



Family Worship Guide

MARCH 8, 2020

Introduction

Good morning Mercy Hill! Thank you for being flexible in the face these difficult circumstances. Because the news of our building's closure came to us with such short notice, we did not think it plausible to try to either hold an outside service or gather in homes. Instead we decided to provide you with this *Family Worship Guide* for you to make use of right where you're at. We encourage you to work through it today either on your own or with family, friends, or other church members. I know that this will not be the same as gathering all together in one place, but I trust you will still find it edifying and encouraging.

For those of us with kids, this is a wonderful time to step into our God-given role as chief disciple-maker and influencer for Jesus in their lives (cf. Deut 4:9; 6:4-9; 11:18-21; 32:44-47; Pro 22:6; Eph 6:4). Gather your family around the table or living room. Lead them in worship! There was recently a study published to Christianity Today by Lyman Stone.¹ In it he notes the correlation between family worship and the staying power of a child's faith. After looking at much data, he concludes: "Families who pray and worship together tend to continue praying and worshipping together. The key to successful transmission of Christian faith across generations is not more youth groups or hipper pastors but the Holy Spirit working through the vocation of parenthood as parents take the time to share their faith with their own children." So parents, let's do it!²

Opening Question

As a way of backing into this morning's study, begin by asking the following:

- Kids love building forts. I remember building them all the time when I was young. I built them in my bedroom, in my family room, in my backyard, in the woods, etc. Have you ever built a fort? Tell the story. Where did you build it? What did you use to build it? What did you do in it? How did you feel in it? Why do you think kids love forts so much?

¹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/february-web-only/discipleship-parenting-kids-stay-christian-home-catechesis.html>

² **For Kids:** To aid you in leading your children, special notes will be made throughout this guide with suggestions for engaging them. You may obviously have to tailor these suggestions to fit the maturity and personality of each child.

The Text

The text this guide will be taking us through is Psalm 46.³ Open in prayer. Ask for God's blessing on your time together. Then read His word aloud:⁴

¹ *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

² *Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,*

³ *though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah*

⁴ *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.*

⁵ *God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.*

⁶ *The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.*

⁷ *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah*

⁸ *Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.*

⁹ *He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.*

¹⁰ *"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 of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah*

Discussion Starters⁵

- Verses 2-3 describe what would seem to be the undoing of the created order. The earth is giving way. The mountains are slipping back into the chaotic seas. Everything on earth is unraveling. Have you ever felt this way? Describe a time when it felt like your world was falling apart. What was happening? Where did you go for help? How did things get better? In what ways are you feeling like this even now?⁶
- This Psalm begins with a declaration of who God is (v. 1). Pause and consider. Who would you say that God is? Be honest. Don't just give the Christian answer. How are you experiencing Him right now? What words would you use to describe Him? Does He seem good or hard? Does He seem strong or weak? Does He seem present or absent? Why? What words do the Psalmists use?⁷ Would you agree with them? Have you experienced God in this way? Can you think of other stories in the Bible where God reveals Himself like this for people in hardship?

³ I actually preached through this Psalm almost five years ago now. If interested, you can follow up this study by listening to that sermon: *Come, Behold...Be Still, and Know - A Call to Active Passivity* (<https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/come-beholdbe-still-and-know-a-call-to-active-passivity/>).

⁴ **For Kids:** If you have children who can read, you might consider having them read aloud at this point.

⁵ **For Kids:** If you are going through this guide with little kids, you may decide to pick and choose and edit these. Feel free!

If you are going through this guide alone, these questions can be used to help you pray and journal through the text. Let them direct you Godward!

⁶ **For Kids:** You might consider asking: It sounds like the Psalmists are describing something kind of like an earthquake. What happens in an earthquake? How do you think you'd feel? What would you do? Where would you go?

⁷ **For Kids:** You might need to linger on the words the Psalmists use (i.e. "refuge," "strength," "very present help," etc.) and make sure your children understand what they mean. You might here want to make the connection to the idea of God as a "fortress" as well (vv. 7, 11). The notion of God as a "fort" ties back to the Opening Question and prepares for the upcoming Family Activity.

