for your pet? Well, there is veterinary pet insurance which, tragically, you cannot deduct on your taxes. You can even protect yourself against being bitten by a werewolf.

Entertainers, for years, have purchased insurance to protect their assets. Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, Rod Stewart have all bought policies protecting their vocal cords. Lots of actresses have bought policies protecting their legs. Dolly Parton has a policy protecting her two largest assets. Jennifer Lopez purchased a policy to protect her derriere. I'm not exactly sure what her fear was, or what risk she was insuring against, but I'll just avoid speculating about that one.

In any case, in a world of threats, real and imagined, the Psalms present us with a picture of God as our ultimate security. I've called today's talk, "Meeting God As Our Security." Psalm 46. Let's pray.

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Ps 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 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. 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. ⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. ⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. 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 "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." ¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

We read in v. 1 these words:

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Ps 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

As you know there are lots of alternatives to discovering God as our refuge and strength. One of the most penetrating questions you can ask yourself is what do I look to for a sense of security when I am fretful, or anxious, or preoccupied? Something happens to you and you are consumed by it, or you fear something will happen to you tomorrow, next week, or next month. You are consumed and in the grip of worry. One of the most penetrating questions you can ask yourself is: As the grip of worry tightens on your soul, what do you turn to as an escapist fix to deal with your worries? Do you raid the refrigerator and eat a cake? Do you eat a half-gallon of ice cream? Do you flip on the TV? Go shopping? Turn on the computer? Turn to sex for a release? Or do you try to seize control? Make a bunch of phone calls, stay up all night working, clean your house, scream, yell?

One of the most penetrating questions you could ever ask yourself about your motivations regarding why you do what you do is to say: "Where do I turn to find refuge, to find security, to find safety, to find escape when I'm overwhelmed by worry or anxiety?"

Another way to put this question, to reframe it in the context of Christian discipleship, we might ask: "Have you learned to find God as your refuge?" There is almost no more fundamental question of Christian discipleship than this:

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God is our refuge.

Have you learned to find God as your refuge? When we speak about God as being our refuge, we mean finding God is our ultimate security. We are trusting in God to make life work, to make life successful, to make life happy. When we

talk about God being our refuge, we are saying we are banking on God, we are setting our hope on God, we are counting on God to safeguard us, to protect us, to secure us.

The Psalms contain the vast majority of references to God as our refuge in the Bible. God as our refuge is mentioned nearly 50 times in the Book of Psalms. And there are a kaleidoscope of images that fill out the picture of God as our refuge. I want you to see this real quickly in Psalm 61:

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Ps 61:1 Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. ² From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

David is saying that God is his rock, God is solid, God is stable. God is more stable than me. He is bigger than me. He is someone I can build my life on. I can't bank on myself. I can't rely on myself, but I can rely on God. He is a rock that is higher than I.

And in v. 3

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Ps 61:3 For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe.

God is someone I can run into for safety and protection. And in v. 4,

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Ps 61:4 I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.

In the ancient Middle East, if you were invited into someone's tent in the desert, it was incumbent upon that person to protect you with his life. That is what the Lord does. He protects us with his life. And then in v. 4 again,

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Ps 61:4 I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.

There is a very sweet picture of a mother hen spreading her wings over her chicks. The motherly care of God for us.

Now, none of this means that we Christians can't get hurt. Followers of Christ live in the same world as those who don't follow Christ. We eat the same food. We drive on the same streets. We live in the same neighborhoods. We attend the same schools. We experience almost all of the same threats from the economy, and our health, and war as everyone else does. So finding God as our refuge

cannot mean and does mean that God promises to keep every bit of harm away from us.

