

**O God Our Help – Some comments on Psalm 46**  
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**Introduction**

Lots of people enjoy singing songs they hear on the radio. It's fun. One problem: We didn't always know all the words to the songs we like to sing. For example, way back in the 1980s, one of the most popular songs was "Stayin' Alive" by the Bee Gees. Everyone knew the words, "Stayin' alive", but few people knew the rest of the song. So, it came out something like this:

Duh-buh-Duh-buh-Duh-buh-Duh-buh-  
Duh-buh-Duh-buh- Duh-buh-Duh-buh-  
- stayin' alive – stayin' alive.  
Duh-buh-Duh-buh-Duh-buh-Duh-buh-  
Duh-buh-Duh-buh- Duh-buh-Duh-buh-  
- stayin' alive – stayin' alive.  
Ah, Ah, Ah, Ah, Stayin' alive...



Back then, if you wanted to learn the words to a song, you had to buy the record and get the lyrics from the album cover. Today we have the Internet. So, a while back, I ran across the lyrics. The words to this song are interesting - Sad, but interesting. They portray a man whose life is empty - Painfully empty. He gets through life by picking up women, getting high, and going out dancing. Here are a few words from the chorus:

Whether you're a brother  
Or whether you're a mother,  
You're stayin' alive, stayin' alive.  
Feel the city breakin'  
And everybody shakin',  
And we're stayin' alive, stayin' alive.  
Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive, stayin' alive.  
(“Stayin' Alive” by Barry Alan Gibb and Maurice Ernest Gibb)

At one point, the man shows us just how empty his life is:

Life is goin' nowhere. Somebody help me.  
Somebody help me, yeah.

Is that all there is to life? According to this song, life is full of pain and emptiness. Somehow, you just have to survive any way you can. You have to stay alive.

Is there nothing more?

There's another song that falls prey the fate of forgotten words. We sing it every Thanksgiving: "O God, our help in ages past." Everyone who grew up in America knows the tune. And they know a few words. But often, they don't know everything. So, you get something like, "O God, our help in ages past. Our (something) for years to come. La-la-la-la..."

As I'm writing this, we're looking forward to Thanksgiving. I'd like to spend some time looking at that song. Here are some of the words:

O God Our Help in Ages Past  
(Hymn by Isaac Watts)

O God our help in ages past  
Our hope for years to come  
Our shelter from the stormy blast  
And our eternal home

Under the shadow of Thy throne  
Thy saints have dwelt secure  
Sufficient is Thine arm alone  
And our defense is sure

Before the hills in order stood  
Or earth received her frame  
From everlasting Thou art God  
To endless years the same.

O God our help in ages past  
Our hope for years to come  
Be Thou our guard while troubles last  
And our eternal home.

What great words! What timeless thoughts! They were written in the early 1700s, so people have been singing this song for 300 years.

Where do these words come from? What would inspire a man to write these things? The ideas appear in a number of places in the Bible. Today, we'll look at a few. Before we read, let's ask a question: The writer of this hymn, Isaac Watts, clearly thought that God was a help to him. ***Can God be a help for us today?*** Have you ever felt like you could use some help? I have! So, let's find out if God can be a help to us today.

## I. God helps people.

The first thing we learn is that God helps people. Let's look first at Psalm 46.

God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble  
(Psalm 46:1)

Think about those words: "Refuge", "Strength", "Ever-Present Help." Imagine that you're outside and you see a threat. Maybe it's a terrible storm coming. Maybe it's someone who looks suspicious. Wouldn't it be great to have a place to go? A safe place.

We've all read the story of the "Three Little Pigs". Three pigs all decide to build houses. One builds his house out of straw. Why straw? Because it's easy and cheap. Another pig builds with twigs - Same reason. The third pig builds with brick. It's expensive, it's hard work, but you all know how the story goes.

The big, bad wolf comes. He huffs, and he puffs, and he blows down the house of straw. Now, at this point, it depends on who's telling the story. If you have a mean person telling the story, that little piggie gets eaten. There's no "this little piggie cried 'wee, wee, wee' all the way home"! On the other hand, if you have a nice person telling the story, that little pig escapes and runs to his brother's house. Sadly, it's made of twigs, so the same thing happens there. Fortunately, when everyone gets to the house made of brick, the bricks hold, and the wolf moves on to something easier.

The writer of Psalm 46 says that God is a refuge - A source of strength. And he is there to help. He is an "ever-present' help in trouble" - He's always ready to help when things go wrong.

Right about now, someone is saying, "This is very nice. Three Little Pigs – that's cute. But I'm facing some really heavy stuff out here." Yes, you are. We face disease, unsteady economies, and social unrest. We need something **big**. So, let's read on.

