

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Psalm 46:1-11

Series: The Psalms [#14]

Pastor Lyle L. Wahl

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Theme: **We Can Be Confident Because God Is Our Fortress.**

Introduction

You may have heard the phrase “It’s as safe as Fort Knox” or, “It’s locked up tighter than Fort Knox.” To clear up any possible confusion, those phrases do not refer to the tower or any part of our solid brick Knox Church. The actual name of Fort Knox is the United States Bullion Depository. It is located next to the U.S. Army’s Fort Knox in Kentucky. Approximately \$170 Billion of gold bars plus coins are stored there. Only the Federal Reserve Bank of New York stores more gold than Fort Knox.

From the outside one sees an impressive fortress. Fort Knox’s granite-lined vault is beneath that building. Entry to the vault is through a blast-proof 22 ton door. Ten separate combinations must be dialed by each of ten different employees to open the door. There is more physical and electronic security beyond the door.¹ The U.S. government has confidence that all the gold in Fort Knox is safe and secure.

Today we are going to think about a fortress that is safer than Fort Knox, about a confidence that is more unshakable than the confidence in Fort Knox, about a confidence every believer can and should enjoy. We can be confident because, as Psalm 46 tells us, the eternal, all-powerful, always victorious God is *our* fortress.

We are made up of body, mind and spirit. Each of us have our own unique personality and come from a long line of experiences that shape how we think and feel about ourselves, others, the past, present and future. We need to have an awareness of the physical, psychological and spiritual factors that are involved in having or not having confidence, in having or not having the right kind of confidence. The principle from Psalm 46 does not bypass the physical and psychological factors, but helps us integrate them with the spiritual aspects and move to true confidence.

Our Confidence Is Grounded In Who God Is.

Just as the U.S. government’s confidence in Fort Knox is based on knowing what it is like, the starting point to knowing God as our mighty fortress, to having confidence in and from Him is getting a hold of, thinking and living in light of who God is, of what He is like. This Psalm gives us four key and powerful descriptions of what God is like.

First, God is our *refuge*. A refuge provides shelter and protection from danger or distress.² This Old Testament word was used of a refuge from physical dangers. Isaiah's prophetic description of the future millennial kingdom describes a canopy God will create over Mount Zion. "There will be," he writes, "a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain" (Isaiah 4:6). If you were caught in one of those heavy downpours of rain recently, you can appreciate having a "refuge and protection from the storm and the rain."

The word was used frequently in the Old Testament to speak of God, to describe who He is, what He is like. Discouraged and desperate, King David called out to God in Psalm 61, "For You have been a *refuge* for me, a tower of strength against the enemy. Let me dwell in Your tent forever; let me take *refuge* in the shelter of Your wings" (3-4). The king continued the theme with the next Psalm, affirming,

"On God my salvation and my glory rest; the rock of my strength, my *refuge* is in God. Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a *refuge* for us."
(7-8)

The writer of Psalm 91 opens with

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, 'My *refuge* and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust!'"

God is *the Refuge, the shelter, the protector* for any and every distress and danger we face.

Then the Psalm writer says that God is our *strength*. This word moves us from seeking protection from God to receiving His strength to deal with the difficulties we face. In another time of distress King David called out to God in Psalm 28,

"The LORD is my *strength* and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart exults, and with my song I shall thank Him." (7)

God was his "tower of strength" (Psalm 61:3), and the "rock of his strength" (Psalm 62:7).

Question: Have you ever felt bad about or even been embarrassed by being weak as you battle with spiritual and other challenges? King David didn't. This man who at the deepest core of his being wanted to be with God, to love God, to do the things of God, knew he was weak, admitted it, and relied on God. The apostle Paul stated the principle as he recorded God's word to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." So, Paul concluded and wrote, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Corinthians 12:9). God is our strength. That is who He is, what He is like.

