



TIME OF GRACE®

Keep the Faith: GOD's Here

Study Notes

Summary

The presence of the right person is powerful. Little children are comforted with, “It’s okay. Mommy’s here.” Imagine, then, the power of God’s presence! Throughout the Bible, “Do not be afraid” is connected to God’s, “I am here.” Few places put this truth as poetically as Psalm 46, a reminder that God is our “ever-present help in trouble.”

- When _____ not near . . . I’m prone to fear!
- **Psalm 10:1:** Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?
- **Psalm 13:1:** How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?
- **Psalm 46:1-11:** 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 He says, “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.
- Keep the Faith! _____ near!
- **Psalm 46:1-3:** 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.

When _____ is near, remember God is _____.

- **Psalm 46:4-7:** 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.

GOD Is Near—Truth #2

When God is near, we have _____ to _____.

- **Psalm 46:8-11:** 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 He says, “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.

GOD Is Near—Truth #3

God’s _____ near . . . so be _____!

- **Psalm 13:5,6:** ⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. ⁶ I will sing the LORD’s praise, for he has been good to me.

Points to Ponder

1. Psalm 46:1 literally says, “God is a help found much.” Think of a section of Scripture that reminds you of that specific truth. Why did you pick that story or verse?
2. Do you use the YouVersion Bible App? Pick a reading plan for your devotional time with God because he is our help and he is easily found in his Word.
3. Identify one “Be Still” action item . . . one thing you need to relax about, drop, and leave with God. Share it with your spouse or a friend. Ask them to pray for you, follow up with you, and hold you accountable during the week ahead.

Homework for Next Week

Read Psalm 136.

Time of Grace Ministry
Keep the Faith: GOD's Here
Psalm 46
September 6, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

Because I bet just like the musical Dear Evan Hansen, there's some things in your life that are so heavy and so challenging and so stress-inducing that there are days when you kind of stumble your way home and you don't know what to do.

A few years ago, my wife and I saw the amazing Broadway musical, Dear Evan Hansen. I'll show you the picture. There's me and Kim standing just outside of the theater and we were about to experience one of the better Broadway shows that we had seen in our entire musical loving lives. If you haven't heard the story before, Dear Evan Hansen is about a teenage boy, named Evan Hansen, who has a pretty tough life. When he's just a little kid, his dad takes off and abandons him for most of his life. His mother is compassionate and loving and active as a parent but as a single mom, she has to work crazy hours and she's not often there for her son. Evan's in high school, he's kind of socially awkward, and he doesn't have a ton of friends and he actually gets into this really dark emotional spot where he climbs a tree and jumps; trying to end his life. He breaks his arm and survives and the story of the musical is what happens next.

Evan Hansen kind of stumbles into telling this lie that ends up changing his life. The lie gets him the attention and actually a relationship with the girl that he likes. It allows him to be a bit more popular at his high school; it even gives him a moment of internet fame. Everything has turned around for Dear Evan Hansen until the lie gets exposed. When the truth comes out about Evan's lie, the girlfriend dumps him, the friends leave him, his internet fame flips on him. He stumbles home, he crashes into his couch, and he has nothing left and that's the emotional moment in the show when his mom shows up. Now, as I sat in that theater, I'm a guy who doesn't cry that much. Braveheart is my favorite movie, I've seen it 26 times, but in that moment, I joined the people around me in getting choked up. Because when Evan's mom heard of what he did, when the whole story came out about his despair, how lost he felt, she sang the most beautiful song. She reminisced about that day when Evan's dad took off, when the U-Haul truck pulled into the driveway and then left, and their life would be changed. She remembered little Evan looking up at her with scared eyes wondering if another truck would come and take his mother away, too. And then looking her son in the eye, Evan's mom sang this beautiful song. She sang: "Your mom isn't going anywhere. Your mom is staying right here. Your mom isn't going anywhere. Your mom is staying right here no matter what. I'll be here." And that's the saving moment of the show. Evan crashed and burned, his life was lost, and his mother showed up with unconditional love.

That is the reason that I love being a child of my Father in heaven. You know, for the past few weeks, I've been trying to talk to you about fear; how you deal with all the mess and the chaos and the problems of life. And because I bet just like the musical Dear Evan Hansen, there's some

things in your life that are so heavy and so challenging and so stress-inducing that there are days when you kind of stumble your way home and you don't know what to do.

