

# **THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE MIND: FACING THE MONSTERS THAT COME CALLING DAY AND NIGHT**

## **Chapter 11**

### **Life without worry and fear**

(Revised 8/26/05)

In the four years since 9/11, has the world become a safer place? In our obsession for security, are we more aware of the dangers, and consequently feel even more insecure?

In the past few years, terrorists have struck hard at Russia. Two jets crashed and the evidence pointed to terrorism. Over 350 people died when a school was seized by rebels from Chechnya. A bomb was set off outside a subway station in Moscow.

There are suicide bombings in Israel. There is continued fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Here in America, national security was one of the central issues of the 2004 presidential campaign. Each candidate touted their qualifications and proposals as to how they will make the world a safer place.

All of these incidents contribute to us feeling a heightened sense of insecurity. Rather than feeling safer, we are even more obsessed with finding security.

Protecting our loved ones and our belongings is at the top of our priorities. We buy surge protectors, virus software, and firewalls for computer systems. Hardhats and bicycle helmets protect our heads, safety goggles shield our eyes, fluoride treatments guard our teeth from cavities, and flu shots ward off the latest virus from abroad.

We buy cars with airbags and antilock brakes. We install home security systems and car alarms to keep thieves away from our property. We are told that condoms promote safe sex while gunlocks will protect children from the danger of firearms.

Celebrities hire bodyguards to insulate themselves from the paparazzi. We take self-defense courses and stock up on pepper spray to ward off attackers. We can purchase life, health, dental, optical, disability, travel, and car insurance for our various needs. We buy supplemental insurance for what our insurance doesn't cover. We long for job security and want to protect our investments.

Over the past 13 years, I have had the privilege of participating in 11 short-term ministry trips to Russia, Ukraine, Spain, and Nigeria. Prior to leaving, our teams have purchased travel insurance. I visited a travel doctor and received shots and prescriptions to ward off the evils of yellow fever, malaria, cholera and other diseases.

We do our best to guard against the danger in the world. Yet as much as we want to insulate ourselves from trouble, sometimes the monsters discover our address and make their way to our doorstep.

When we lived in the Midwest, we found piles of sawdust in the basement and discovered our home had carpenter ants. We began to have doubts about the stability of our house. The home of a good friend was broken into three times within six months and his valuables were stolen. He and his wife feared for their security, terrified that the burglars would return a fourth time.

Anyone who has ever received a "Dear John" letter or whose boyfriend dumped them because he was scared of the "C" word, commitment, knows just how shaky a relationship can be. If your husband or wife announces that they do not love you anymore

and that they want a divorce, what you once thought was a secure marriage bond has now crumbled all over the floor.

When we visit a doctor and discover that we have cancer or some other life-threatening disease, we lose the security of a healthy body.

People go to work feeling safe. But when the rumors of layoffs begin to swirl throughout the cubicles, insecurity begins to whisper, “Who will receive the next ‘pink slip?’ Maybe it will be you.” When the reorganization hits your division and you lose your job, security flies out the window. You find yourself on the employment line looking for work.

Ask the people who left their secure positions to help launch a dot.com startup what they think of job security. Gauge the attitude of the financial gurus who invested in a failed IPO. Take a poll of the workers whose company suffered a hostile takeover by a corporate raider how secure their paycheck is. Seek out the opinion of a single mom who found herself on the employment line after her firm was downsized how she feels about the prospects of providing for her family.

When asked about their concerns about the future, elementary school children used to list the threat of nuclear war. Now they are afraid of guns on campus and whether their school will become the latest Columbine. Adults are afraid for their children’s safety, with the rise of crimes committed against children and violence at school.

Because of the instability and insecurity of the world in which we live, we are haunted by our fears and driven by a longing for security. Everyone desires to be safe and secure, free from problems and fears. While it may be prudent and wise to protect our homes, cars, health, and finances, the danger comes in actually believing that we are safe.

The harsh reality is that none of the security products or services we can obtain guarantees 100% reliability. They all come with some type of disclaimer or limited warranty. Money, health, possessions, people, relationships, and houses are all subject to change at a moment's notice.

Rather than put our faith in a product, we need to place our trust in a person.

The writer of Psalm 46 understood that principle. He boldly declared that God was the source of his security. His confidence in that fact produced three significant effects in his life.