What I would suggest it means is two things: One, that God will bear the brunt of whatever comes our way. We don't have to take it all on ourselves. We don't have to experience this thing straight on. To have God as our refuge means that everything that comes our way has to first go through God. To have God as our refuge means that whatever does come our way can never separate us from God. That's what the apostle Paul says in Romans 8.35-39

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Ro 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It doesn't say that you, follower of Christ, will experience no trouble, hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword – that you will not be at all threatened by angels or demons, or something in the present, or something in the future, or job loss. What is promised is that nothing can separate you, follower of Christ, from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. That when you make God your refuge, when you run into him rather than into the refrigerator, or into the bottle, or into sexual release, or the TV, when you say, "I now realize that I am motivated by a search for security, an answer to my worries; I'm going to escape into God," God will carry the brunt of this. God will keep you in his love.

And you know, friends, this lesson of turning to God as your refuge is more easily learned at a young age than it is at an old age. See, I believe a fundamental part of discipleship of our children is teaching them to turn to God as their refuge.

A week ago I picked up my granddaughter, Naomi, at preschool. She is 4 years old. She got in the car and she had a very bad attitude. She was a little mouthy. We went home and she continued to be a little mouthy. So I knelt down and looked her in the eye. I said, "Naomi, what's wrong? What's going on? Are you feeling upset?"

She just burst into tears. She said, "I want to be Meredith's friend, but Meredith doesn't want to be my friend. I was nice to Meredith, but Meredith wasn't nice to me today." She just cried and cried. She was inconsolable.

So I picked her up and I said, “Naomi, let’s pray to God for his help and his healing.” She immediately calmed down. So I began to pray and I said, “Lord, will you work in Meredith’s heart...”

Naomi just broke into the prayer and said, “No, Grandpa, don’t pray for Meredith. Pray for me. Pray that Jesus would heal my heart.”

And so I prayed that Jesus would heal Naomi’s heart. And at age 4 she is learning how to make Jesus her refuge. I’ll tell you, friends, at age 4 she knows more about making Jesus her refuge than many of us do as adults.

But you know, God does offer protection. I don’t want to suggest that there is never any time where God not only bears the brunt, but he actually protects us from harm.

A few years ago my sister married a guy who was not an American. She needed someone to sign for him in order to get him into the country. So she called me and said, “Rich, would you be willing to sign for my husband?”

I said, “Well, I need to see what that involves. Send me the papers and we’ll see.”

Well, as I read the papers, to sign for him meant that I would be financially responsible for him for ten years, if he stopped working. Specifically, to sign for him, meant that if the government, federal and state, had to put out any money for him because he went on welfare, or unemployment, or Medicare, that I would agree to pay the government back for everything they spent. And so I called my sister and talked with her. I said, “You know, I don’t know that I’m willing to do this.”

She cried and pleaded and said, “You know, you are a Christian. You are the one who led me to Christ. Won’t you do this for me?”

My mother called and talked with me and cried on the phone.

Well, I prayed about it and I certainly didn’t want to do this, but I felt it was the right thing to do; that I ought to put myself at risk. And so I signed the papers. And before I mailed it off, I laid my hands on the paper and said, “Lord, you know everything. You know the character of this man. You know the future. You know all of the problems I could encounter. I just ask you to protect me; protect Marlene; protect our family. And if I am making some dreadful mistake, will you intervene and just take care of this. I’m trusting you. I’m putting this paper in your hands.” And I sent it off.

Well, my sister’s husband went to the Embassy. They went through the papers. Everything was good except one minor detail: I signed the paper in the wrong

place. Now, I intended to sign the paper in the right place. I thought I did sign it in the right place. And I'm an attorney, so I know something about signing papers. But somehow my signature was on the wrong line. They said, "We're sorry, we can't accept this." And they sent him back home. Shortly after that, it was revealed that this guy was abusing drugs, and involved in some other sordid situations. My sister tore up the papers in front of him.

And my response was, "Thank you, God. You are my refuge."

There are times, friends, when God will literally step in and deliver you out from the snare. Sometimes he delivers us through and sometimes he delivers us from.

God is not only our refuge, but God, it stays, is also our strength, in Psalm 46.

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Ps 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

One commentator, Derek Kidner, I think very helpfully distinguished between God as our refuge and God as our strength.