Ah, but here's the thing: I love the musical because it taught me that you can have the greatest parent in the world, in fact, you could have the greatest God in the world, but if that person, that God, was not close, it really wouldn't do you that much good. I mean, if God was caring and compassionate, if he was loving and forgiving, if he was powerful and wise but that God was not right here with you, if he was way over there at work for eight to 12 hours; if he was way up in heaven so, so far away, then you'd be stuck here with your problems and stresses and issues. So really, the whole character of God, all these things that we love about him come down to this simple fact, is God right here? No matter what, is God in this place with me and you in this very moment? And brothers and sisters, that is the good news that I get to share with you today. I'm going to tell you right up front, even before we open our Bibles, that this is the amazing idea; it is the key to the Christian faith. Write these words down: That this God - caps lock GOD - is near. He's not far away; this amazing God is near. That's what we are about to learn in one of my favorite chapters of the Bible, one of the most famous songs ever written, Psalm 46. This psalm is actually so famous that even though it's 3,000 years old, there are people that you probably know who still quote its lyrics today. Verse 1 says this: "God is our refuge and strength; an ever-present help in trouble."

Now think with me for a second: What is a refuge? I define it this way: A refuge is a place that you can run to where life gets better. Let's imagine that you're standing here in the sliding doors of Walmart and it's pouring rain outside. What is your refuge? What place would make life better? Well, your car, right? It's wet and miserable and windy and cold out here but if you could get inside your car, it would be dry, it would be warm, it would be better; that's your refuge. Or let's say you work here in an office that just isn't glamorous. Any of you have jobs like that, it's like Stressville, Inc., run by Mr. Grumpy & Sons. You know, what would be your refuge? What place would make life better? Oh, maybe your couch where you could relax and get away from the stress? Maybe your gym that you go to after work? Maybe a group of friends that help you blow off steam and remember that life is still good; it's still okay? Or what if you're here battling cancer and you're going through the chemo and you just don't feel good and you're scared that it's going to go on way longer than you want? What's your refuge? It might be your parents or your best friend or your spouse or your kids, the family that you run to when you feel like you can't - you can't go on, you can't keep doing this, not another round of treatment - you run to them and they make life better with their words and their encouragement. Really, anything could be a refuge; a physical place, an actual person, it's a place that we can run to and they make life better.

But here's the problem: The problem is that if you're here, sometimes the refuge isn't near. All right, you're standing in the doors of the Walmart - what if you're not parked in a handicap stall? What if you're 11 or 26 cars down, well, then maybe things will get better but it's not here and it's not now. You might be miserable at work and maybe your couch is your refuge but what if you're not five minutes from the end of your shift? What if you look at the clock and you've only been there for five minutes and, you know, there's going to be seven hours, 55 minutes until you get to that place. And even if you're battling cancer, even if your family is amazing, they can't be there 24-7. Sometimes you call and they don't pick up. Sometimes you feel sick and no one's

there with you. Just like Evan Hansen's mom, there are many good things in this life that we can run to but the problem is that they can't always be here.

But that's what makes God so good. Did you catch the line from verse one? It says, "God is our refuge and strength," here it is, "an ever-present help in trouble." What makes God the most amazing refuge is that he is ever-present. He's not far away and he's not even here; he's right here. He is as close as he possibly could be. He is always present and therefore, we don't have to be afraid. I love that truth so much because it applies even in the worst times of life.

That's actually what I learned the Saturday after the Tuesday when I last taught this idea. Way back on Tuesday, January 7th, 2020, I had a really special moment in my life. I got to release a book that I had been working on for a long time; this book called *Three Words That Will Change Your Life*. Sorry for the shameless plug. The premise of the book, that these three words - God is here, he's near, he's present always - can change your life. And in fact, chapter seven of this book is called *Life in the Refuge*. I spent the whole chapter trying to unpack this idea that through Jesus, Christians always have a place that they can run to. We even drew a little picture of a refuge and a tower to drive the point home. That was Tuesday and I had no idea what was about to happen that Saturday.

You see, that Saturday, January 11th, 2020, the first known coronavirus patient died. And as you and I know, after that happened, our world was shaken. What was way over there in China moved over to Europe and then the storm cloud settled over America and all the stuff we thought was so secure, all the places that we could run to with our stresses and our fears, they got pushed so far away. We were stuck in isolation here and the school we used to go to see our friends and the family gatherings around the dinner table and the gyms we used to work out in, even in the churches we used to gather in, instead of being so close, they were pushed so, so far away. And I bet you had to deal with some of that fear: Where do you go? What do you do?

The answer of this psalm is you don't have to go anywhere because God is our refuge and our strength and he is an ever-present help in trouble. That's what the next verses of this psalm say; jump with me to verse 2: "Therefore," the psalmist says, "we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; God lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

So look how this psalm finishes up. Verse 8: "Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire." He says, "Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

There's that classic line. You know, that's what helped a woman on the other side of the world be still. I got an email about a month ago from a woman I had never met from the UK. She had come across something that I had written online about the presence and the power of God and

she wanted to tell me her story. She said that she was discouraged and depressed, she simply couldn't be still, and the reason why was because she really wanted to be married and things just weren't working out. I don't know all the last details of her story but I've been there with so many of you who want to settle down and start a family, you want to meet that one but, you know, things just don't work and sometimes the men that seem interested in you, they're not that interested in Jesus and relationships are complicated and marriage is a huge commitment and for her it wasn't working.

