Ever Present Help in Time of Need

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Consider one of the most powerful promises in all of God’s Word:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof….

“There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge…. He maketh wars to cease” (Psalm 46:1-7, 9).

What a marvelous word. I’ve read this passage over and over, dozens of times, and I’m still overwhelmed by it. God’s Word to us here is so powerful, so immovable, he tells us, “Never again do you need to fear. It doesn’t matter if the whole world is in turmoil. The earth may quake, the oceans may swell, the mountains may crumble into the sea. Things may be in complete chaos, a total uproar all around you.

“But because of my Word, you’ll have peace like a river. While all the nations rage, powerful streams of joy will flow to my people. It will fill their hearts with gladness.”

Right now, the whole world is in a fearful time. Nations are trembling over terrorism, knowing no region is immune to the threats. Personal troubles and sufferings are mounting. Yet, in the midst of it all, Psalm 46 echoes to God’s people the world over: “I am in your midst. I am with you through it all. My people will not be destroyed or moved. I’m going to be an ever-present help to my church.”

Do you grasp what the Lord is telling us in this Psalm? Our God is available to us at any time, day or night. He’s continually at our right hand, willing to speak to us and guide us. And he’s made this possible by giving us his Holy Spirit, to abide in us. The Bible tells us that Christ himself is in us, and we are in him.

Yet I doubt that any Christian comprehends this truth fully. If we’re honest, we’ll admit that our concept of God’s abiding presence is inadequate. Many of us picture the Holy Spirit as dwelling in some little chapel he’s built in our heart. Then, when we need him, we run to that chapel and bang on the door till he answers.

This concept isn’t biblical at all. I believe the Lord wants to open it for us, through this Psalm. He knows we all face deep needs and troubles. We all encounter turmoil, temptations, times of confusion that cause our souls to quake. His message for us here in Psalm 46 is meant for just such times. What’s the message? Simply this: if we give in to fear — if we become downcast and full of despair — we’re living absolutely contrary to his present reality in our lives.

Peter writes, “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Supernatural peace is a part of God’s divine nature. And of all his wonderful promises, Psalm 46 is the one word we need to obtain his peace like a river. Let me share with you what I’ve learned on this subject.
1. There is an ever-present evil.

Paul attests, “When I would do good, evil is present with me” (Romans 7:21). “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

There is a very real enemy of our souls. And this enemy is at work against us, day and night. Paul wants to make sure we understand this. If we don’t — if we’re ignorant of what our battle is, and who we’re fighting — then we’ll surely be defeated.
From the Gospels to the Epistles to Revelation, the entire New Testament warns us not to be ignorant of Satan’s devices. This doesn’t mean we’re to fear or magnify the devil’s power. But Satan is still “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). And he rules an evil empire of demonic powers. These principalities do his constant bidding, continually harassing God’s people.

It’s extremely dangerous to be blind to Satan’s ways. We simply have to accept that our present battle isn’t a human one. It doesn’t matter what struggle we face, what besetting sin we wrestle with. We have to realize, it’s not merely about some flaw in our character. It’s not some habit to be worked out in our flesh. Our conflict is no less than a supernatural battle that’s unfolding in spiritual high places.

And our foe is an ever-present enemy. Satan’s powers and principalities never sleep. They never let up in their lying, conniving, and working of evil against us. Their one goal is to destroy our faith and bring us to destruction.

This is why Peter urges us, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:8-9). Peter experienced this firsthand. Jesus had warned him, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31). Christ knew the devil wanted this apostle. And Jesus gave Peter ample warning about what was to come.

If you no longer settle for a status-quo Christian life — if you’ve stepped out to give Jesus your all — you can expect to be assaulted by an ever-present evil.

If this describes you, Satan and his rulers will come after you with accusations, hindrances, lies that flood your thoughts. You’ll be tempted, persecuted, interrupted in your prayers. You must know, it’s all a conspiracy of evil, aimed straight at your faith.

Years ago, I invited a devoted prophet of the Lord to speak at one of my meetings. I had always admired this man tremendously. He was one of the most humble people I knew, a simple carpenter who rarely ever preached. Yet whenever he did speak, God’s Spirit fell so mightily that people were stirred as deeply as anything I’d ever experienced.

That’s exactly what was happening the night he spoke at my meeting. Then suddenly, in the midst of his message, he stopped. He stepped back from the pulpit and took me aside. In a calm but trembling voice, he whispered, “David, I need you to pray for me. Please, lay hands on me right now. Evil thoughts are hounding me. I haven’t experienced this in years. They’re flooding my mind, and I can’t shake them.”

My first thought was, “Maybe I was mistaken about this man.” Yet in fact, the opposite was true. Here was a servant who was sold out for Jesus as few men are. And Satan was coming at him at the least expected moment: when he was in the midst of a mighty spiritual work.

This humble man pleaded, “You know me, David. You know these are not my thoughts. We’ve got to take authority over them, or I can’t go on.” We prayed, and soon the assault ended. As the service continued, I was reminded of how ever-present the enemy’s attacks are against God’s people.