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God is our strength.

He said that having God as our refuge really implies outer protection. Having God as our strength really communicates inward strength. It is the difference between having a cast on your broken leg that gives you outward strength, and having the cast removed and discovering that you need to build back the strength of your leg's inward strength.

God is your inward strength. He works inside of us to enable us to keep going when we are overwhelmed, when we are threatened, when something is too big for us. As our refuge, he protects us from experiencing the full brunt of the hurt; and, as our strength, he keeps us from imploding.

I think having God as our strength is illustrated by one of my favorite New Testament passages, 2 Cor. 4 where the apostle Paul says,

SLIDE – 2 Cor. 4:7-8

2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;

Now, I want you to see this inner strengthening. It says in v. 8,

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2Co 4:8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;

The apostle Paul is saying, in other words, it is not my strength that keeps me from imploding, keeps me from being crushed like a soda can. Again, in v. 8,

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2Co 4:8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;

It is not my smarts that keeps me going. It is not, in other words, that I have it all figured out and I have the answers. It is not our strength and it is not our smarts. And then he goes on in v. 9 and says:

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2Co 4:9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

It is not my social skills or social network. It is not because we have such great relationships that we are able to keep going. And then in v. 9, again, he says:

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2Co 4:9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

And it is not my circumstances. It is not my situations. It is not because things have turned around that I am able to keep going. It is not our strength. It is not our smarts. It is not our social network. It is not our situation. How in the midst of something overwhelming do I keep going? Only the inward strengthening of God.

Have you ever experienced that inward strengthening, friends? Have you ever said the reason why I'm getting through this is because God is supplying supernatural strength to my soul. Otherwise, I would just collapse. I could never have gotten through this other than Almighty God kept me from collapsing.

Some of you may not know this, but Psalm 46 was the inspiration for Martin Luther's great hymn that became the battle cry of the Protestant Reformation: A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. And, of course, Luther suffered persecution and attack. His life was regularly threatened. But as he read Psalm 46, he found refuge in God. But not only refuge in God, he found strength in God. You see, Luther also suffered from regular bouts of depression. He discovered in God, in the midst of overwhelming outward pressure and great inward pressure, he discovered in God a strength, a capacity to keep going even in the darkest days of his depression.

Well, the psalmist goes on to say this in v. 1:

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Ps 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Literally, he is saying that God is a help that is accessible to me. An ever-present help literally means help that is well proved.

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Ever present help = help that is well-proved

God provides help that has proven itself helpful to many others who have been in my situation – a well-proved help. You are going through a financial crisis; you have cancer; you have a heart problem; you are struggling with one of your kids; you are separated; you talk with a bunch of other people who have similarly experienced cancer or heart problems, or financial problems and you say: How did you get through it? And they say, “I got through it by discovering God as my refuge and my strength.” That’s what it means: a well-proven help. You follow the counsel of others who say: God was the help for me. And so you turn to God for help as well.

Look with me at vv. 2 and 3.

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Ps 46:2 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.

He speaks in v. 2 of the earth giving way, or literally the earth should change. Change is part of the human condition. Part of being a human being is

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Our experience of change.

Here the psalmist is talking about the most extreme change that could be experienced – the earth dissolving under your feet. It is a picture of whatever it is that you are building your life on – your ministry, your reputation, your marriage, your finances, your ability to see, your ability to speak, your ability to walk, your identity as a mother, a father, a wife or husband, or your health. Having those things dissolve under you, so that whatever you formerly thought was stable and solid, suddenly collapses under your feet. Change is part of the human condition. Change is our lot in life as human beings.

Here is a truth: We human beings experience change as stress.