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.

This is big. Ancient Israel, the region of the world where this psalm was written is unique. Just north of Israel is Lebanon. Before terrorists took over, Lebanon was a wonderful place. It was a big resort. People from all over the world came to visit. On the western side is the Mediterranean Sea. Only a few miles inland, and you're in mountains. In the 1950s, people could start their vacation with a visit to the beach. A few hours later, they could travel just a few miles inland and be skiing. There are places where you can face one way and catch an ocean view. Then, you can just turn around, face the other way, and you see mountains.

Because the ocean is right there, people of the region have seen their share of storms over the years. And every now and then, they get an earthquake. But what if a cataclysm took place? Imagine horrifying earthquake. It's so big, the mountains slide off their foundations and fall into the sea. That's the writer of Psalm 46 is picturing.

And you know what? The writer says, if we were all standing in the middle of that, we would not need to fear. Why not? Because God offers himself to us as a refuge. He is strong. He is always willing to offer help to those who call upon him.

What does it mean that we don't need to be afraid? There's a church leader out in California named Chuck Smith. He started the "Calvary Chapel" chain of churches. On one occasion, he shared a message from Psalm 46. After he was done, someone came to him. That person read about a prophecy that said California would fall into the ocean. They said, "You just told us that we don't need to be afraid, even if there's some terrible catastrophe." Then the person asked, "What would you do if you saw a mile-high wall of water coming at you?" Chuck Smith answered: "I'd run and grab my surfboard!"

Oh, to live in California.

But you see the point. When terrible things are happening all around us, we don't need to be afraid. Why not? Because God offers himself to us as a refuge. He is strong. He is an ever-present help in time of trouble.

Now that we know this, let's ask another question:

## **II. What do we need to do?**

Is there something we need to do to get God's help?

When I prepare a message, I always go to biblical scholars for help. Today is no different. When scholars look at a passage of Scripture, two questions they ask are, "When was it written" and "What was the situation surrounding the writer?" Some commentators think that this Psalm was written about a Hebrew king named Jehoshaphat.

What do we know about this man? The first thing we know is that Jehoshaphat was a good king. In this history of Israel, there were good kings and bad kings. Good kings obeyed and followed the God of Israel. Bad kings followed false gods. Bad kings built pagan shrines and appointed pagan priests and encouraged people to worship the false gods. When they did this, all kinds of bad things followed.

When a good king came, they tore down the shrines and kicked out all the people who led Israel the wrong way. It's funny, the good kings did a lot, but often times, they would give up before all the evil was destroyed. There were just a few exceptional kings who worked so hard,

they succeeded in rooting out all the evil. However, Jehoshaphat was one of those who fell short. He was not successful in getting rid of all the evil that troubled Israel.

From this, we learn that: Jehoshaphat was a good king, but not perfect. That tells us something. To get God's help, you don't need to be perfect. I don't know about you, but that sure makes *me* happy!

Let's learn more about Jehoshaphat by looking at a story from his life. It involves a time when he faced a terrifying crisis. It's found in the book of II Chronicles, chapter 20. We won't read the whole chapter - just a few highlights.

Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea." (II Chronicles 20:2)

It's hard for many people in America to understand this. The United States has been involved in wars over the years. But unlike many other countries, we haven't seen armies fighting on our mainland for generations - since the Civil war in the 1860s. Wars are always somewhere else.

Sadly, Israel saw a number of occasions where they were attacked. Here, Jehoshaphat was told that he was living in one of the generations that would see invading armies.

How did he react?

Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. (II Chronicles 20:3)

We're told Jehoshaphat was alarmed. We'll give him "alarmed". You're allowed to be alarmed when a massive army is invading your country. But Jehoshaphat didn't stop there. He didn't cry or give in to fear. He certainly didn't run away. We're told that Jehoshaphat "resolved to inquire of the Lord..."

So, here's the answer to our question: What do we need to do to get help from God? Are you taking notes? Make sure you write this down. What do we need to do to get help from God? Here it is: **Ask**.

When he was faced with a terrible threat, Jehoshaphat went to God and asked for help. And he did it right away. Note: This is all one sentence. It's not, "Jehoshaphat was alarmed" and then we get a few chapters about how he thought about what he should do. When he faced a threat, he resolved to inquire of the Lord, and right away.

He added a fast to that. We've talked about fasting and prayer in our church on a number of occasions. To understand this, you have to understand different approaches to God - You have to understand different religions.

