

Ever-Present Help

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[0 : 0 0] Take your Bibles and turn to Psalm 46. God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in trouble.

! Therefore, 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. He lifts his voice, and the earth melts.

The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth.

[1 : 0 3] He makes war cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the shields with fire. 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.

The Sunday I've been dreading is here. My heart is stunned and heavy.

And I'm sure you've had moments like I have where you have said, Is this even happening? It is happening.

Despite what my troubled mind says at two in the morning, when I can't sleep, it is happening. And we are troubled.

[2 : 1 3] I don't need to say anything more. We are troubled. Things we assumed and took for granted, taken as a matter of course, have fallen into the heart of the sea.

And places where we once walked with solid stone under our feet are no more.

C.S. Lewis lost his wife and wrote, No one ever told me grief felt so much like fear. So we are in trouble.

Not in danger. That's not what I mean. We are in our Father's hands. We are as safe and secure as Josie is now.

So we're not in danger, but our hearts are troubled all the same. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope, because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed.

[3 : 3 5] And that's what it feels like. It feels like we will be consumed. The grief will consume us, devour us. But between you and that devouring grief is the Lord's great love that's standing there.

We will not be consumed. Great is your faithfulness. Martin Luther wrote, He's a bulwark never failing.

So the seas of grief and sorrow are beating upon the shore. But there's a wall, a wall to protect us, and it's the Lord's love.

And it's love with its foundations in the very bottom places of God's heart. And God's love stands between you and devouring grief.

We are in trouble, but our God is an ever-present help in trouble. And you see that on your page, Psalm 46, verse 1, and that's our meditation this morning.

[4 : 49] He is an ever-present help in trouble. If you have the ESV, you can look and see as a footnote, as a possible translation, it says He's a well-proved help.

Well-proved help. And indeed, that's something of what it means. Literally, in the Hebrew, it's not very good English, but literally in the Hebrew, it says, a help he has been found greatly.

A help he has been found greatly. Not very good English. And so the translators are trying to capture this idea that we have tried Him over and over again, and He has always proven Himself to be a help.

He's never failed us. Not once. And so we sing it, from every stormy wind that blows, from every swelling tide of woes, there is a calm and sure retreat.

It is found beneath the mercy seat. So listen to Matthew Henry. Are we in distress? He is a help.

[6 : 08] To do everything we need, a help found. So the word is. One whom we have found to be so.

A help on which we can write, it is tried. He has been tried.

And so here we are in this new trouble, and the real danger is that we are going to forget that the Lord has helped us in the past. The Lord is a tried help, a well-proved help.

John Gill, the old Baptist, wrote, in all kind of trouble that the saints have come into, the Lord has been found by experience to be an exceedingly great helper of them.

Again, not perfect English like we would like to hear, but the Lord has been found by experience. We're not talking about hearsay now. That's not what the psalmist is talking about.

[7 : 11] He's talking about what we have found by experience. And so what the psalmist, the son of Korah, is doing in Psalm 46 is he's looking back in Israel's history, and he is saying he has always helped us before.

So therefore, we will not fear. Now, last time, two weeks ago, I stood in this pulpit and I preached, I believe, therefore I speak.

and we looked at Psalm 46 where it says, be still and know that I am God. And the lesson there was, in times of trouble, it is a good time to now, to remember what we know and what we believe about God.

So it was, I believe. This morning, we're going to, it's not I believe, this morning it is, I remember. I remember. I remember.

Days of trouble are days to remember what the Lord has done in the past. And so, how he's helped us in the past.

[8 : 21] Psalm 143, verse 5, I remember the days of long ago. I meditate on all your works. I remember. I remember. I remember. Therefore, I will not fear.

Because my God has proved. He's tried. He's been tried over and over again. And every single time he has been found to be a helper for us.

And again, we're not talking about things I've just read and heard, but experience. I remember. I remember. I remember Joseph.

Was sold by his own brothers into slavery. And he was as good as dead and gone. And no one was to help.

No one was there to help him. No, there was no soul to depend upon. No one was there. But the Lord, it says, was with Joseph three times in Genesis 39. The Lord was with Joseph.

[9 : 26] In Potiphar's house, the Lord was with Joseph. But things got worse. And then he was thrown into an Egyptian prison. But it says, the Lord was with Joseph.