- How does knowing God in this way change the experience of this calamity for the Psalmists? If God really is our refuge and strength, and a very present help in time of need, how would that change things for us?
- In verses 4-5 we see the contrast between the chaotic situations around us and the stable reality of God's kingdom and plan. Though the waters may be roaring and foaming (v. 3), in the city of God things are calm—"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God" (v. 4). Though the mountains are moving into the heart of the sea (v. 2), the city of God (and by extension, His people) "shall not be moved" (v. 5). And all of this, again, because "God is in the midst of her" (v. 5). He is "our fortress" (v. 7). He is the One who keeps us sane in the midst of insanity, stable in the midst of chaos, secure in the midst of danger.⁸ Read Philippians 4:4-7. How does this text build upon the ideas in our Psalm? What ministers to you in these verses?
- What are you and I actually called to *do* in this Psalm? Make note of the four commands there in verses 8 and 10. We are to (1) *come*, (2) *behold* the works of the Lord, (3) *be still*, and (4) *know* that He is God. That's our action plan. It's an "active passivity." We are running to God and watching Him flex His muscles on our behalf. Why do you think it's so hard to stop and look to God in times of trouble? Why is it so important that we do?
- Jesus is ultimately the singer of every Psalm. How does Jesus and His work on the cross sum up and fulfill all that we find here? Where is the gospel in these verses?
- In verse 9 we see that the peace God brings us in Jesus is not just for us but for the world! He is going to put an end to war and injustice, oppression and evil. The city of God and the people of God press out into this fallen world with love. We do not hunker down in our fortress and forget everyone else. No! Because the Lord of hosts is with us, because the God of Jacob is our fortress, because He is our refuge and strength and a very present help in trouble, we Christians are actually freed from bondage to worry and self-preservation. Because I know Christ is committed to caring for *me* I can be committed to caring for *you*. I can be an agent of peace and love, even in times of national and global distress.

What is happening right now with the Coronavirus, no doubt, is scary, but it isn't unprecedented. Disease and plagues have many times run amok. And what's interesting is that Christians, because they have the God of Psalm 46, have often run towards the chaos and the storm rather than away from it.

Eusebius (c. AD 263 - 339), an early church historian, in his *The Church History*, recorded a time when famine and plague were decimating the population of Caesarea, one of the Roman Empire's larger cities. He writes of the early churches response to such a thing. Let's listen in:

Death, waging war with the two weapons of plague and famine, quickly devoured whole families, so that two or three bodies might be removed for burial in a single funeral procession. . . . In this awful adversity they [the Christians] alone gave practical proof of their sympathy and humanity. All day long some of them tended to the dying and to their burial, countless numbers with no one to care for them. Others gathered together from all

⁸ **For Kids:** You might stop at this point and rehearse the differences between the two places. One place is scary and seems to be out of control (vv. 1-3). The other place is peaceful and full of gladness (vv. 4-5). Ask your children which place they would choose to live in. Then let them know that we can actually live in the place of peace and gladness even while we're living in the place that feels scary and out of control! Because we know Jesus, we can find comfort and joy even when things are hard. He brings the happy place into the scary place. He is our fort—our protection against the storm.

parts of the city a multitude of those withered from famine and distributed bread to them all, so that their deeds were on everyone's lips, and they glorified the God of the Christians.

Consider, how can you, like these early Christians, move towards others in love even during this frightening time?

Prayer

We saw that our call in times of trial is to come, behold, be still, and know the Lord. Do this even now. Open up a time of prayer. Together, run to God. Take your burdens to Him. Turn to Him for help. Pray for yourself and for each other. Pray for our city, nation, and world. Give thanks for the things He has already done and for the things He has promised He will yet do.

Song

Consider listening and worshiping along with a wonderful song written by Shane and Shane inspired by this Psalm and aptly titled "Psalm 46."⁹

Family Activity

It's a cold and cloudy day. It's a perfect day to build a fort inside! If you've got little kids (and even if you don't!), follow up this lesson by building a fort with them. Emphasize the need for the fort to keep you safe and secure. Use sheets and cushions, tables and chairs. Have fun! Then get inside with your children. Imagine that outside there's a storm or wild animals but that inside you are safe. Read the Psalm again from inside it. Explain how God and Jesus keep us safe in the midst of life's hardships. And did I mention . . . have fun!

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqFDt3RpJ8A>