Back in the 1960's two psychologists, a man by the name of Thomas Holmes, and another man, Richard Rahe, put together a list of life changes and gave

each of these life changes a point value concerning the stress that would be experienced by us. So, for example:

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The death of a spouse = 100 points

Divorce = 60 points

Jail Terms = 60 points

Menopause = 60 points

Death of a close family member other than a spouse = 60 points

Being fired at work = 45 points

Retirement = 40 points

And then what they also said in this study was that it was not just bad life changes that caused stress. Any change causes stress. So,

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Getting married = 45 points

Having a new family member = 35 points

Finishing school = 20 points

We human beings experience change as stress, and so our tendency is to want to keep things from changing. We want to scream at the world: Slow down! We're moving too fast. Technology is changing at warp speed. So is the American economy. People in their 20's change their jobs on average every 18 months. Factories are closing, corporations are downsizing, globalization is moving jobs overseas. We want to shout: Slow down!

But you know, in the midst of change, the great alternative to find God as our security is nostalgia. Nostalgia literally means to return home, to mourn for a simpler time, a better time. To try to retrieve something from the past that is no longer retrievable. The great alternative to turning to God in a time of change is nostalgia. I want to make things the way they were. I don't want to change. I don't want my kids to grow up. I don't want an empty nest. I don't want to be a widow or widower. I don't want the church to grow. I liked it better when we were small. I don't want our small group to change. I want to go back to the way things were.

And I will tell you, friends, this great alternative to finding God as our security is announced almost every day on Christian radio. Let's turn back the clock to another time in America, a simpler time, a better time. Let's try to recreate a period, the 1950's, where mom was at home and people respected their elders. Parenthetically, by the way, you know that the 1950's were not all that great for everyone. If you were a minority, if you were African American, or Hispanic, the 1950's wasn't a great decade. If you are a woman who has career ambitions, you probably wouldn't want to go back to the 1950's.

But the Bible doesn't offer nostalgia as our security in a time of change. The Bible offers us God. We read in v. 7,

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Ps 46:7 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

And we read the same thing in v. 11,

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Ps 46:11 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

In the place of putting your hopes in an irretrievable past, the Bible said:

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God is with us.

A man by the name of John Robinson was commenting on one of the Psalms and he said:

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God is not only a God of the rocks, but of the rapids.

I like that. God is not only a God of the rocks, but of the rapids. In other words, God is not only there with us when everything is solid, unchanging and immovable in our life. God is there with us in times of rapid change, when the water is really moving. God says, "Even then I will be with you." Notice in vv. 7 and 11, God is referred to as the God of Jacob.

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Ps 46:11 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Jacob, of course, was one of the patriarchs in the Old Testament. He is the father of the Jewish nation – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And Jacob lived the life of a pilgrim constantly on the move. His life was a life of constant change. The promise came to Jacob over and over again:

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As I was with your father, so will I be with you.

God is not just a God of the rocks, he is a God of the rapids. If you turn to God as your security, he will see you through every life stage – from being a toddler to being a child; to being an adolescent; and then a young adult; through middle age and retirement and old age.

For the past two years in my morning devotions I've used the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer*. One of the prayers that is in what is called The Great Litany that catches me day after day is this prayer that says:

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In all our time of tribulation; in all our time of prosperity; in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, Good Lord, deliver us.

We can have God has our security. We can have God with us when we are going through severe trial and when we are prosperous. We can have God with us at the moment we die whether alone in a nursing home, or surrounded by family and friends. Most of all, if you turn to Christ as your Lord and Savior, you can have God with you in the Day of Judgment. No one else will stand by you, come what may, other than Jesus. No one else will be there advocating for you, defending you, protecting you on the day of Judgment except Jesus.

The psalmist promises not only that God will be with us, but that God can be the great transformer. Look at vv. 4-6,

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Ps 46:4 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. ⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

The picture here changes. This is a tranquil picture after all of the tumult. In v. 3 we see the waters roar and foam. But in v. 4 we read of a river whose streams make glad the city of God.