The Lord was with Joseph. And everything Joseph touched flourished and was blessed. And the question is, why? Well, the Lord was there helping him. So, Joseph, what do you say?

Did the Lord help you in your trouble? I tried him. He's a helper to me. I've proved it. I remember Israel down in Egypt in the hands of a tyrant at the mercy of an insane megalomaniac, insane with hatred.

And the Lord appears to Moses at the burning bush and he says, I have seen, seen the misery of my people. I've heard them crying out.

and I have come down to rescue them. The Lord wasn't far off. The Lord had eyes to see, his ears to hear, and he helps.

[10 : 34] Now, you remember, Moses was personally scared. He's going to have to have a personal encounter with the most powerful man in the world at that time, the Pharaoh. And now, I'm nervous when I get pulled over by the police.

But now, Moses is going to have to face Pharaoh, and so he's afraid. But did the Lord help Moses? Well, it was a showdown.

And staffs are thrown on the ground and it says, Aaron's staff swallowed up the Egyptian sorcerer's staffs. It was a show of power.

Just a simple show of, God, are you strong enough? Yep. Help needed. Help received. Now, ten plagues later, Pharaoh is begging Israel to leave.

Help desperately needed. Help given. Then I remember the Red Sea. the Egyptian army has the Israelite people backed up against that water.

[11 : 48] And there were grandmas and grandpas and teenage girls and moms with babies and herds of animals. They're all backed up to the sea and the water split and Israel flees through the Red Sea and they come out on the other side and they sing the horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

Now, there are deep waters but there is singing on the other side. I remember the desert and the thirst.

I remember the hunger and the manna and I remember the rock that gave water and I remember Moses' death and I remember Joshua's writhes.

And then I remember the whole book of Judges. The people crying out and under oppression and the Lord sending one judge after the other. And I remember David going down into a valley against a giant.

A gigantic warrior who's been a warrior since his youth versus a shepherd boy. And I remember David running from Saul. And then I remember David running from Absalom, his own son.

[13 : 06] This is days of trouble. And then he comes to the end of his life after these troubles. Troubles that would have torn out his heart. You know how he cried out, Absalom, Absalom, my son.

This isn't like a mere political coup. This is the tearing out of David's own heart. Troubles. But then at the end he sings, the Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer.

My God is the rock in whom I take refuge. The Lord turns my darkness into light. With your help I can advance against a troop.

With my God I can scale a wall. So Moses, what do you say? David, what do you say? He's tried.

I've proved him. He's a helper in days of trouble. I remember Hezekiah. And again, all of his people are now shut up in Jerusalem with the Assyrians all around.

[14 : 15] And again, there's grandmas and grandpas and teenage girls and moms with young children. And these are Hezekiah's people and they are all about to die.

And Hezekiah prays, Lord, what will you do? We need help. We need help.

We need help. Lord came. This is the angel of the Lord. The angel. God in angelic form comes down.

His people needed help. He's there. The next morning, the next morning, all it says is behold all the bodies. I remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego thrown into a seven times heated furnace.

And yet, there was another one in there in the fire with them. And I remember Daniel in the lion's den and the king says, Daniel, did your God save you?

[15 : 30] And Daniel said, he sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. So, Hezekiah, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Daniel, what do you have to say?

Well, we've seen armies and we've seen fire and we've seen lions and the Lord has helped us. And we're barely into the New Testament and we hear these iron shod sandals marching down a dirt road.

And we hear horses, hooves on a dirt road. These are professionals coming down, coming down to Bethlehem to kill the baby boys.

More specifically, to kill the baby Messiah. and then in the next scene, we see Joseph and Mary asleep in a little house, asleep, unaware that murder is coming.

And an angel wakes Joseph up. and we see Joseph and Mary fleeing down the road as the Roman soldiers come into town.

[16 : 58] And they only, the only one protecting little baby Jesus is a carpenter and a teenage girl. The Lord helped them. So Mary, Joseph, what do you say?

Oh, we've tried him. The Lord has helped us. I remember Peter in prison. I remember Paul and Silas in prison. And Peter walks out right past sleeping guards.

and I remember Paul and Silas singing until the chains break right off the wall and the doors fly open and they're free. And I remember Paul standing before Caesar.

This is another one of those like Moses versus Pharaoh. But it's Paul standing before Caesar and all of his friends, none of them had shown up for him. All of them had abandoned him.

