

Formula for Security: Psalm 91

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These are scary times. Danger seems to lurk everywhere; there seems to be no safe place on earth. Fear and paranoia reign in most of society. It would be foolish to deny that the dangers and threats are real, and we must not—even in the exercise of our faith—presume that we are immune.

Yet even in the places of danger through which we must walk, we must have our eyes open to reality, and we can and should enjoy a peace and confidence. The God who will keep us forever, keeps us now. He neither slumbers nor sleeps, and He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we should not fear even if the earth should change (see Psalm 46).

Psalm 91 develops this theme of the present security believers have in the Lord. It reminds us that the saving, protecting, strengthening power of God is the personal experience of believers through all the trials, terrors, and temptations of life. Although the author is not named, there is good tradition that attributes the Psalm to Moses as the author, who in Deuteronomy 33 testified that the eternal God is our refuge and underneath are His everlasting arms.

Throughout his career, Moses was in constant danger and distress, but God never left him without His presence, provision, and protection. This psalm is an expression of faith at its best. It is the poetic version of Paul's bold statement, *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31).

To live in the spirit of this psalm is to be fearless in all the circumstances of life. This hope and confidence is a real possibility as we focus on the Lord and not the surroundings. The psalmist sets before us three ways to experience and enjoy the security that is founded in the Lord.

1. HOW TO STAY SANE IN A CRAZY WORLD

The person of the Lord is the basis for our sanity in a world that in many ways makes no sense. The more of our attention that we focus on the Lord, the greater will be our confidence that He is in control and is trustworthy as our faithful God. In the first two verses, the psalmist directs attention to the Lord with four titles that declare significant propositional truths about who God is and what He is to us.

First, He is the Most High; therefore, He owns us. The first occurrence of this title links the statement of God's exalted status over all creation with the fact that He is the "possessor of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:19). The Lord created the world; therefore, he owns the world. He owns what He has created, and He has the right to rule what He owns. Indeed, He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth in every mine; the fullness of all the earth is His. There is nothing that is outside the realm of His rule. God's people happily confess that the Lord has made them, and therefore by virtue of that creation they belong to Him (Psalm 100:3).

But believers can also confess that God doubly owns them, both by creation and redemption.

Consequently, they are His prized possession and the objects of His special care.

By faith, believers should take up their residence in the secret place of the Most High. The secret place refers to a hiding place, an asylum. What a place of safety that is! To dwell with the Most High God is to be out of the reach of those who would harm. Certainly, to be *"in heavenly places in Christ"* spiritually (Ephesians 1:3) should translate into temporal confidence regardless of circumstances.

Second, He is the Almighty; therefore, He sustains us. The title "Almighty" is *Shaddai*, which reveals the Lord as the One who provides for and nourishes His people. He is the Keeper of every promise. He is sufficient to meet every need because He has the will, heart, and power to do so. By faith, believers should abide under His shadow.

To abide literally means to keep on spending the night. In the Old Testament, the shadow was a common image of a host/guest relationship. The host assumed the responsibility for the complete welfare of his guest, including protection and provision. To "spend the night" with the Lord is not only to be secluded from danger but to be at rest knowing that God has assumed the responsibility

for our care. *Shaddai* keeps His word and fulfils His obligations.

Third, He is the LORD; therefore, He saves us. The title LORD is Jehovah, the very name of the covenant-keeping God. Because He is the covenant God, believers should have confidence in His saving faithfulness. Significantly, the psalmist expresses his personal faith: *"I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress."* The refuge refers to a shelter, and the fortress refers to a mountain stronghold—places of safety and deliverance. This is a truth about God to live by; it is not abstract theology. The fact that God is safety and deliverance means little if it is not true experientially. We must prove what we profess to believe by our actions. When in danger, flee to Him.

Fourth, He is my God; therefore, He is able. God is the general term for deity and declares Him to be the transcendent Creator who is infinitely powerful. By faith, the psalmist claims a personal relationship with this transcendent God and confesses his trust. To trust is to find safety in the object of trust, and the psalmist knows that his God is reliable and trustworthy. God would not let him down because under him were the everlasting arms of the omnipotent and eternal God.

