

SESSION 5

THE SHELTER OF GOD'S PEACE



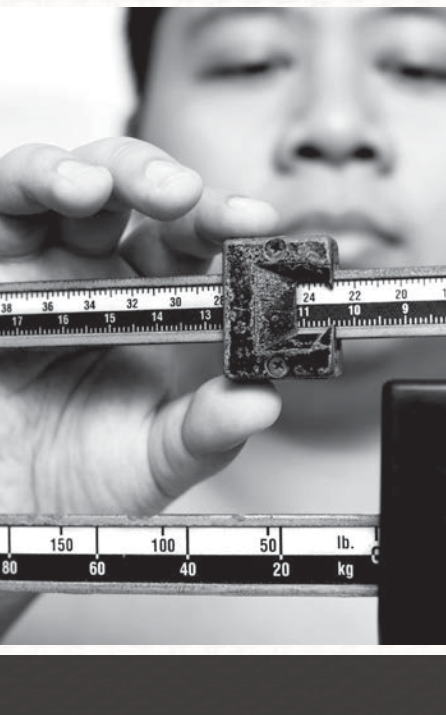
What have been your most successful New Year's resolutions?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLpeace

THE POINT

*God is the source of peace
in the midst of turmoil.*



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Do you make New Year's resolutions? If not, you still know which resolutions are most common: exercise, lose weight, spend more time with family, read more, watch less TV, and so on.

Have you ever thought about why people make such resolutions? One of the main reasons is a desire for a calmer life. We think, "If I can just live better, eat better, and be a better family member, then life will take on a new sense of harmony." Or, "If I can just gain a sense of balance or control, I will have a more peaceful life." But then life happens, and the idea of a better anything gets shot to pieces.

In reality, we don't need better resolutions. We need a *revolution*.

That's because 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.

WHAT DOES **THE BIBLE** SAY?

Psalm 46:1-11 (NIV)

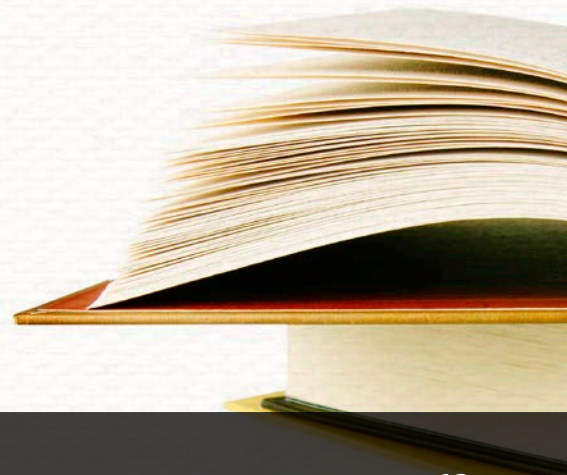
- 1** God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
- 2** Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- 3** though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.
- 4** There is a river whose streams make 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.

Key Words

Refuge (v. 1)—This Hebrew word literally means a "place of refuge," and can refer to a place of shelter for animals (Psalm 104:18) or humans (Job 24:8).

Fortress (vv. 7,11)—Technically, this means a high point, like a cliff or rock outcropping (Isaiah 33:16) or high walls (25:12) that serve as a defensive position.

LORD Almighty (v. 11)—One of the frequent names for God, this phrase is often translated "LORD of Hosts." The phrase proclaims the Lord's authority as King over Israel.



Psalm 46:1-3

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

My guess is that most of us would settle for something in the middle—something that applies to our everyday lives. Peace for me would mean fewer surprises at work, less stress in my family, and enough money to pay my bills. Is that too much to ask?

Psalm 46 points to 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.

Notice how the psalmist began verse 1: "God is . . ." Those might be the two most powerful words you can read, hear, or speak. Next, the psalmist described God with three distinct terms:

- 1. Refuge.** When God is our refuge, we have a place to hide when life assaults us. When you feel battered and bruised and bullied, you can find a place of shelter with your Heavenly Father.
- 2. Strength.** When life is hard, we're not forced to continue in our own power. Rather, God empowers us to take on life no matter what comes our way.
- 3. Help.** God is always there to help us. I love how personal this is. God, the Creator and Master of all things, helps me. No matter what I face, God is personally there to help.

The psalmist also 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 sometimes it feels like we are. We can't seem to get our footing. Stuff is crashing down all around us. Troubles show up like a flood against us. But the one who trusts in God does not have to be afraid.

Where do you go to experience peace?