Paul understood what this was all about. Every day of his life, Satan dogged the devoted apostle with harassing attacks out of hell. We have a record of these assaults in the book of Acts and in Paul’s own epistles. We see him being buffeted at every turn, in body, mind and spirit, even to the point of physical death. At one point, Paul states very clearly, “Satan hindered us” (1 Thessalonians 2:18). Yet, through it all, Paul says, God supplied him with a more sufficient grace.

Satan won’t bother harassing his own children. That’s because he has no controversy with them. Jesus says of such people, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44). No, the devil’s weapons are aimed at a select few. He’s after those who have set their hearts to seek Christ. These saints have a passionate love for Jesus, and they’ve shut themselves up in the secret closet of prayer to pursue him. They’re determined to walk in the Spirit and to obey his every Word.

If you’re one such believer, there is something you must realize: you will never be free from the devil’s assaults. Satan has one thing in mind, and that is to undermine your faith. He wants you to doubt God’s faithfulness. So he’ll bombard you with troubles and trials until finally you wonder, “How could the Lord be with me in the midst of all this?”
Many lifelong servants of Christ today have begun to doubt the Lord in the midst of their trial. They simply don’t understand what they’re going through. I’ve talked to several pastors who spent days in fasting and prayer only to emerge doubting God’s existence. These saints don’t realize they’re under spiritual assault.

Make no mistake: the enemy’s attacks are especially fierce in these last days. In my opinion, our generation needs God’s direction more than any other. Yet Satan wants to convince us that when we need Jesus most desperately, our Lord will abandon us.

Such attacks simply aren’t going to let up until Christ returns. Of course, we’ll experience seasons of grace because of our merciful Lord. But the reality is, we’re in a constant battle. And we must recognize it as such.

2. God has promised us, “In your time of trouble — when you face a persistent, ever-present evil — I will be your ever-present help.”

The phrase “ever present” means “always here, always available, with unlimited access.” In short, the abiding presence of the Lord is always in us. And if he’s ever-present in us, then he wants continual conversation with us. He wants us to talk with him no matter where we are: on the job, with family, with friends, even with non-believers.

I refuse to accept the lie Satan has thrust upon so many of God’s people today: that the Lord has stopped speaking to his people. The enemy wants us to think God has allowed Satan to grow in power and influence, but that he hasn’t equipped his own people with greater authority. No, never! Scripture says, “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him” (Isaiah 59:19). It doesn’t matter what the devil brings against us. God’s power in his people will always be greater than Satan’s assaults.

This verse from Isaiah actually refers to the flag-bearer who rode ahead of Israel’s army. The Lord always led his people into battle behind his own mighty standard. Likewise today, God has a glorious army of heavenly hosts who ride forth under his banner, ready to execute his battle plans on our behalf.

You may ask, “So, how does God bring us help in our troubles?” His help comes in the gift of his Holy Spirit, who dwells in us and works the Father’s will in our lives. Paul tells us again and again that our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. We are the Lord’s dwelling place on earth.

Of course, we repeat this truth often, in our worship and testimonies. Yet, many of us still don’t take it seriously. We simply don’t understand the power that resides in this truth. If we did grasp it and trust in it, we would never again be afraid or dismayed.

I certainly haven’t laid hold of this lesson fully. Even after all my years as a minister, I’m still tempted to think I have to work up some emotion in order to hear from God. No, the Lord is saying: “You don’t have to spend hours waiting for me. I abide in you. I am present for you, night and day.”

Listen to David’s testimony: “I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons. I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:7-8). David is declaring, “God is always present before me. And I’m determined to keep him present in my thoughts. He faithfully guides me day and night. I don’t ever have to be confused.”

I hear some Christians say, “The Lord never speaks to me. I don’t ever hear his voice.” Yet I question this. How can we state that God’s Spirit lives and works in us, yet he doesn’t speak to us? If we say we live and walk in the Spirit — if he’s ever present in our heart, always at our right hand, ready to direct our lives — then he wants to converse with us. He desires a dialog, hearing from us and speaking into our lives.

Some believers fear listening to “inner voices.” They think they’ll end up being deceived by their flesh, or worse, by the enemy. They’ve done so before and ended up in a mess. I agree that this is a valid concern for every servant of Jesus. After all, the devil spoke to Christ himself. And he speaks to even the holiest among God’s people today.

But all too often, such caution becomes a paralyzing fear. And this fear prevents many Christians from launching out in faith, trusting God’s Spirit to faithfully guide their steps. The truth is, those who spend time in God’s presence learn to distinguish his voice from all others. Jesus said of himself, “The sheep follow (the shepherd): for they know his voice…. My sheep hear my voice…and they follow me” (John 10:4, 27).
Here is our safeguard. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will never let Satan deceive any saint who trusts fully in his abiding presence. He promises to speak clearly to all who commune daily with him. By contrast, if we don’t step out in faith — if we refuse to trust in the Lord’s guiding presence — we’re sure to fall into deception. Why? If we don’t trust his Spirit to speak to us, the only voice we’ll rely on is that of our flesh. All through the New Testament, we read these words: “And the Spirit said…”

Whenever the Holy Ghost spoke, those who heard knew unmistakably it was his voice. And the Spirit spoke with clear, precise, detailed instructions.