Next we read that God is *our very present help in trouble*. This is another wonderful part of who God is! The underlying meaning of the word *present* is to find, to discover. God is always willing and ready for us to seek and find Him as our help in each and every situation. He is our help when we need it. King David wrote in Psalm 34,

“The righteous cry, and the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (17-18)

And again, in Psalm 145, “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth” (18).

Some of you are saying to yourself, “That’s great, *but ... but* I have called out to God, sincerely, desperately, truthfully and the problem did not go away, I did not understand or know what to do, I did not feel better.” King David experienced what we experience. We read his Psalms of lament expressing his day after day calling and waiting for God. And yet he knew that God is near, that God hears, that God saves, that God helps the brokenhearted and crushed, all who call upon Him in truth.

There is no contradiction here. Neither is there an easy, sugar coated magic formula-like answer. God hears and responds. The nature, the specifics of His help don’t always line up with our expectations. Or, we should say, our expectations don’t always line up with God’s help and purposes. Never allow the long dark nights of uncertainty and agony move you from the truth, the reality that God is your help. He is helping you through the nightmare.

God is our refuge, our strength, our very present help in trouble and also our *stronghold*. The writer makes this point twice, at the close of the second and third stanzas, verses 7 and 11. “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our *stronghold*.” The word *stronghold* refers to a high place, and so a secure, safe place. A castle or fortress on the top of a mountain was seen not so much as a place of retreat but a strong, defensible, difficult to defeat place. A fortress, a *stronghold*. King David sang to God in Psalm 59,

“But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning, for You have been my *stronghold* and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my strength, I will sing praises to You; for God is my *stronghold*, the God who shows me lovingkindness.” (16-17)

If you are a child of God through Jesus Christ, God is *your* fortress, your stronghold. These four aspects of who God is are the strong foundation of your unshakable confidence.

Our Confidence Is Also Grounded In What God Does.

One of the amazing things that God does is always being with us. The world’s most powerful computer in 1976 was the Cray-1, which performed 160 million floating-point

operations, or calculations per second.³ At the close of last year the most powerful computer was the Cray XT5, known as the Jaguar, which performs 1.759 quadrillion, or 1.759 thousand million million calculations per second. As powerful as that computer is, it does not begin to compare with the ability, with the reality of God being with each of His children—listening, watching, caring for, protecting, guiding, encouraging, strengthening us.

Verse 5, speaking of the city of God as the people of God, at least in part, says “God is in the midst of her.” God has said, “I will not fail you or forsake you.”

- He said that to Israel as they faced entering the promised land without Moses, the only leader they had known.⁵
- He said that to Joshua as he was about to take over from Moses as the leader of Israel.⁶
- And He said it to the church through the writer of Hebrews as he told us to be free from the love of money and to be content with what we have.⁷

In Psalm 74 Asaph wrote “With Your counsel You [God] will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory” (24). In other words, “Throughout all my life God will be with me and guide me until He brings me to be with Him forever in heaven.” So we can say with King David, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, *for You are with me*; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”⁸ This is what God does! With God’s presence we have confidence in His love and care. We have confidence in Him!

Another example of what God does that forms a ground for our confidence is that He asserts His sovereignty and glory over all. Look at verse 6. “The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered; He raised His voice, the earth melted.” Now skip down to verse 8.

“Come, behold the works of the LORD, who has wrought desolations in the earth. He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire. ‘Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.’” (8-10)

The emphasis here is on God’s judgment, but God asserts His sovereignty and establishes His glory over all of His creation in many different ways. Look ahead here in the Psalms. The next one, Psalm 47, verse 9.

“The princes of the people have assembled themselves as the people of the God of Abraham, for the shields of the earth belong to God; He is highly exalted.”

Psalm 148:13. “Let them [all the people] praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven.”

If God is sovereign over all and asserts His sovereignty and glory not hypothetically or occasionally, but actually and continually, and He is and He does, we can be confident that He, His truth and plans will prevail, that He will be true to us, that He will guide and keep us. *We can be confident because God is our fortress.* Our confidence is grounded in who God is and what He does.

