

When fear meets love

By [Rachael Keefe](#)

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As is common, I received my first Bible in third grade at the end of my first year of attending Sunday School. It was the Revised Standard Version with a faux black leather cover. I carried that Bible with me for years. I used it college religion classes and even through my first semester in seminary. Now it sits on a shelf and is stuffed with fond memories. The caterpillar bookmark naming each part of the Bible and other Sunday School remnants, a copy of "A Child's Creed" yellow around the edges, notes from mostly forgotten retreat weekends, and scores of underlined and highlighted passages.

Also tucked in the pages are a few colorful tracts with different psalms printed on them. Memories flood my being any time I pick up this Bible. Today I am envisioning one of those tracts, the one printed with Psalm 46. I remember exactly where it came from. I was 15 and hospitalized after I had overdosed. The Rev. John Williams handed it to me. The care and concern for me were evident in his presence and his voice. Equally clear is that he did not know what to say. So he handed me a few of these tracts and indicated that they might be helpful in some way. He said that he often gave them to "people in pain." One of them was Psalm 46.

At the time, I didn't pay much attention because I was as uncomfortable as John was, though for different reasons. It was late in the night when I read the words, "God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear..." I remember sobbing and whispering, "God help me, please." I was surrounded by fear, being consumed by fear, and I so desperately wanted to believe that God could help me.

Thirty-four years later I am confident that God heard my plea, heard it before I had the courage to whisper it into the darkness of the night. Many people have walked with me and embodied the love of Christ along the way. Yet, my life was governed by fear in those days. I was afraid of everything. At core, though, I was afraid I was not lovable or worthy of love. It was a long journey to get to the day when my life

was no longer ruled by fear. I did, however, believe that God could help me overcome my fears because I trusted that God really did have the power to make war cease and lead people to peace.

Now I find myself living in a different sort of fearful space, a space filled with concerns and anxiety for the days ahead. Fortunately I've had decades of experience acknowledging fear and choosing not to live by it. And I trust that God is still our refuge and our strength, still a very present help in trouble, not just personally but communally as well. When communities and nations give in to fear, chaos rules. It is a sure sign that we have forgotten to seek God and God's ways.

It isn't surprising that human beings give in to fear with almost predictable frequency. The real surprise is that God waits for us to turn from our human ways to God's holy ways. God waits for ridiculous stretches of time and has throughout history. Eventually, we collectively remember that seeking God leads to more acts of kindness, more humility, more peacemaking and justice-seeking. When we open our lives to these things, fear diminishes. Fear always diminishes when confronted with love.

This is true when in the company of terrified, suicidal adolescents and it is true for frightened, hopeless communities. We who bear the name of Christ must endeavor to be a refuge and strength for those on the margins and at greater risk of violence and being told they are unlovable and not worthy of love. Yes, fear is real. Yes, it is powerful. However, when we turn to God's ways we become capable of choosing actions that make room for hope, for love, and the possibility of new life.

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