

SESSION 5

THE SHELTER OF GOD'S PEACE

The Point

God is the source of peace when your world falls apart.

The Bible Meets Life

"I could have some peace in my life if it weren't for" We could all complete that statement with something that, at best, is annoying or, at worst, causes pain in our lives. Peace is not just the absence of irritating circumstances or challenging problems. We can experience truth in the midst of trouble. Psalm 46 points us to the source of such peace: God Himself.

The Passage

Psalm 46:1-11

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Psalm 46:1-11

¹ God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble.

² Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas,

³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with its turmoil. Selah

⁴ There is a river—its streams delight the city of God, the holy dwelling place of the Most High.

⁵ God is within her; she will not be toppled. God will help her when the morning dawns.

⁶ Nations rage, kingdoms topple; the earth melts when He lifts His voice.

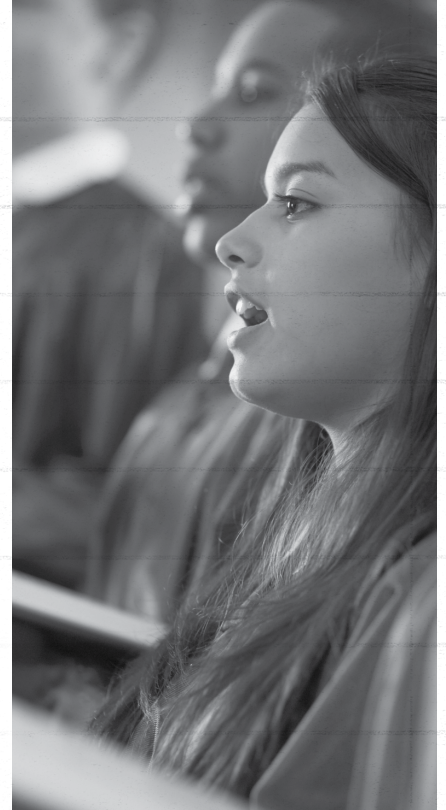
⁷ The LORD of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah

⁸ Come, see the works of the LORD, who brings devastation on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease throughout the earth. He shatters bows and cuts spears to pieces; He burns up the chariots.

¹⁰ “Stop your fighting—and know that I am God, exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth.”

¹¹ Yahweh of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah



THE SETTING

Based on the inscription of this psalm, it's a choir anthem for congregational worship. Based on the content, it's somewhat akin to the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (which was inspired by this psalm) or “It Is Well with My Soul.” The psalm celebrates God's great ability in all situations and identifies why His people can experience peace and security, specifically in times of trouble.

ENGAGE

(15 MINUTES)



GET INTO THE STUDY

ENGAGE: Begin the session with one or more of the **Engage Options** on the next page. (This is optional. If you'd rather skip the **Engage Options**, just begin with the first discussion question.)

SAY: Can you finish the phrase, "I could have some peace in my life if it weren't for..."? We can probably easily finish the phrase with something that bothers us. Peace is not just the absence of irritating circumstances or challenging problems. As we study Psalm 46, remember that we can experience peace in the midst of trouble.

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the question, "What is a New Year's resolution you think you could actually keep?"

GUIDE: Call attention to **The Point**. Explain that this is the key idea to keep in mind throughout the session.

ITEM
6

Leader Pack: Direct students to the C.S. Lewis Quote poster during the session. Remind them that true peace and happiness cannot be found apart from Him.

THE POINT

God is the source of peace when your world falls apart.

READ: Read and summarize **The Bible Meets Life** for your group.

At the beginning of each new year, many of us make resolutions. Even if you don't make them, you probably still know which resolutions are most common: exercise, lose weight, spend more time with family, read more (or watch less TV), and so on. Ever thought about why we make such resolutions? Behind many of the resolutions is a desire for a calmer life: "If I can just live better, eat better, and be a better family member, then life will take on a new sense of harmony." "If I get a sense of balance or control, I will get a more peaceful life." But then life happens, and the idea of a better anything gets shot to pieces. We do not need better resolutions. We need a revolution. Let me put it another way. Resolutions are based on our ability to change our circumstances. A revolution is based on allowing a new authority to take charge and transform us. We need the revolutionary presence of God to bring to us what we cannot produce on our own. Peace, even in the midst of life's turmoil, is one of the revolutionary results of God's presence in our lives.