The author stated the theme in verse 1, and then repeated it in verses 7 and 11. The psalm is then divided into three movements or scenarios that explain the results of his theme. Each of these movements is punctuated with the word, "Selah," which means pause, think, or consider.

BECAUSE GOD IS MY SURE DEFENSE . . . (1, 7, 11)

Webster's Dictionary defines security as safety; certainty; freedom from worry; protection, shelter. In this psalm, God — as the psalmist's security — is described by those very words.

(1) "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. . . (7) The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. . . (11) The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

If I went into your home, I might see a variety of pictures. Those pictures would tell me more about you and your family. The writer of Psalm 46 uses 6 pictures to describe the security that God provides. He referred to God as a refuge, a strength, an ever-present help, the Lord Almighty, the God of Jacob, and a fortress.

In verse 1, we see the first picture. God is described as a refuge. A refuge is a place of safety and security. It is a hiding place that you run to when you are in danger.

When you were young and afraid at night, did you ever crawl into bed and pull the covers up over your head? I know I did. I believed that as long as I was covered, the monsters in the closet or the ones under the bed could not see me. And because they could not see me, I was safe.

The second picture is that God is our strength (1). My daughter, Amanda, once played in a soccer game that ended in a tie after double overtime. Her team finally won in a shootout. At the end of the second overtime, the referee collapsed on the field and said, “Would somebody please score so that I can go home?” He was exhausted.

I’m sure we’d all agree that there are times when our emotional, physical, and spiritual reserves are completely depleted. There may be times when we feel like the British marathoner Paula Radcliffe at the Athens Olympics.<sup>1</sup> We’re so exhausted that we want to give up and drop out of the race. When we are running on empty, God protects us by being our strength when we have none of our own.

When two children get especially angry with each other, what is one thing they might say? “My brother is bigger than your brother!” Or, “My dad can beat up your dad!” Or, as a bumper sticker I once saw that said, “My lawyer is better than your lawyer!”

Like little children, when we get into trouble, we want help from someone who is bigger and stronger than we are. God is that person for us.

In the third picture, the psalmist stated that God is “an ever-present present help in trouble” (1). He is the one who comes alongside to assist us and to render aid when we are in a tight spot.

Have you ever helped a child learn to ride a bicycle without training wheels? You take off the training wheels and then you run alongside the bike, ready to steady it when it begins to wobble. Have you ever watched someone tackle a project which is bigger than they are? It could be a child attempting to move a boulder or a coworker trying to decipher their income tax forms. You have the knowledge or ability to help them and all you are waiting for is to be asked. In each case, our children or friends or coworkers do not have to search for help because it is already present.

In the same way, God is an ever-present help. Not only does he come alongside, but he is in our midst and is with us. He is an ever-present help (7, 11). There may be times when we feel alone, but we are not abandoned. God is always available in time of need. He is never too busy. His office is never closed.

In the fourth picture, the psalmist called God the Lord Almighty or the LORD of Hosts, as the NASB translates it. It is a name of God that appears most often in the context of failure and powerlessness. It appears 229 times in the Old Testament, 207 of which are spoken of by the prophets. In that context, his name was a great comfort, because it reminded Israel that the LORD of Hosts, the Lord Almighty, was a God who worked on their behalf to fulfill his purpose in their lives.

In the fifth picture, the psalmist called God the God of Jacob (7, 11). This picture refers to the covenant and the promises. We can find security because God is faithful. He always keeps his promises.

The last picture of protection is that God is a fortress (7, 11). This pictures an armed, walled city. It was a place of protection when the people were attacked by an enemy. A fugitive on the run or a soldier in battle would look for a “safe height” or a “strong rock” to which they could hurry for protection.

This psalm gives us six pictures of the protection that God provides. God is our shelter, our hiding place. He is our strength when we have none of our own. He is with us. He is the Lord Almighty. He is the God of Jacob, the one who keeps his promises. God is our wall of defense.

The psalmist weaves these pictures together into a tapestry that describes God’s protection. Because God is all powerful and keeps his promises, we can trust him to provide safety, strength, help, and protection.

Do you feel like you are in over your head? Are you running a deficit in your emotional bank account? In what area of your life could you use his strength? Where would you like for him to intercede and to work on your behalf? God is a refuge and strength. He is our wall of defense. God is an ever-present help. He is the LORD of Hosts, the Lord Almighty, ready to respond and to meet us at our point of need. God always keeps his promises.