Our Confidence Grows As We ...

Confidence is a growing, expanding thing. We have an important part to play in this growth. Our confidence grows as we study God's works. Go back to verse 8. "Come, behold the works of the LORD ..." While the Psalm writer points us to desolations, judgments, to making wars cease, the call is to *behold*, to look intently at *all* God's works. We see some of this in Psalm 66, starting at verse 5,

"Come and see the works of God, who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men. He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot; there let us rejoice in Him! He rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations; let not the rebellious exalt themselves." (5-7)

Sometimes we can get so busy with work, family, our interests and activities that we may not even be noticing, let alone looking for, looking intently at, studying the things God is doing around us. Could you write a list of things you noticed God doing this last week? Would you begin writing immediately, or would you have to think for a while? Could you write out descriptions of what the things on your list are about, the implications and applications to yourself and others? When we study God's works in nature, world events, our community, church, friends, family and ourselves, our confidence in God and His sovereign, loving care for us will grow.

As well, our confidence will grow as we stop striving. Drop down to verse 10. God breaks in and says

"Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

Look at those first two words, "Cease *striving*." Notice that the word *striving* is in italics in the NASB. That's because the Psalmist wrote "Cease", and striving is added to fill out the thought. The New International and King James versions render it "Be still."

This word *cease* has a range of meanings with the focus on stopping, dropping, abandoning and letting go. Back in Psalm 37:8 we read "*Cease* from anger and forsake wrath; do not fret; it leads only to evil-doing." And in Psalm 138 King David asks God to "not forsake [*cease*] the work of [His] hands" (8).

One writer states that this "... is not in the first place comfort for the harassed but a rebuke to a restless and turbulent world: 'Quiet!'—in fact, 'Leave off!'"⁹ This one word means to "Cease and desist!" The immediate setting, including the rest of the verse, points to nations and rulers. They should stop pushing, shoving, battling because, after all, God is sovereign. But it applies to everyone. God is the Sovereign who exalts Himself, and we are to stop pushing, shoving, battling to get our way, to get ahead, to get our agenda accomplished. We *are* to think, plan, to dream and work diligently, but always and only in step with God, in accordance with His truth in the Bible. But when we push, when we shove and when we battle for our own agenda, we will reap a bumper crop of insecurity rather than confidence.

Then "Cease striving *and know that I am God.*" The nations are to recognize and accept God's rule. But what about us? As Moses told Israel, God has spoken His truth and worked wonders so that we "might know the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him" (Deuteronomy 4:35). Psalm 78 makes the same point, also telling us to pass on the truth and our heritage of God's goodness so the next generation might know and put their confidence in Him.

But what about those who already know Him, those of us who believe? To us Psalm 100:3 says

"Know that the LORD Himself is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture."

Moving to the New Testament, as the apostle John wrapped up his first letter he wrote

"These things I have written *to you who believe* in the name of the Son of God, so that you may *know* that you have eternal life."

Learning and living God's truth helps us know God better, more accurately, more intimately. Knowing God in this way brings a certain and stable knowledge of God. *We can be confident because God is our Fortress.* But what does it mean in practical terms?

Our Confidence Means That...

Our confidence in and from God means we will not fear. Fear is a powerful and destructive force. I am sure each of us know that through personal experience. Go back up to verse 2.

"Therefore [that is, in light of God being our refuge and strength, our very present help in time of trouble] we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains

slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.” (2-3)

This is the grand daddy of all disasters. If the earth changes so that the mountains shake at and slip into and the raging seas, that would dwarf the greatest hurricanes and tsunamis. The point God is making through the Psalm writer is that even if everything really does go wrong, even when we do walk through the valley of the shadow of death, even if the world really would be falling apart, people who have confidence in and from God will not fear.

Why not?