PRAY: Transition into the session by praying that your students learn that in times of turmoil, frustration, and hurt they can find peace in God's truth.

Engage Options

▶ *Lead with Action*

Buy wooden blocks to make a large Jenga game. If space is available, have multiple large Jenga sets up. Allow students time to play. Say, **“All it takes sometimes is one circumstance or life event to cause your whole world to fall down.”**

OPTION: *If you can't find or afford large wooden blocks, challenge two students to compete against one another in a regular game of Jenga in front of the group.*

▶ *Lead with Atmosphere*

Build a small fort on stage. It could be just a box with pillows in it or a more complicated fort. Say as you sit in the fort, **“Growing up, who had a tree house, fort, or some special spot that you went when you were upset, frightened, or unhappy? It was your retreat, your refuge. The place you could breathe easier. But in reality, God is our true peace—where we can run when our world comes crumbling down.”**

▶ *Lead with Media*

Search the Internet for the story behind the hymn “It Is Well.” Read the story to your students and then play the hymn. Ask, **“Whatever comes your way, can you say, ‘It is well with my soul’?”**

OPTION: *Divide students into teams. Allow them to choose from a pile of “supplies” to build their own fort for their team. Tell them the goal is to build the sturdiest fort. Ask adult leaders to help judge the forts.*

STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: God is the source of peace when your world falls apart.

¹ God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. ² Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas, ³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with its turmoil. Selah

—PSALM 46:1-3

PSALM 46:1-3

SAY: Peace has all sorts of definitions. For some people, peace is the absence of open hostility toward themselves. For others, peace is only present when everyone lives in perfect harmony with one another.

READ: Read or have a volunteer read the following:

The heart of Psalm 46 is a peace that goes way beyond simply overcoming the rut of daily routines. It's a change God brings that no calamity can overwhelm. How God does this is wrapped up in His very Person.

See how the psalmist began verse 1: "God is..." Those might be the two most powerful words that you can read, hear, or speak.

The psalmist described God with three words.

- 1. Refuge.** When God is our refuge, we have a place to hide when life assaults us.
- 2. Strength.** When life is hard, we are not forced to continue in our own power. Rather, God empowers us to take on life no matter what comes our way.
- 3. Helper.** God is always there to help us. No matter what we face, God is personally there to help.

SAY: The psalmist described some pretty serious threats. We may not be physically facing an earthquake, mountains toppling into the sea, or the ocean flooding over us, but life sometimes can feel as if we are. Troubles show up like a flood against us. But the one who trusts in God does not have to be afraid.

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the question, "God is our refuge, strength, and helper. Which of these means the most to you right now?"

Commentary

PSALM 46:1-3

The essential character of Psalm 46 is clearly seen in the opening verse. The psalmist, one of the sons of Korah, began with an affirmation that God is our refuge and strength. The rest of the psalm uses powerful imagery and metaphor to communicate this basic theological theme.

Psalm 46 starts off with a two-part confession of confidence in verse 1, followed by a statement of result or consequence in verses 2-3. The confession contains two statements about the character of God. First, God is identified as our refuge and strength. In the Old Testament the term *refuge* has the meaning of a “place of refuge” or “shelter.” The close connection of the terms *strength* with *refuge* have led some to suggest that strength would be better translated “protection.” In either case, the picture is of complete shelter or protection in God. The theme reappears in the refrain in verses 7 and 11.

Second, God is described as a helper who is always found in times of trouble. God’s presence is an ever-present help. It’s the kind of help that can be found when you most need it. In this case, God is ready to be found (Isa. 55:6).