When we are in trouble and have no power to help ourselves, when we are under attack and require protection, when we reach the end of our rope and need deliverance, when our world is rocked by unexpected tremors, we can rest assured that God can and will work on our behalf.

While those thoughts are comforting, what difference should that knowledge make in my life? When I come face to face with a new challenge, can the knowledge that

God works on my behalf transform how I approach that situation? When circumstances don't go my way, should the fact that God is a refuge and a strength influence how I react?

The psalmist would answer with a resounding "YES!" In fact, he went on to say that there are three changes in the attitude of the one who trusts in God's protection and care. He stated that because God is my sure defense, I will not fear, I will not fall, and I will not worry.

... I WILL NOT FEAR (1-3)

The first change in my attitude is found in verses 1-3.

<sup>1</sup> God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup>

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, <sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah

The author of this psalm stated, Because God is my sure defense, I will not fear. I will not be alarmed. I will not be consumed with dread. Because I know for certain that God is my hiding place and provides strength to take action, and I am convinced that he is with me and ready to act on my behalf, I will approach life with a sense of confidence.

The absence of fear begins with having a right perspective of who God is. A. W. Tozer said, "The most important thing about you is what you believe about God, because what you believe about God determines what you believe about everything else."

What is the source of security for a child at night? A night light, perhaps? A security blanket? Or is it the confidence that mom and dad will come running when the child cries to solve the problem or soothe the anxiety? Is it the reassurance that when the

nightmares strike, the child can go climb in bed with mom and dad? Isn't that what really helps a child sleep soundly, the fact that mom and dad are present?

Because God is an ever-present help . . . Because God is my sure defense, I will not fear.

The psalmist went on to state that he would not be afraid even though the worst possible natural disasters might occur.

He suggested the possibility of an earthquake — “I will not fear, though the earth should change, and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea.” If the psalmist lived in Seattle, he might phrase it like this, “Even if an earthquake strike and the state capitol should slip off its pillars, or the Space Needle topple over and become sediment on the bottom of Elliot Bay, even then I will still trust God.”

The author also pictured the likelihood of a tidal wave or a raging flood — “I will not fear, though its waters roar and foam.” Today he might write, “Even if the Skykomish and Snoqualmie Rivers crest their banks, or the ocean be stirred up into 30 foot swells and cover the Olympic Peninsula, or a mudslide in West Seattle cover my home, even then I will still trust God.” If he lived in Florida, he might exclaim, “Even if two hurricanes pelt us within one month, even then we will still trust God.”

He mentioned the remote chance of a volcanic eruption — “I will not fear, though the mountains quake with their surging.” If he lived in Washington, perhaps the psalmist would state confidently, “Even though Mt. Rainier should shake and tremble and surge with molten lava, even then I will still trust God.”

During an earthquake or a hurricane or volcanic eruption, people flee in terror. Their possessions become insignificant and all they care about is gathering their family together for safety. They tend to become irrational and panic.

But the author of this psalm stated, In the likelihood of a devastating natural disaster, I will not be dismayed. I will not be paralyzed with terror. I will not fear, because I know that God is my sure defense.

Perhaps you're not concerned about an earthquake, a raging flood, or a volcano. Perhaps what causes you to cringe with fear is your son or daughter having an accident with a drunk driver. Maybe your chest tightens when your husband or wife travels on a business trip. Perhaps the rumors of your company downsizing and the possibility of a layoff looming on the horizon leaves you in a cold sweat at 3:00 AM. Maybe it is the uncertainty of what you will do after graduation that has you worried.

To be honest, I need this reminder. There are numerous worries and concerns that compete for my attention. I am the poster child for the sandwich generation. On one side, I am concerned about aging parents. On the other side, I have three teenage children that I need to prepare for college and adulthood. My wife, Carol, and I are face to face with the two "D" words that strike fear in every parent's heart—driving, and dating. With that type of fault line running under our lives, I feel seismic activity all around me.

If you sense a seismic warning in your life, duck and cover yourself with the knowledge that God is your refuge and strength. Then you can ride out the shock waves without being alarmed. The first result of knowing that God is my sure defense is that I will not be afraid. The second result is that I will enjoy a sense of stability and blessing. Because God is my sure defense, I will not fear, and I will not fall.