He says, but there was still one that stuck closer than a brother to him. The Lord stood by my side. So Peter, Paul, you've tested the Lord.

[18 : 09] You've been in big trouble. What have you found? We found him to be a help. We found him to be a help. In the night, in the prison, in the fear, we found him.

He was there and he helped us. That's in the Bible. And I say, yes, that is in the Bible, but all of these things were written that we might have hope.

Because it's the same God who's for us. Times have changed. Our God has not changed. He's still the same. He's still a tried, proven help in days of trouble. More than enough for his people.

Then, more than enough for his people. Now, more than enough for us. I could tell you about Blandina, a teenage girl who was martyred for the faith in Lyon, France.

She was murdered under Marcus Aurelius, the Caesar at the time. You have Google? I won't tell you what she endured.

[19 : 21] I'll tell you what, she stood to the end. And she was a girl filled with the power of God, strengthened beyond mortal strength.

And you know what? We forget all of her torturers, we forget all the soldiers, we forget all the governors. She was a slave girl, a nobody, a non-entity, a nothing.

And we forget all the rest, but if you know her story, you don't speak her name without a little sense of awe. Because what the Lord did through her. And I could tell you about Perpetua and Felicitas, both from Africa, they're caught up in a dragnet as they go through the city of Carthage looking for Christians.

And Perpetua's father pleaded with her to recant. She's a noble woman. She just had a baby. She has life to live. And this is what the father is saying, please, just do this.

And she refuses. And Felicitas is pregnant, and she delivers a baby in a Carthaginian prison. I want you to think of the trouble and the fear and the pressure.

[20 : 39] And these are your sisters in the faith, just like you. Can the Lord be found there? Will the Lord show up there to help?

I'll just tell you this much. After the wild animals didn't finish them off, they sent in the soldiers to do the job. And the soldier that approached Perpetua was shaking so badly that she had to guide his sword to her own throat.

So Blandina Perpetua Felicitas, ladies, what do you say? He's tried.

He's helped us. We can remember Martin Luther who faced the diet of arms and the whole might of the empire and the pope stood against him and he said, here I stand.

I can do no other. So help me God. Amen. And there's a lot more that we can be said that I could say. But I want to bring this home because all of that I understand is far away and it's different people.

[21 : 56] And they can almost seem like fiction. But I'm asking Grace Fellowship Church, I'm talking to you specifically, can't we join our voices to theirs, to Moses and David's, to Mary and Joseph's, to Peter and Paul's, to Perpetua and Felicitas.

Can't we say amen to John Gill when he said, this is what we have found by experience. The trial is a new trial, but we aren't facing trouble for the first time.

so Grace Fellowship Church, what do we need to remember? I wasn't there, but I know the story and some of you actually remember it, but I remember in 1982, 83, God revealed the gospel in a clearer way.

First to stand, then to John, I think, or to stand in John, and then to their father, and Pastor Bob started having trouble at his church, a church that he had helped to found.

And there were problems, there were troubles, and I don't think anyone here knows the full extent of how much those meetings and how painful they were. Some of you might have an idea, but it was a time of trouble, and God helped.

[23 : 27] God helped us. And so there we were, Grace Fellowship Church, a little tribe, a little tribe of people, and meeting in the high school band room.

Some of you remember those days, I remember those days. My first Sunday school class was in a band locker room with cages and instruments all around and a little card table that we sat in, sat at.

But was God there? Was He there? He was there and He helped us. And who here can say He didn't?

Who here can say that He didn't help us? Well, we needed a building, and the Lord saw we needed a building, and the Lord gave us a building. But you know what?

Buildings and band rooms, those aren't real troubles. They're difficulties, but we have seen trouble. we've seen tense meetings, and doctrinal differences, and people leaving for reasons, painful reasons.

[24 : 41] And we have faced serious sin, and we have not wavered. We haven't wavered.

We've faced heartbreak, and here we are. and we've been doing this for 35 years almost now. Sometimes in trouble that took our very breath away, that made us lose sleep.

And my question is, how have we done it? We did it with God's help. love. We went through deep waters with Letty, and then Pastor Bob, but I remember Pastor Bob's memorial service, and this place was packed, and the gospel went out.