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God is the Great Transformer

God can take something that threatens us, God can take something that causes us fear, and God can transform that thing into something that gives us life and causes us to grow. Have you ever experienced God as the great transformer? God taking something bad in your life, something awful, and using it in your life to produce peace and growth. Maybe it was an unintended pregnancy or a job firing, or a divorce, or an illness. You say, "I would never want to go through that again. But the fruit God has born in my life as a result of that difficulty, I wouldn't trade for anything." Almost every mature Christian has a testimony to that effect. How many of you can say this: it was incredibly hard, but God used this trial to plow up my life and he sowed seed during that time that changed my life.

Friend, if you are going through something now that is overwhelming, if you turn to God as your security, as your refuge, as your strength, this thing can transform

you so that whatever seems to present you with pain and death can be a source of growth and life.

And then we come to the third stanza, v. 8-11,

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Ps 46:8 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 “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” ¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

When it says in v. 10,

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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.”

Some translations put it more literally, cease striving.

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Our practice of striving.

A great alternative to finding God as our refuge and our security is to strive, to fight like crazy. Vv. 8 and 9 talk about the bow and the shield. Today’s terms, we would talk about lawsuits, threats, arguing, trading nasty emails, spending years trying to get something, your rights, to get what you are entitled to. Again, I think about the patriarch Jacob. He spent his whole life manipulating, striving, wrestling for a blessing God was only too willing to give him, if he just let go. If he just abandoned himself to God, if he just gave up, stop fighting with Esau your brother, stop fighting for your dad’s blessing and approval. Jacob, I’m only too willing to give you what you’ve always been seeking.

Friends, do you see this in your life, this striving, this unwillingness to just surrender to God as sovereign.

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God is our sovereign.

v. 10,

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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.”

You know, one of the secrets in really experiencing God as our refuge and security is simply giving up. I don't mean giving in to despair. I don't mean giving up and sinking into depression or hopelessness. One of the secrets to discovering God as your security and refuge is giving up control of a situation to God. Just giving up.

A number of years ago I was in the midst of one of the greatest difficulties in my life. I just was absolutely consumed by this particular trial. I was praying to God out on a prayer walk, I like to pray while I walk. I was out walking talking to God and I said, "Lord, nothing that I'm doing is working. It doesn't matter if I speak or don't speak; if I'm nice or not nice; it doesn't seem to matter what I pray or how I relate. Nothing that I am doing is fixing this problem. " I began on this walk to get more and more emotional. Finally, I just broke down as I walked and began to cry. I felt the Lord draw near to me and I said to the Lord, "Lord, I give up. I can't fix it. I can't do it. If anything is going to happen, it is going to be because of you."

Friend, that was a watershed moment in my life. Something inside of me shifted. Something broke; something changed. I knew that I knew that I had turned control over this area in my life. I can look back now years later and even though the situation didn't radically change, something inside of me changed.

And we find God as our security, finally, when we know that God is our hope.

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God is our hope.

In vv. 8-9, the psalmist is pointing ahead to our future hope.

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Ps 46:8 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.

This verse is pointing to a day when there will be no more threats, no more war, no more change that threatens to overwhelm us. The Bible regularly calls us to look ahead to a better day, to the new creation. In Revelation 21 we read of the city of God surrounded by walls and outside the walls is everything that can threaten us. We followers of Jesus don't set our hope on a particular person who might be elected in the next presidential election. We don't set our hope on some particular break-through in medicine, or winning the war on terrorism. We Christians are banking on God. We're betting our lives on God in the present and in the future. He is our security. Let's pray.

Meeting God As Our Security

Rich Nathan

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Meeting God in the Psalms

Psalm 46

I. Our Need for Security (Ps. 46.1)

A. Alternatives to God

B. God is Our Refuge (Ps. 61.2-4)

C. God is Our Strength (2 Cor. 4.7,8)

II. Our Experience of Change (Ps. 46.2,3)

A. Alternatives to God

B. God is With Us (Ps. 46.7,11)

C. God is The Great Transformer (Ps. 46.4-6)

III. Our Practice of Striving (Ps. 46.8-11)

A. Alternatives to God

B. God is Our Sovereign

C. God is Our Hope