Consider the Spirit’s instructions to the Gentile Cornelius: “Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do” (Acts 10:5-6). Talk about detailed instructions.

Meanwhile, God gave equally detailed instructions to Peter, saying Cornelius’ men were on the way: “The Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them” (10:19-20).

The Spirit worked this way also in Paul’s life. In Acts 9, when he was still called Saul, he was without sight for three days in Damascus. God instructed a man named Ananias to go to Paul and pray for him. Here were his detailed instructions: “Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias as coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight” (9:11-12).

We find the Holy Spirit giving more specific instructions in Acts 27. Paul was on a ship that had been tossed about in a storm for days. Just when the sailors were about to give up, Paul was stirred to encourage them with this detailed message:

“Be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee” (27:22-24). Indeed, it all happened just as Paul said.

Tell me, where does Scripture say the Holy Ghost stopped giving detailed instructions to God’s people? When did the Spirit stop being present in our lives? When did his presence leave our right hand? The devil speaks to his own children. Why would the Lord neglect his own people?

Yet, we have to understand: the kind of sensitive walk that allows us to hear God’s voice doesn’t come overnight. The Spirit has to teach us to seek him in our daily lives. Only then will he be able to direct our steps. The Psalmist speaks of this learning process: “What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose” (Psalm 25:12).

If we acknowledge God in all our ways, he will be faithful to speak. His Word promises, “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:6). Throughout my fifty-plus years of ministry, I have quoted this verse frequently. Yet, at times, I still don’t mix it with faith.

Many times the Lord has spoken to me, saying, “Do this, David... Don’t do that...” On a few occasions, I’ve hushed his voice in my mind and gone my own way. And in every instance, God let me get into a confused mess that cost me. He says, “I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go. O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea” (Isaiah 48:17-18).

My loving Father keeps delivering me from my failures. And I’m still learning. I want his supernatural peace to flow like a river in my soul.

3. There is only one thing hindering us from an intimate walk in the Spirit: the ever-present problem of unbelief.

Israel never did learn to trust God’s ever-present help. The Lord led them through the wilderness with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. These supernatural works were visible reminders to God’s people of his constant presence with them. He was at their right hand every hour of the day. And he led them like a gentle, caring
shepherd. When they obeyed him, they were safe and at peace, no matter what obstacles they faced.

Yet, in spite of God’s loving guidance, “They believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation: though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven…. Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble” (Psalm 78:22-23, 33). Do you see what the Psalmist is saying here? He’s connecting the supernatural cloud and fire with God’s salvation. Trusting in those signs literally would have saved the Israelites’ lives. But because they didn’t trust in God’s work on their behalf, they ended up lost, wandering in confusion the rest of their days.

Now I want to return to where we started, with Psalm 46. I believe this Psalm is a picture of the New Testament “promised land.” Indeed, Psalm 46 represents the divine rest referred to in Hebrews: “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9). Psalm 46 describes this rest to God’s people. It speaks of his ever-present strength, his help in time of trouble, his peace in the midst of chaos. God’s presence is with us at all times, and his help always arrives on time.

Yet Israel rejected this rest: “They despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word” (Psalm 106:24). Sadly, the church today is much like Israel. In spite of God’s great promises to us — his assurances of peace, help and full supply — we don’t trust him fully. Instead, we complain, “Where is God in my trial? Is he with me or not? Where is any evidence of his presence? Why does he keep letting these hardships pile up on me?”

How does he react to our unbelief? He said of Israel’s murmuring, “I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways…. With whom was he grieved forty years? Was to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:10, 17-19).

Likewise, we are warned: “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it…. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (4:1, 11).

Today, I hear the Lord asking his church, “Do you believe I still speak to my people? Do you believe I desire to give you my help and guidance? Do you truly believe I want to speak to you daily, hourly, moment by moment?” Our response has to be like David’s. That godly man shook all of hell when he made this statement about the Lord: “He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:9).

Here is God’s covenant promise to every generation who would believe his Word that he desires to speak to us: “The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (33:11). The Creator of the universe wants to share his very thoughts with us!

Scripture makes it clear: our God spoke to his people in the past, he’s speaking to his people now, and he’ll continue to speak to us till the very end of time. More to the point, God wants to speak to you about your problem today. He may do it through his Word, through a godly friend, or through the Spirit’s still, small voice, whispering, “This is the way, walk in it.”

Yet, no matter what means he uses, you will recognize his voice. The sheep know the voice of their Shepherd. And he is faithful to “(preserve) the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 97:10).