. . . I WILL NOT FALL (4-7)

In verses 4-7, the psalmist explained that not only is God an ever-present help, he is also in our midst.

<sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. <sup>5</sup> God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. <sup>6</sup> Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. <sup>7</sup> The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Selah

The psalmist described a river flowing through the city of Jerusalem. It is a stream that brings blessing and joy. The psalmist used this metaphor to say that God is present among his people. This concept would be well known to Israel since the prophet Isaiah also likened God's presence to a river in Isaiah 8:6 and 33:21.

In the Old Testament, God was present among his people through the temple. His glory dwelt in the Holy of Holies. Today, God does not dwell in one city. He does not limit himself to Moscow, London, Washington, D. C., New York, Seattle, or Denver. God is present in believers through the Holy Spirit. When we accept Christ as our Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside us.

As a result, God's presence causes us to be glad and to rejoice. Not only are they not afraid, but the men and women who trust in God as their sure defense will have a sense of security and stability. They will not fall. They will not be moved, as the NASB says.

That doesn't mean that this person will never encounter problems. It simply means that in the midst of them, they will remain secure.

As Hurricane Frances whistled, howled and thumped in September 2004, Paul and Ann Jutras comfortably watched college football, read and played cribbage in their home just two blocks from the storm-tossed Atlantic Ocean. They never considered evacuating.

The Jutrases, both 61, and son Paul Jr., 34, rode out the hurricane snug inside a house they designed with a hurricane in mind. Paul Jutras, a retired Defense Department engineer said he had it built twice as strong as the building code required.

At one point, as Paul Jutras stepped out onto his front porch, the neighbors' shingles were flapping, but his roof was holding up. His house has a double roof, with an inner layer serving as a backup, extra beams, far thicker plywood than most builders use, and electric, self-closing hurricane shutters.<sup>2</sup>

In the same way, the one who trusts in God for his sense of security can withstand difficulty and disaster without falling, without being moved. They might be rocked and swayed, the gale force winds may blow, but their foundation will remain secure.

People can take away our property, our possessions, our health, and even our life itself. But they cannot take away our relationship with God.

In addition to stability, the psalmist explained that God provides help when morning dawns. Have you heard the saying, "God is seldom early, but never late"? Since dawn is the time of attack, God provides help when it is needed the most. The return of morning is the sunrise of speedy help. In Exodus 14:27 at the parting of the Red Sea, God destroyed the Egyptian army at dawn. God sends deliverance just when it is needed. Whether your night of trouble is short or long, you can rest assured that morning always

comes. And according to the promise of Lamentations 3:22-23, with the morning comes a renewal of God's faithfulness.

The reason why God's help is needed is that Jerusalem is under attack. The context of verses 4-7 is a national disaster. Israel's neighbors are in an uproar. There is great insecurity because of their unrest. God steps in and destroys his enemies with his voice. Even in the midst of attack, the citizens of Jerusalem could feel secure because of God's presence.

How does God help us during times of trouble? Sometimes he delivers us from the trouble. At other times, he gives us strength and courage to stand firm in the midst of the battle.

In the fall of 1993, two weeks before a ministry team I was leading was scheduled to fly into Moscow, tanks fired upon the Russian White House. The government was in an uproar. In 1994, I was in Ukraine shortly after a cholera outbreak. In 2000, I was in Nigeria, where there had been conflict between Christians and Muslims.

Each one of these situations created great anxiety and insecurity. People asked us, "Are you afraid? Are you still going?" Because our teams knew God was with us, we were confident that he would protect us. And he did.

In the midst of natural disaster, we do not need to be afraid because God is a refuge and strength. During a national disaster, we do not need to fall because God is in our midst and provides help when we need it most. The third result that the knowledge of God's presence and protection should produce in our lives is that we can relax and not worry. Because God is my sure defense, I will not fear, I will not fall, and I will not worry.

... I WILL NOT WORRY (8-11)

In verses 8-11, the psalmist stated,

<sup>8</sup> Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth. <sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. <sup>10</sup> “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” <sup>11</sup> The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

The psalmist commanded his readers to view the remains of war. We are to pay attention and to see what God has done. Broken weapons and the charred remains of chariots litter the battlefield. The writer placed an emphasis on the horror caused by the desolation of judgment.