A statement of consequence and an illustration of a fearful calamity follow the confession of trust and confidence. The confession and the result are linked by a strong *therefore*. Since the confession (“God is our refuge and strength”) is true, then we have nothing to fear regardless of what calamity may befall the world around us. Indeed, God is our shelter and protection; *therefore*, we will not be afraid. Why should we? If God truly is our refuge and protection, then our peace and protection are assured. Psalm 46 challenges us to have confident faith in God.

The statement of consequence is followed by an illustration of calamity in the rest of verses 2-3. In this frightening word-picture, the psalmist depicted the demise of two of the most stable objects of earth’s geography. In this massive quake, the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the seas. The waters of the seas roar and foam, and the mountains quake in response.

Such a cataclysmic event has been understood in different ways. Some scholars regard the poetic description of a natural catastrophe, a fearful earthquake. Some propose that the psalmist envisioned a moment of “uncreation” when the chaotic waters attempt to break the boundaries set for them at creation (Gen. 1:9-10; Ps 104:5-9). Regardless of the nature of the calamity contemplated, the psalmist presented a confident trust that God is our shelter and protection. Even if the world should end, we will not be afraid because nothing is able to overwhelm God.

TIP: Ask students to identify the safest place they can think of. What makes it safe?

STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: God is the source of peace when your world falls apart.

⁴ *There is a river—its streams delight the city of God, the holy dwelling place of the Most High.*
⁵ *God is within her; she will not be toppled. God will help her when the morning dawns.*
⁶ *Nations rage, kingdoms topple; the earth melts when He lifts His voice.*
⁷ *The LORD of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah*

—PSALM 46:4-7

PSALM 46:4-7

READ: Read or have a volunteer read the following:

In verse 2-3, the psalmist used tumultuous images of water: deep seas and roaring waters. In verse 4, he turned to the refreshing nature of water in a river or a stream. In several places, the Bible refers to God's presence as a cool stream or a place where our thirst is satisfied (Ps. 36:8; Isa. 48:18; John 4:3-14; Rev. 22:1). Yes, some images of water are terrifying—such as a roaring, foaming tidal wave—but nothing compares with God's presence. He can take something with such devastating imagery and turn it for our good. In the midst of raging waters, He is our calm stream.

When you look around, does it sometimes seem as if there is an unending war all around you? No matter which way you turn, a battle is raging. The reality is that the battle rages because of sin. We can only overcome the effects of sin by turning to God and the shelter He provides.

SAY: Words have enormous power. A word from our enemy can remove our sense of peace and replace it with anxiety in a split second. The voice of God, though, is far greater. When He speaks, His words confront those who oppose His peace. He speaks and all the enemies of peace are rendered null and void.

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the question, "How does the power of God's words affect your sense of peace?"

DO: Direct students to complete the **Action Point**, "I Would Have Peace."

I Would Have Peace

Finish this statement, "I would have peace in my life if it weren't for..." Pair up with another student and pray for the answers to each others statement.

Commentary

PSALM 46:4-7

The second unit begins with a surprise word (v. 4). It simply says “a river.” But this river is not like the roaring and foam of the menacing sea that seeks to topple the mountains. Rather, this river provides life-giving waters that satisfy and give joy. Indeed, its streams delight or satisfy the city of God. God provided this sustaining care for His city when He subdued the chaotic waters (Ps. 104:6-9) and transformed them into the life-giving waters needed by his people (Ps. 104:10-16; Ps. 65:9).

The psalmist also identified the city of God with the holy dwelling place of the Most High. To the poet, the holy dwelling place referred to the tabernacle (the same Hebrew word is used here) or the temple and indicated that God resided in the city. This is confirmed in the first part of verse 5: God is within her. Literally, this means “God is in her midst.” Tranquility is the direct result of God’s presence.

The use of similar verbs and phrases in verses 5 and 6 creates several connecting points with verses 1-3. Because God is within her, the city will not be toppled. In contrast to the stability of God’s city, the mountains (v. 2) and kingdoms (v. 6) topple in turmoil. God will help the city quickly at the break of day in the same way God is a “helper” who could be found in troubling times (v. 1).

