

## A Helper Always Found in Times of Trouble

### Psalm 46 (CSB)

For the choir director. A song of the sons of Korah. According to *Alamo*. <sup>1</sup> God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. <sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas, <sup>3</sup> though its water roars and foams and the mountains quake with its turmoil. *Selah* <sup>4</sup> There is a river— its streams delight the city of God, the holy dwelling place of the Most High. <sup>5</sup> God is within her; she will not be toppled. God will help her when the morning dawns. <sup>6</sup> Nations rage, kingdoms topple; the earth melts when he lifts his voice. <sup>7</sup> The LORD of Armies is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. *Selah* <sup>8</sup> Come, see the works of the LORD, who brings devastation on the earth. <sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease throughout the earth. He shatters bows and cuts spears to pieces; he sets wagons ablaze. <sup>10</sup> "Stop fighting, and know that I am God, exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth." <sup>11</sup> The LORD of Armies is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. *Selah*

March 18, 2020, as everything was shutting down due to COVID, we experienced a 5.7 magnitude earthquake. It's one of those events that you probably remember exactly where you were and what you were doing. I was just getting out of bed, heard the noise, and then kind of fell back into bed because I couldn't stay on my feet. The earth was literally trembling. What do you do? Where do you find shelter and help when the ground, that should be stable, shakes you up?

In our verses from Psalm 46, there is a whole lot of chaos. The earth trembles so hard, experiences an earthquake of such magnitude, that the mountains topple into the depths of the sea. Imagine seeing our Wasatch mountains rumbling and shaking so much that they broke off in their entirety and landed in the Great Salt Lake. The waters are violent, turbulent, churning worse than the off-balance washing machine, so hard that you can only be swept away. Nations rage at the upheaval. The earth is in devastation. Kingdom, countries, fall, never to recover. The earth melts away. Everything that was seemingly stable was shaken.

What are the things that shake you up? It could be the death of a loved one, a diagnosis of cancer, losing your job, going through a move, or many others. As we get closer to our seminar to train advocates for abuse survivors, I want to focus you in on how a person's life is completely shaken up and melted away by abuse. Imagine (but maybe you don't have to...) that the person who vowed to be faithful to you, cherish you, support you, help you in sickness and in health as long as you both shall live calls you stupid and other abhorrent words that shouldn't be said to any human being. They isolate you. They limit or remove your access to the finances. They blame you for the way they're acting. They punch a wall, chuck something across the room and break it. They scare you. They threaten you. They raise a hand against you, shake you, strike you. Maybe it's a friend or a family member, someone you trust, someone you assumed who never seek to harm you. But they wouldn't leave you alone. They make you feel uncomfortable with things they say, actions they take. They forced themselves on you, violated you. You were sinned against. You were abused.

What do you do? Can you stay with your spouse? Can you honor your marriage vows to this person? Should you stay quiet, that what happens in the home stays in the home behind closed doors, that events of that dark day stay hidden in the shadows and you should just move on from it? You're in so much pain, and how do you even begin to get help?

When your world has been shaken like this, you look for help but maybe don't see it anywhere. Yeah, there are people you know, but what will they say? Will they tell someone else? Are they equipped to deal with a situation like mine? What if they tell me to suck it up and deal, that everyone has problems? What if they say that it's my fault that this happened? People at church don't know; they don't ask. No one has a clue. If only they could see what goes on and know the pain I'm feeling because I don't feel heard. Honestly, I don't really want the pastor to know. He'll probably just tell me to honor my marriage vows. It seems like all help is gone. You feel abandoned. When there are no brothers and sisters in Christ to support you and help you through times when you've been abused, you feel like God is that much farther away from you, that maybe he doesn't care and let this happen to you.

I wish I could say that relationship violence, abuse, is a problem "out there," in the homes of unbelievers, that Christians don't abuse anyone ever because we've been taught to love others as Christ loved us. Statistically, though, relationship violence does not decrease among Christians, but we also tend not to talk about it. It's one of those taboo issues, a private issue that we feel ill-equipped to deal with. And since it's not talked about, our brothers and sisters in Christ who have been abused often suffer silently, feeling abandoned as if there is no help for them and they have to deal with it on their own. They feel abandoned like Paul did at his first defense. They feel abandoned by God himself, start to lose faith in him, want nothing to do with him.