In August 2000, I was in Nigeria investigating a ministry opportunity. We toured the city of Kaduna that was the site of conflict and persecution by Muslims in March 2000. We saw areas where homes and businesses had been completely leveled. I felt like I was looking at scenes out of WWII. The persecution was so devastating that it left 75,000 families homeless. We talked with a pastor whose church had been burned. When we asked if the church would stay, he replied that with God’s grace, they would rebuild.

Our response to all of this was a hushed silence. We had nothing to say. What more could we possibly add?

That is the response that the writer of this psalm suggested in verse 10. After telling them to consider God’s work, he commanded his readers, Stop worrying. Cease striving. Be still. Relax. Be quiet. Pause.

This command is not a comfort for the harassed, but is a rebuke to a restless and turbulent world. In the midst of noise and confusion, be quiet. When panic builds and the need to do something rises, relax and refrain. When anxiety increases and it becomes difficult to remain calm, be still. When the pressure mounts to worry and fret, cease striving.

The command is to stop doing one thing in favor of another. Stop worrying and let God be exalted in your life. Be quiet and watch God work. Cease striving and know that he is God. This kind of knowledge pictures an intimate acquaintance. It is a knowledge that is gained by experience. It is the process of going through stressful times and afterward reflecting on what God did to bring you through. It is the picture of the wise man that after a trial meditates on God's character, his acts of deliverance and protection, and his promises.

The real issue with being still or ceasing to worry is one of trust. Am I trusting in myself for security or am I relying on God? Will I relax and trust God to keep his promises to protect me? Am I willing to stop my own efforts to build security and allow God to work on my behalf?

In times of distress, it is tempting to place our security in bank accounts, political leaders, insurance policies, military strength, personal relationships, and worldly wisdom. It is standard operating procedure to rely on my own strength and resources. It is extremely difficult to sit back and relax, to be still, to cease striving, to stop worrying, and to let God demonstrate his power. Yet that is precisely what God wants us to do.

Do you live in strife and panic? Are you fretful and worried? Do the monsters whisper that your security is slipping away? Enter God's invisible sanctuary of rest and trust him completely for your security.

In the story, "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," Quasimodo and Esmeralda ran to the church and claimed "sanctuary." As long as they were within the walls of the church, they were protected from those who wished to harm them. In the same way, we can run to God and claim "sanctuary" in his presence. Like passing through an airport metal detector, we can rest securely knowing that nothing will come into our lives without first being screened by God.

Many years ago a missionary to Africa, Frederick Nolan, was forced to flee North Africa to escape persecution. Hounded by his pursuers, over hills and through valleys, with no place to hide, Nolan fell exhausted into a wayside cave, expecting to be found soon. Awaiting his death, he noticed a spider weaving a web right across the mouth of the cave. When his pursuers reached the cave, they wondered if Nolan was hiding there, but thought it impossible for him to have entered the cave without destroying the web. So they went on. Having escaped, Nolan burst out and exclaimed: "Where God is, a spider's web is like a wall; Where God is not, a wall is like a spider's web."<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes it appears as if the enemy is winning. It seems as if our trouble has no end. When we are afraid . . . when we are concerned . . . when we are worried . . . when we have no where to run . . . Run to God.

He is our Refuge. He is our strength. He is our wall of defense. He is with us. He is all-powerful. He keeps his promises. He is the source of our security.

If we place our security in God, we will be able to conclude with the psalmist,

Because God is my sure defense,

I will not fear,

I will not fall,

I will not worry.

I will not strive.

LIFE WITHOUT WORRY AND FEAR

Because God is my sure defense,

I will not fear,

I will not fall,

I will not worry.

I will not strive.

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU TURN ON THE NIGHT LIGHT

1. Can you think of a time when you were worried or afraid? Describe what caused you to feel that way.
2. Think about the various ways the psalmist describes God as our security. If you meditating on those pictures the next time you were faced with feelings of insecurity, how do you think that change your view about the problem?
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<sup>1</sup> Radcliffe led the first 15 miles of the race, but then dropped out at the 23-mile mark due to the heat and humid conditions. She was too exhausted to finish.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/olympics\\_2004/athletics/3589138.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/olympics_2004/athletics/3589138.stm)

<sup>2</sup> *Seattle Times*, Monday, September 06, 2004, 12:00 a.m. Pacific

<sup>3</sup> Green, Michael P. (Ed.). (1989). *Illustrations for biblical preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, p. 295, #1108.