In verse 6, the psalmist continued the use of parallels. Thus, “the earth melts” is parallel to “the earth trembles” in verse 2. Two different verbs are used here. However, in the same two verses, the mountains toppling corresponds to kingdoms toppling, using the same verb. Interestingly, the psalmist used the same verb in comparing the rage of the nations (v. 6) with the “roar” of the chaotic waters (v. 3). These parallels are not coincidental. Where the calamities envisioned in verses 2-3 are cataclysmic, the catastrophes of verses 5-6 are local. The psalmist added them here to contrast the turmoil of unstable human nations with the peace and stability of the city of God.

The two parallel divine titles the “LORD of Hosts” (or Yahweh) and “the God of Jacob” point back to Israel’s ancient traditions. The first refers to protective nature of the “hosts” of God (1 Sam. 17:45; 1 Kings 22:19), and the second to God’s protective promise of grace to the patriarch Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15). Like the divine titles, the second half of each phrase also echoes central themes of the psalm. The presence of God is affirmed in the preposition “with us” (Isa. 7:14), and His protection is declared as our stronghold. This term implies inaccessible height.

TIP: Guide students to talk about current sources of peace in their lives. Lead them to talk in detail about why those things cause peace. Encourage them to allow nothing to replace God’s peace.

IMPART

(10 MINUTES)

STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: God is the source of peace when your world falls apart.

⁸ Come, see the works of the LORD, who brings devastation on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease throughout the earth. He shatters bows and cuts spears to pieces; He burns up the chariots. ¹⁰ “Stop your fighting—and know that I am God, exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth.”

¹¹ Yahweh of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah

—PSALM 46:8-11

PSALM 46:8-11

SAY: In our war against the mayhem of life, God is completely unstoppable. He is the all-powerful Lord and Almighty God over all things. He has the absolute ability to stop any roaring commotion in your heart.

GUIDE: Lead students to understand that God provides His presence and peace.

It comes down to a choice for us. God has made peace—the greatest peace of all—possible. It is the peace between Him and us. He is the true Hero of our battle, but it must be your choice to trust Jesus rather than your stuff and your own willpower.

Yahweh is with us, and He is our stronghold (v. 11). The name Yahweh is the ancient Hebrew name that God used to reveal Himself as “the great I AM.” It signals to us that He is eternal and needs nothing to sustain Him. Peace is ours because no nation, no act of humanity, or no self-imposed pain is greater than our God. It is captured in the title given to Jesus: Immanuel, which simply means “God with us.”

- ▶ We need God’s presence that brings peace when parents are talking about divorce.
- ▶ We need God’s peace when we are faced with a situation we have no answers for.
- ▶ We need God’s peace when we feel depressed.

SAY: God’s presence and peace is what we need, and God provides them. God is simply waiting for you to rush into His stronghold. The door is always open.

DISCUSS: Ask students to answer the question, “How do we seek God’s peace instead of our own ideas of peace?”



Commentary

PSALM 46:8-11

The third stanza of Psalm 46 renews the thrust launched in verse 1 and revisited in verse 7: that of radical trust in the Lord. Psalm 46 highlights this last point by weaving together the themes of the previous two sections into this last stanza. This feat is accomplished poetically by using two sets of imperatives (commands) to set the stage for the final repetition of the refrain containing the confession of trust in verse 11. The first set of imperatives presents the psalmist inviting the faithful to consider the present and future reality of the confession of trust (vv. 8-9). The second set delivers the actual prophetic voice of God and His ultimate will (v. 10).

The psalmist commanded the faithful to come and see the present and future works of the Lord. This is the first set of imperatives. The Hebrew verb translated “see” or “behold” is one connected most often with the oracles of a seer or prophet. The faithful are to consider this—to “foresee” the works of God. The outcome of the invitation is peace, but the call to come and see is not a tranquil or gentle summons. God will bring devastation on the earth. The word *devastation*, also translated *desolations*, is plural and refers to horrifying and atrocious events. The psalmist pictured Yahweh here as the Divine Warrior who will fight for His people.