But she came across this devotion where I challenged her to do this. I said, "Close your eyes and picture that guy." Picture Mr. Right walking into the room, looking at you with those beautiful green eyes and a smile spreading across his face; you feel the affection even from the other side of the room. And I wrote, "Now open your eyes and remember this: That God is even better." However you picture that guy who walked into the room, if God is God, he is so much better. He's more committed, he's more faithful, he's more affectionate, he's more patient, he's more gentle, he is wiser, he's more loving, he is more forgiving; everything that you would want in a guy, you have even more in God. And then I reminded her of the greatest thing and that God, through Jesus, is right here. When you open your eyes, you didn't see that guy but you do have God. And she wanted to tell me how that simple truth of God's presence impacted her heart.

Let me read to you her words. She said, "I can declare that God is even better than marriage. My disappointment and my discouragement has lifted. Amen." And when I read her email, I said "Amen!" Friends, one of the hardest but most important things in our faith is simply to remember that he's God and he's here. He's better than all the other things we would ever want, desire, or imagine and because of Jesus, we have him; an ever-present help in trouble. Our refuge, our fortress, and our strength.

So let's practice. If you're holding a phone, a tablet, a device, a remote, a pen, a program, I want you to put that all down for a second so your hands are free and now I want you to tense up your muscles. I want you to think about all your worries, all your what ifs, all your anxieties and all of your fears and as you do, fist after fist, abs and length, curl your toes inside of your socks, squeeze up your face, I want you to think of all the things that could fall apart in life. Go ahead. About the coronavirus and what if there's another outbreak and it's worse, what if the school year, the entire school year falls apart. What if it messes with the election, what if things get jacked up in our country, what if? And what if it affects someone you love? They can't get a job, their retirement falls apart, what if they get sick and they need medical care? What if the next year you lose someone you love? What if you don't figure things out with your kids and the relationship grows distant? All of your fears - are you as tense as you can be? All right, now on the count of one, two, three - ah. Be still. He's God. He's God. Be still and know that he is the God who is exalted. He's bigger than any fear that you're facing. There is nothing you are worried about that the God you worship can't handle. So be still. Take a deep breath. And remember that God can. Breathe again. And don't forget that God cares. Keep going. Remember that God controls and God knows and God's enough and God is near. God is right here.

In the days to come, this won't be some like pastor exercise through a screen; it's going to be real. You're going to look down and see that you've been clenching your fists. You're going to feel

the tension in your neck, in your jaw, the stress headache will come on and in those moments, here's what I want you to do: exhale. He's God. And remember that because of Jesus God is not way over there and you've got to run to him. There is a city and she will not fall and a river runs through it. Picture yourself there with God and say with the psalmist, "The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

This is the amazing part about being a Christian because we have a Jesus who actually lets us relax. Today, I'm telling you to be still. But it's not because I have things worked out. I'm telling you to be still, relax, because he's God. Come to the cross of Jesus and see what our Savior has done. See how Jesus smashed the spear and broke the bow and demolished any distance between you and God. Run to the cross and see your Savior bleeding so that there would be no barrier between you and the city where the Most High God dwells. Fix your eyes on Jesus who lived a gloriously loving life so that you could experience a glorious loving life with your Father in heaven. And look at Jesus, risen from the dead, so that the place where God is is the place where you are. Where you can look around at this crazy world and you can be still. He's God. It's not way over there. Through faith in Jesus, God is right here. God is near.

Let's pray.

Oh Father in Heaven, you - you're right here. The Holy Spirit, the dove that descended on your Son at his baptism, the fire came upon the apostles at Pentecost, that glorious spirit is not far away. He dwells in every Christian heart. What an amazing truth, Father, that all that we need for peace, for joy, for self-control, it's not a journey we have to take; it's right here. Open our eyes to see it, to see you. The devil would love for us to tense up our muscles, to pace like things are out of control, but they're not. Help us to remember today that you're God and you're right here.

Jesus, we love you. I don't even know how to express it. We love you so much because you gave us the guarantee of the city of God. You brought the kingdom where God reigns and rules right here into our hearts. You did everything and we just trust you; we just have faith. And so I thank you today for being the way to the Father. I thank you for being an ever-present help in trouble. I thank you that no matter what happens in the days to come with our finances, with our economy, with our families, with the corona virus, we will not fear because you are with us; a mighty rock, an ever-present help in trouble. We love you, we worship you, and we praise you today, Father, and we ask it all in Jesus' name, Amen.