Finding GOD when the World’s on FIRE

Strength & Faith for Dangerous Times

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FEAR OR FAITH?

*I trust in the LORD for protection.*

*So why do you say to me,*

*“Fly like a bird to the mountains for safety!”*

Psalm 11:1 NLT
If our foundations are in place, then nothing else really matters.
Cynthia and I lived in Southern California for almost twenty-five years. I recall how often I was amazed at the frequent forest fires that ravaged the land. Fortunately, we did not experience any loss from these fires, but we knew some who did. Since moving to Texas, I still feel a familiar pang when the newscasts report that the California fires have ignited again, or similarly, as I listened recently to reports of the massive Fort McMurray fire in Canada. What is equally tragic are the many who ignore the warnings to evacuate.

In 2003, more than twenty people lost their lives in a series of fires where the flames moved faster than many residents could flee. When people complained that officials didn’t offer enough prior warning, Sergeant Conrad Grayson responded, “We’re begging people to leave, and they don’t take us seriously. . . . The ones who listened to me left the area and lived. The ones who didn’t, died.”²
The only prudent response to a dire warning is to flee. That’s certainly true when you find yourself in the path of a raging, out-of-control forest fire. But what about when circumstances in your life make you feel out of control?

Psalm 11 is the place to go. It was written by David, Israel’s shepherd king, at a time when his life began to feel unhinged. He was being hunted and haunted by King Saul, who was determined to kill him. David’s words offer insight into the reality of fear and the contrasting power of faith.

David had received a word of warning from a close advisor, urging him to run for the hills like a bird flying to the mountains for safety. Instead, David paused and considered a compelling question: “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (11:3 NKJV).

Great question! Webster tells us that a foundation is “the basis upon which something stands or is supported.” Every house has a foundation. Every significant structure, every multiple-storied high-rise has a foundation. The taller the building, the deeper and more substantial its foundation. Destroy the building’s foundation, and you’ve toppled everything.
A particularly devastating strategy of ISIS has been to move into the areas they overtake and begin destroying the foundations of that particular culture. Historical monuments and long-standing remains of ancient structures as well as intricately preserved works of art and architecture are systematically leveled by the terror group. Not only has the landscape been irrevocably altered, the collective psyche of the inhabitants of these lands has been forever ravaged and diminished.

Foundations are everything. If our foundations are in place, then nothing else really matters.

That is precisely David’s point in Psalm 11. David is not referring to literal structures or great works of art or even layered stones that comprise enormous fortress walls. David’s psalm is about standing firm in life when one’s entire world seems on fire, when devastation seems imminent.

The righteous—people whose lives are rightly related to God by faith in Jesus Christ—stand on a firm foundation.

Now, should the foundation of a life be destroyed, that life crumbles. But if the foundation remains secure, no amount of stress—in David’s case, no brutal
attack on his life by Saul or painful backstabbing from his own son Absalom—would cause his life to fracture or ultimately crumble. David envisioned those threats as arrows coming from warriors. In his psalm, he uses a vivid word picture: “The wicked are stringing their bows and fitting their arrows on the bowstrings. They shoot from the shadows at those whose hearts are right” (11:2 NLT).

In those days, the warrior was an excellent marksman, known for his keen ability with the bow and arrow. One of the most effective weapons in David’s day was a sharp, slender arrow as it slipped from the bow, guided by the archer’s eye to the target. David’s point was that the wicked had him secretly in their sights; they were stealthily getting ready to attack.

What a fitting metaphor for our times! We face a constant threat of unseen, spontaneous attacks—terrorists bursting into crowded theaters; suicide bombers standing in long lines of innocent men, women, and children. And then the threat becomes real as the terrorists release their “flaming arrows” of devastating explosives and scattered shrapnel.

We can relate to David’s advisors, whoever they
were at the time, by responding in fear and panic as we retreat. Yet David would have none of that. He strengthened his resolve to respond in faith, not fear.

He declared at the outset of his psalm, “I trust in the Lord for protection,” and again, “But the Lord is in his holy Temple; the Lord still rules from heaven. He watches everyone closely, examining every person on earth” (11:1, 4 NLT).

What a magnificent declaration of confidence in the Lord his God!

David’s soul was definitely not on the run. His spirit refused to melt amid the encroaching flames of opposition and danger. His refuge was in the Lord. A refuge is a place of hiding—a place of secure protection. The term is chasah in the ancient Hebrew. A chasah is a protective enclosure that provides safety from that which would otherwise consume everything in its path. It’s an impenetrable firewall of protection from danger and distress—from anxiety and fear. David makes it clear that the Lord alone is his chasah. He remained firm in his confidence in the Lord. His “foundation” of trust would not be shaken. He was fully human, but he found incredible stability in his divine refuge.
The old country preacher was right when he said, “I may tremble on the rock, but the rock don’t tremble under me.” Keep in mind: David has no corner on such confidence. Faith is our solid foundation too. A foundation of faith, not fear, is our refuge; it enables us to stand firm against the advancing threats of terror.

God is our refuge [chasah] and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.

David’s word refuge reminds me of yet another psalm—Psalm 46—that includes a remarkable promise we can claim. Who wouldn’t find comfort in the solidarity of this ancient promise? This is the very psalm in which Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, found refuge and relief more than five hundred years ago. He hid in its truths and found strength when the fires of persecution raged about him. Psalm 46 fueled his courage to go on, even though he was misunderstood, maligned, and mistreated. How comforting are these opening words in Psalm 46:1 NLT: “God is our refuge [chasah] and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.”

It was from the opening lines of this psalm that
Luther was later inspired to write, “Ein’ Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott.” “A high tower is the Lord our God.” We who are Christians sing the familiar lyrics today: “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.”

Why is such a foundation impervious to the flaming advance of terror and danger? Because our “mighty fortress” is God Himself! Our bedrock foundation is the God of creation who has revealed Himself in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. The God who made us and saves us is the God who shelters us from danger and calms our fears in threatening times. He’s there. He offers us safety. Our need is simply to rest in Him.

*He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty [El Shaddai]. I will say of the L ORD, “He is my refuge [my chasah] and my fortress; my God, in Him will I trust” (Psalm 91:1–2 NKJV).*

On that solid foundation of faith, we are secure. We find help and hope in God—even when the world seems on fire.
We hope you enjoyed this sample of Finding GOD when the World’s on FIRE

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