The second set of imperatives or commands occurs in verse 10. The conquering King raises His thunderous voice (v. 6) and demands the cessation of hostilities. “Be still. Stop your fighting,” God demands. This is a rebuke to the raging and restless world. No act of humanity, no rebellion is greater than God. In two short phrases, God declares Himself to be exalted among the nations and exalted on the earth. To speak of exaltation is befitting of kingship, particularly that of the Lord (Pss. 99:1-5,9; 113:4-5; 145:1) The prophetic voice of God declares His ultimate will—that the peoples of the world will know that He is God.

The final repetition of the refrain underscores the primary theme of Psalm 46. Yahweh is the source of peace in the midst of the storm. He is our refuge, strength, and stronghold. We can trust in His protective care in any calamity or turmoil because nothing is greater than our God.

TIP: Help students see that God’s presence doesn’t mean perfection or immunity from trouble. His presence means that we have the opportunity, at all times, to seek peace in all things when we seek Him.

IMPACT

(10 MINUTES)

TIP: As you “live it out” and complete the Live It Out options, be sure to share your experience with your group. Share your struggles, triumphs, and growth with your students, encouraging them to complete the options as well.

APPLY IT

SAY: Consider how you will let God work in you to bring peace:

READ: Ask for a volunteer to read aloud a few ways students can take what they have learned and **Apply It**.

- ▶ **Read Psalm 46 daily for the next week.** Choose one verse to memorize so that you can remind yourself about God’s power during times of turmoil.
- ▶ **Evaluate what keeps you from having peace.** Determine what steps you can take to keep your focus on the peaceful presence of God.
- ▶ **Partner with other students in your student ministry to seek to bring spiritual peace into the lives of people.** As a group, decide how you can minister and deliver the gospel to people so that they can experience the ultimate peace that comes through Christ.

GUIDE: Lead students to consider which of the three suggested responses to the Bible study most closely applies to them and their current circumstances.

ASK: Which of these responses do you personally need to focus on most as you live this session out? Allow time for responses.

WRAP UP

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking the Lord to help students seek His peace rather than what the world tells them will bring them peace.

ASK: Ask students about last week’s **Live It Out** options. Discuss any responses and encourage students as they choose to apply the Bible to their lives.

GUIDE: Encourage students to complete one or both of the **Live It Out** activities for the week. Let them know you will discuss them next time you meet.



For **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife

LEADER LIVE IT OUT

Before the session, challenge yourself to grow with your students through this Live It Out.

Be Ready | 1 Peter 3:15

Write out your testimony in the space provided below as if someone asked you, "Why do you have peace?" Make sure you include your salvation experience as part of your peace. Try to use words that anybody would understand. Once you have finished your testimony, read over it at least three times so that you could comfortably recall what you have written. Then, pray every morning this week that you will have a chance to share your testimony. Be prepared to share it when the opportunity arises. Also, consider sharing your testimony with you students at your next group meeting. Ask for volunteers to share theirs as well.

Notes:

ONE CONVERSATION™

Use these discussion starters to help foster a spiritual conversation with your family.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE: "I could have some peace in my life if it weren't for" We could all complete that statement with something that, at best, is annoying or, at worst, causes pain in our lives. Peace is not just the absence of irritating circumstances or challenging problems. We can experience truth in the midst of trouble. Psalm 46 points us to the source of such peace: God Himself.

Scripture: Psalm 46:1-11

STUDENTS

THE POINT: God is the source of peace when your world falls apart.

- Discuss with your student some things that people mistakenly try to find peace in.

Discuss the following quote: "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."¹ —C.S. Lewis

1. .S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 50.

LIVE IT OUT: Your student has been encouraged to do one or both Live It Out activities in the Personal Study Guide. Here are some

suggested ways to help your student:

*If your student chooses to do **Be Ready**:*

- Help your student answer the question, "Why do you have peace?"
- Pray that your student would have an opportunity to share his/her answers.

*If your student chooses to do **Stronger**:*

- Ask your student how he/she would complete the sentence: "I would have some more peace in my life if it weren't for..."
- Pray for your student to find peace in a relationship with Jesus Christ.