- Because “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”
- Because “The LORD is my light and my salvation; [so] whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; [so] whom shall I dread?”¹⁰
- Because “In God I have put my trust ... what can man do to me?”¹¹
- Because “The LORD is for me ... what can man do to me?”¹²
- Because “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹³

Confidence in and from God brings freedom from fear.

It also means that we will not be moved. Look at verses 4 and 5.

“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, *she will not be moved*; God will help her when morning dawns.”

The word *moved* has the basic sense of tottering, shaking, or slipping. King David’s testimony in Psalm 16 was “I have set the LORD continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be *shaken* [or, moved].” Psalm 112:6 and Proverbs 10:30 tell us that the gracious and righteous “will never be *shaken*.” Paul testified “we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”¹⁴

People with confidence in and from God will stand their ground, will not be shaken, moved or destroyed by the worst attacks, betrayals, disasters whether from people, the earth or Satan’s forces.

And, finally, confidence in and from God means that we will be *glad*! Verse 4. “There is a river whose streams make *glad* the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High.” The picture in our present world is symbolic, for there are no rivers flowing through

Jerusalem as pictured here. As the apostle John closed the account of the vision God gave him of the new Jerusalem, he wrote

“Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”¹⁵

This pictures the people of God, people who have their confidence in Him, who have confidence from God who is their fortress. Yes, they are released from fear and stand firm. But not stoically. *They are glad!* Go back to David in Psalm 16.

“I have set the LORD continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is *glad* and my glory *rejoices*; my flesh also will dwell securely.” (8-9)

In Psalm 36 he wrote

“How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; and You give them to drink of the river of Your *delights*.” (7-8)

Real heart, mind and soul gladness comes only from God to people who have confidence in and from Him.

Conclusion.

Yes, *we can be confident because God is our fortress*. Whatever your circumstances or feelings, *you can be confident today if God is your fortress*.

Martin Luther had many struggles with internal turmoil as well as many struggles with those who not only disagreed with him, but also sought to have him condemned and put to death for what he believed. Out of those experiences, and based on Psalm 46, he wrote the familiar hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. It is said that in the dark hours he would often say to his friend Philip Melancthon, “Come, let us sing Psalm 46!”¹⁶ The opening lines, “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing. Our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.” Later, “We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.”

As you meet with God in the next quiet moments, Make sure that you are in the position to have God as your mighty fortress, that you know Jesus Christ as your Savior. If you have not received Jesus Christ as your savior, do that now or talk with me after the service. If you are God’s child through faith in Christ, examine where your confidence is really placed. Check to see if you are striving after your own desires and plans, or looking to, trusting and

taking refuge in God. Decide or reaffirm that in every day, every area of your life, every circumstance you will run to, stay in and enjoy the confidence of God, who is your fortress.

¹“United States Bullion Depository.” *Wikipedia*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Bullion_Depository>. 19 June 2010. Accessed 19 July 2010.

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²“Refuge.” Def. 1. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary. 1974. Print.

³“10 Most Powerful Computers in the World.” *Listphobia*. <<http://listphobia.com/2010/03/11/10-most-powerful-computers-in-the-world/>>. Accessed 22 July 2010.

⁴“Oak Ridge ‘Jaguar’ Supercomputer Is World’s Fastest.” *ScienceDaily* 17 November 2009. 24 July 2010 <<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/11/091116204229.htm>>. Accessed 22 July 2010.

⁵ Deuteronomy 31:6, 8.

⁶ Joshua 1:5.

⁷ Hebrews 13:5.

⁸ Psalm 23:4.

⁹ Derek Kidner. *Psalms 1-72*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973, page 176.

¹⁰ Psalm 27:1.

¹¹ Psalm 56:11.

¹² Psalm 118:6.

¹³ Romans 8:38-39.

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:8-9.

¹⁵ Revelation 22:1-2.

¹⁶ Frequently cited, e.g.,

James Montgomery Boice. *Psalms Volume 2*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996, page 388.

Herbert Lockyer. *All God’s Comfort*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishing, 2001, page 87.

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