2. HOW TO BE SAFE IN A DANGEROUS WORLD

Verses 3-13 detail God's providence to accomplish the desired end of His glory and His people's good. The psalmist highlights three thoughts about God's protection.

First, His protection is all encompassing (vv. 3-4; 10-12). Verse 10 is the summary, all-inclusive statement: "There shall no evil befall thee." Evil refers to danger, trouble, or calamity; nothing is exposed to the onslaughts against us (see the complete armour of Ephesians 6). Specifically, God provides safety against external threats (v. 3). The bird snare (a net to entangle and filled with bait to allure) and the noisome pestilence (literally, pit of destruction) refer to all the manmade or spiritual perils that can bombard the soul. For this reason, we should pray as Christ instructed: Deliver us from evil and lead us not into temptation.

Also, God provides safety in His loving care (v. 4). With a beautiful image, the psalmist compares God's protection of His people to feeble little chicks who are subject to the snare but who find safety under the safety of the mother hen's wings, exposing herself to danger while sheltering her chicks. So, Isaiah explained when he said of the

Lord's presence with the wilderness generation: *"In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old"* (63:9). The image shifts in the second part of verse 4, but the truth is the same. The Lord's unfailing word is a shield (that which covers the body) and buckler (the round movable shield to ward off well-aimed assaults).

Finally, the psalmist instructs that God provides safety through the operation of angels, those ministering spirits who are the agents of His providence (vv. 11-12). They guard like a shepherd watching over a flock and like a nurse who would lift up a child into the arms. These are spiritual beings operating beyond sight, but operating nonetheless.

Second, His protection is personal (vv. 7-9). Believers are special to God, and His care for them is discriminating. His people are restricted to the sidelines as spectators of the calamity that will befall the wicked. Trouble may be all around that threatens faith in the good providence of God, but the wonderful fact is that none who trust God will ultimately fall. His purpose stands, and no believer will ever be subject to the judgment of the wicked.

Third, His protection demands a response (vv. 5-6, 13). The demanded response is fearless boldness. With forceful language, the psalmist commands, *“you must not be afraid”* (v. 5). Not fearing in scary situations (terrors, arrows, pestilence, and destruction) is walking by faith and not sight. Not to be afraid of the fearful things that can be seen requires consciousness of a greater power that is unseen but infinitely more real.

The fear of God dispels fear of everything else (v. 9). Why should we fear the stuff of this crazy world if we believe that He owns and rules all that is? This kind of faith generates action and confidence to conquer the things that otherwise would cause the fear (lions, adders, and dragons). Resting in providence is active, not passive.

3. HOW TO BE SATISFIED IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

In verses 14-16, the Lord interrupts the inspired poet and speaks for Himself concerning His own, thus reinforcing the guarantee of salvation both in time and for eternity. Knowing that nothing can separate the believer from God’s love is grounds for satisfaction.

First, God promises mutual love (v. 14). Love reciprocates. We love God because God first loved us, and as we love, He keeps evidencing His love for us. To set love literally has the idea of being attached to, referring to an intimate clinging or cleaving to the object of the love. Knowing God's name refers to an intimate relationship to His person. God's promise is to deliver and exalt those who love and know Him by bringing them near to Himself. As James said, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (4:8). As we are brought near to Him, we can live in confident satisfaction even in the midst of turmoil.

Second, God promises His presence (v. 15). This is the key thought and foundational to contentment. God does not promise that there will not be trouble, but He does promise that He will be with His people in the midst of trouble. This is the Immanuel concept that is so precious to believers. Regardless of circumstances, God is with His people and He answers them in their distress (see Psalm. 34:6).

Third, God promises satisfaction (v. 16). When God's people rest in His love and presence, they will be content in whatever state they are in. God is never a disappointment, and He promises to satisfy

with long life and salvation. Dying old or young is not the issue but rather living out the measure of one's allotted days with satisfaction and readiness to leave this life for the next. Satisfaction and security comes when we realize that our times are in His hands, and there is no better place to be.

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