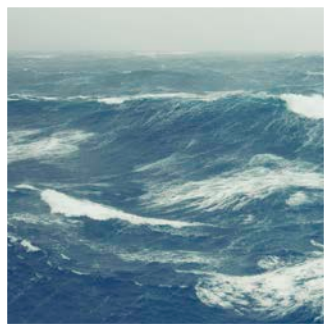
QUESTION #2

God is our refuge, strength, and helper. Which of these three resonates with you right now?

QUESTION #3

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE

The psalms are flooded with references to water in different forms. Write down any emotions you feel in connection with the images below. Examples are provided to help you get started.



Fear



Peace



Satisfaction

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What emotions do you experience when you read Psalm 46?

"Trust the past to God's mercy, the present to God's love, and the future to His providence!"

—AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Psalm 46:4-7

In verses 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. The Bible often refers to God's presence as a cool stream or a place where our thirst is satisfied (see 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. In the midst of raging waters, He is our calm stream.

One of my favorite movie battles takes place in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. Taken from J.R.R. Tolkien's book, it's known as "The Battle of Helm's Deep." In the scene, a massive army of nasty, ogre-like creatures called Orcs attacks the men of Rohan in a lopsided battle. The humans are terribly outnumbered. It appears that the city of men will be wiped out. And then the hero arrives! Gandalf appears with additional forces and turns the tide of the battle. In the end, good wins out.

The Lord of the Rings is fiction, of course, but our lives can sometimes feel like the Battle of Helm's Deep. Good seems to get crushed into the ground. Good intentions, good work, and good morals are trampled by the "nations" that wage war against us. Yet even here, God isn't afraid—nor should we be. With the mere lifting of His voice, our enemies melt.

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. **When God speaks, all the enemies of peace are rendered null and void.**

How are you currently affected by the conflicts raging in today's culture?

QUESTION #4



Psalm 46:8-11

In our war against the mayhem of life, God is completely unstoppable. God is not just a little bigger than our circumstances or the world. He is the all-powerful Lord and almighty Ruler over all things! He has the absolute ability to cease the roaring commotion in your heart.

It comes down to a choice. God has made peace possible between Himself and us. We were the enemies raging against His kingdom. We were the rebels making alliances with the chaos of the world. But God stands infinitely over and above all things. He is the true Hero of our battle, and He offers peace. But we must choose to trust Jesus rather than our stuff and our own willpower.

Yahweh is our fortress (see v. 11). The name Yahweh is the ancient Hebrew name 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, and no self-imposed pain is greater than our God.

You need God’s presence that brings peace in all kinds of situations:

- ▶ When family comes to visit.
- ▶ When the project at work is coming apart at the seams.
- ▶ When it’s Saturday and your teenage daughter is an hour and a half late coming home—and she won’t answer her phone.
- ▶ When you’re enticed or tempted to sin for what seems like the millionth time.
- ▶ When problems must be solved, relationships must be mended, and chaos rages around you.

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



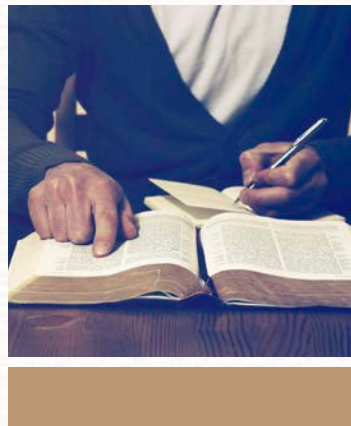
What steps can we take to seek God instead of our own ideas for peace?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

Consider the following suggestions for allowing God to work in your life and bring peace:

- ▶ **Dwell in God's Word.** Read Psalm 46 daily for the next week. Choose one verse to memorize so you can remind yourself about God's power during times of turmoil.
- ▶ **Take a retreat.** Spend a significant portion of time alone in prayer and worship this week. Ask God to give you peace.
- ▶ **Get involved.** Identify a group or ministry that seeks to bring spiritual peace into the lives of people. Determine how you can help that cause.



You're going to face turmoil every day. That's not a pleasant reality, but it's true. Fortunately, you can actively choose to make a resolution in the face of turmoil. Be intentional to let God work a revolution in your life—a revolution of His peace and presence.

Tulips for Traci



I'm 42 years old and am recovering from bilateral mastectomies, a hysterectomy, and radiation treatments for breast cancer. Over my lifetime, I've watched my grandparents, cousins, uncles, and most recently my father pass away from one excruciating form of cancer or another—bone, brain, breast, pancreatic, and prostate. The stages and original prognoses may have differed, but the outcome never did.

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