The gospel rang out. The Lord helped. We sent out about 30 of our people to plant a church in Warsaw, and there were questions, and there were problems, and there were difficulties, and there were ups, and there were downs, and there was trouble, but all through this trouble, we've had peace.

We love each other still, don't we? We like each other even. We're still in this together. together. We still love singing what we're going to sing at the end.

[26 : 06] Oh, how good it is when the family of God dwells together in peace and unity. We're going to sing that at the end, and we're still enjoying that now, and I ask, how? Well, because God has been our help.

We've put him to the test. We've tried him, and he's come through for us. Together, we have rallied around new widows and new widowers, and together we have prayed for the lost and the hurting.

Together, all this trouble in the Lord has helped us. And so, Grace Fellowship Church, that's my question, is what do you say?

Well, don't we say the Lord is our refuge and strength and ever present help in trouble? We put the amen to Psalm 46.1.

We put the amen to John Gill's statement of this is what we have found by experience. And so, I'm not talking about people a long time ago, and I'm not talking about people we've never met or troubles we've never seen.

[27 : 06] I'm talking about what we have found. And I remember his help. I remember his help. And I've seen his help. And I've felt his help. And I've known his help.

And I remember, therefore, I am not afraid. I will not fear that the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.

So, Grace Fellowship put away your fear. We look at ourselves and we see our inadequacies.

We feel this great emptiness, this great need. But as long as my eyes are here, then I am afraid.

I am terrified. But I lift up my eyes to the heaven. heaven. And where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

[28 : 09] Grace Fellowship Church, so I say put away fear, throw doubt behind you. We don't know the future. And that's okay. I've never known the future before.

I haven't needed to know it before. I know that God knows the future. And I know that he's my help. And maybe some of you are saying, I won't be able to do this.

Whatever this is, I won't be able to do this. And I want to say, yes, you can. You can. And I'm not giving you a pep talk with no reasons.

You can because the Lord has helped you a hundred times in the past. He's not going to fail you now. So throw away your doubt.

You leave Bremen on 106, you go, and you leave west, you go over a little bridge that goes over the Yellow River, and when you do that, some of you are like, is there even a bridge there?

[29 : 15] There's a bridge there. Do you doubt that bridge? No, I don't even think you think about that bridge. Because you've been on that bridge 10,000 times, and that bridge has held you every single time.

Well, all of God's people for thousands of years have gone over him, and none of his people have ever fallen into the water. That bridge has never failed.

So is it going to fail this time, Grace Fellowship Church? Is it going to fail for you individually? Actually, it's not. So brothers and sisters, there's work to do.

There's people to love. There are people to serve. There is a God to glorify in this situation. There are people that need to hear the gospel.

There are children that need to see their parents with living faith. Not falling away, but holding on. there's a world that needs to see and be reached for Jesus.

[30 : 28] The time might come when Grace Fellowship Church closes its doors or the gospel is not heard in this building. Someday they might put Ichabod on the sign out front.

Glory is departed. But it's not today. It's not this month. It's not now. Because the Lord is with us.

The Lord is for us. So our eyes are lifted and we're staring up at the God of heaven, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we're filled and we should be filled with hope.

Why? What can give us such hope now? Because we remember, don't we? We remember, don't we?

Let's pray. God, be glorified in us. Be glorified in our active, great faith.

[31 : 40] Grant us that faith. What we lack, give. What we need, provide. Where we are poor, show yourself rich.

Where we are sinful, show yourself merciful. Where we are helpless, show yourself gracious. Where we hurt, show yourself compassionate. Lord, we come to you with a sense of grief and emptiness and need.

There's almost no words. And yet, we know where sin and grief and sorrow abound, grace super abounds.

And so, that is what we're asking for. We want you to display the glory and the fullness and the richness of Jesus Christ in giving us, his poor people, everything we need.

Please give us that wisdom. Give us that kindness. Give us that love that we need. For John and the children and all those who are especially hurting.

[32 : 55] Lord, Lord Jesus, draw so close. They'll know you're present with them. Holy Spirit, come and remind them of everything that is true for them, everything that is true in the gospel.

people. We do pray that you would help us to remember the things that we have gone through and experienced, to not forget them and so dishonor you, but to remember, to believe, and to go boldly forward into the future, giving you the glory.

Pray that you would help us now as we sing, give us a sense of belonging to one another. Holy Spirit, come and bind our hearts in love. Send us on our way with your blessing.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.