The Sons of Korah who wrote this psalm must have gone through times where their world was shaken. The ancestor that they're named after actually rebelled and led a conspiracy and coup d'état of sorts against Moses' leadership in the times of the Exodus and

the Lord caused the earth to open up and swallow them. We can imagine that Korah's sons and descendants were looked down on, possibly abused, felt abandoned by their fellow countrymen because of what someone else had done.

But they found help. "God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble." (verse 1) In their distress, possibly being abandoned by everyone else, they found God as their helper every time they felt they had no where to turn. God had never stopped caring for them or loving them. He was the constant for them while the world around them quaked, shook, fell apart, and melted.

For someone feeling abused and abandoned, that there is no one that they can turn to for help and support, it's hard to trust that God is actually with them to help them through times such as these. In those moments, recall that Jesus was abandoned. In the midst of his suffering on the cross, the cry came out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!?" (Matthew 27:46) In a moment that somewhat goes beyond our comprehension, God turned his back on Jesus. There was no help in that moment. To have God forsake you, turn his back on you, that is hell. Jesus, as God and Man, experienced total abandonment from God, hell. This was the price that our sins deserve. Sin separates us from God. Jesus willingly suffered abandonment from God for us in our place. He did this so that we would never be abandoned by God. Jesus paid the price so that God would be for us "our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble." (verse 1)

Not only is God our helper, but "the God of Jacob is our stronghold." (verse 7b) Think of an inaccessible, secure place maybe high up on a rock, somewhat like the picture on our worship folder. This place is safe and secure. It can withstand any force. The enemies cannot get in. An earthquake with a magnitude that would shake our Wasatch mountains into the Great Salt Lake won't even shake God our stronghold because he "is within her; she will not be toppled. God will help her when the morning dawns." (verse 5) Does that mean he is going to make us wait through a dark night before being this helper for us? No. When this psalm was written, attacks by enemies typically happened at the break of day, dawn. God is telling us here that even before the attack happens, he is with us to help us. He lights up the dark times and our enemies with his help. He ends conflicts and will one day end them all. "He makes wars cease throughout the earth. He shatters bows and cuts spears to pieces; he sets wagons ablaze." (verse 9)

So how does God serve as our stronghold in these dark times? His Words are a refuge to us. When we are abused and hurting and feeling like there is no one we can go to, our God is with us, knowing what we are going through, ready with his ears to hear our cries of pain and pleas for help, never to abandon us.

And our God does more. "The LORD of Armies is with us." (verse 11a) This is a special name of God used often in the Old Testament meaning that he commands an army of angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways, especially when your world is shaken. Not only does he command an army of angels for you, like he did for Elisha, but he also leads an army of believers to serve you.

We are Christian soldiers, called by God to serve others in his name. God uses us to bring his strength and his refuge and his stronghold to other people. Maybe a place to start is in how we greet one another, especially at church. By default, we ask people, "How's it going?" We've been taught that this is a polite thing to do, but we often don't expect people to give a full and honest assessment. Before we ask this question, do we have the unhurried time to listen, to probe, to ask follow up questions so that we can learn how the person is actually doing? Are we able to reflect on the statements they said, hear their joys and maybe where they are hurting and lonely? Instead of caring primarily on a surface level, let your care dig deeper. If you do this, you'll start to find out where this person is hurting. And if we don't have that time to dive in, maybe we should just say, "Hi! It's really great to see you!" This is something that I am trying to retrain myself to do. As we spend this unhurried time asking how someone is doing, listening, reflecting, probing, we will find opportunities to share with them the God who is our strength, our refuge, our stronghold, our helper who is always found in times of trouble.

Maybe you can lead people to the helper always found in times of trouble specifically for someone whose world has been shaken by abuse. On August 21 & 22, Michelle Markgraf from Kingdom Workers is coming to our church to provide a seminar to train people to be advocates for abuse survivors. As an advocate, you would pray for the survivor, maintain their confidentiality, offer emotional support – sympathy, empathy. You would ask the survivor about their safety often; offer to help with a safety plan, if needed. You would know about community resources and refer as needed. Maybe you would accompany the survivor to a meeting with the pastor. Is this a way that you can give people our God as the helper who is always found in times of trouble?

When people's worlds are shaken up, melted away, they can feel abandoned by everyone and God. We, though, have the LORD of Armies with us. We serve him by leading people to our God who is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. We can help people find our unshakable God, our stronghold. Amen.