Most people, when they face a threat, will try to figure out how to fix the problem on their own. When everything they try fails, they think about asking God for help. At that time, they'll head down to the local temple. Maybe they'll offer a small sacrifice of some kind. If that doesn't work, the offering grows. In some ancient religions the offering would get bigger and bigger until people eventually offered human sacrifices.

With the one True God, it's different. He wants us to come to him. He wants us to come to him first. He wants us to come to him in faith. We don't have to come with things to somehow buy him out. We don't have to purchase his love. Offerings come later because we want to say "thank you" for his kindness when he answers our prayers.

The bigger the threat, the more our hearts and our minds get into gear. The idea of a fast is simply to say we want to give full concentration to our time with God. We don't want any distractions. So, sometimes it's appropriate to add fasting when we pray. That's what Jehoshaphat did here.

Here's the main thing to understand: To get God's help, we simply ask.

How did God respond to Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah? Let me just describe the story from II Chronicles 20. God told Jehoshaphat that he would be there to help. Jehoshaphat was to get his fighters ready, knowing that God would be there for them. When it came time to face the enemy, it turns out that the battle was already won. God sent a spirit of confusion on the enemy army. Instead of attacking the Hebrew people, the enemy soldiers all wound up fighting each other. By the time Jehoshaphat and his fighters showed up, all the enemy soldiers were dead.

On top of that, they left behind all their things: Weapons, money, food, animals, and clothing. In fact, there was so much, it took three days to collect it all. Not only did Jehoshaphat win, but he came home richer than when he started!

How do you get help from God? Ask!

Now, someone might ask, "Does God always send miracles when we pray?" People who have been attending our church for a while know the answer. There are three ways God can reply when we ask for help.

- 1) **Yes.** God is fully capable of sending help. He's fully capable of sending it right away. I've had numerous times in my life when I've received help after I prayed. Sometimes, it's amazing.
- 2) **Wait.** You've asked for a good thing, but it's not the best time for you and for others.
- 3) **No – Because God has something better.**

What could be better than having your problems solved right away? Lots of things – here’s one: Eternity. Over in Psalm 90, the writer says this:

Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
throughout all generations.  
Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.  
(Psalm 90:1-2)

God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, is eternal. If you look back before the first atoms of the universe were put into place, God was there. He was there before the mountains were born. If you look forward into the future, to the furthest reach of time, God is there.

We could stop here and worship. We could just let that truth instill in us a sense of awe and wonder. But it’s also practical. It’s why God can be our help today. He’s not just a helper to ancient kings who lived thousands of years ago. He’s not just a helper to people like Isaac Watts who lived centuries ago. He is a help to us today and always.

Even more, he doesn’t just offer us help in this life. He’s not just a refuge for the here and now. He offers us a chance to live in eternity with him. He does that through Jesus Christ. The apostle John wrote about him:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

John talks about someone he calls “The Word.” He says, “Through him all things were made.” Then he tells us more:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory... (John 1:14)

This being is known to us as Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who is responsible for the birth of the mountains, long with the oceans and the stars in the skies and everything else.

Two thousand years ago, the eternal Word, Jesus Christ came to the earth in human flesh to walk among us. He did it so he could invite us into his kingdom - His eternal kingdom.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Again, we could respond by falling to our knees in worship. The gift of eternal life is beyond imagination. But again, it’s very practical for now. The apostle Paul tells us why:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)

When you understand the gift of eternity, it changes your outlook on life. If we face a challenge and God helps us by giving us a miracle, we give thanks, of course. But if he chooses to take us down another road, a road that involves suffering, we still do not fear. That road is part of the unique plan that God has for us. We have confidence that he will bring us safely into his eternal kingdom someday.

Let's pull this all together.

## **Conclusion**

Back in the 1980s, the Bee Gees sang a song depicting a lonely, frustrated man with an empty life. To him, all that mattered was "Stayin' Alive." We've learned today that life can be much, much more.

*Maybe it's a good thing that no one remembers the words to that song.*

A much better song for us today contains those wonderful words from Isaac Watts, written 300 years ago. A song that echoes the words of Psalm 46. A song that tells us how God offers himself to us as:

- a refuge
- a source of strength
- an ever-present help in times of trouble.

A song that reminds us that God was there before the mountains were born - And he'll be there forever.

## **Invitation**

If this is new to you, would you contact us? We'd love to tell you how you can understand the gift of eternity that God offers to you through Jesus Christ. A gift that helps us now, and forever. There are some important links at the end of this article that will help you to get started.

Can God be a help for us today? Yes! And not just for today, but forever.

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**Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:**

Trinity Church  
[www.TrinityTeaneck.org](http://www.TrinityTeaneck.org)

Phil's Site  
[PhilBrainerd.com](http://PhilBrainerd.com)

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

[PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net)

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