

Refuge, Security and Peace

By Mary J. Ferrill



A Bible verse plaque hung on my childhood bedroom wall when I was growing up. I don't remember when I first noticed it or where it came from, or where it has gone since, but it somehow seeped into my memory. Based on the aesthetic appearance of the plaque, I suspect that it was a product of my creation as part of a Vacation Bible School or Sunday School project. It was not a masterpiece of art. It looked like a scroll of paper made from plaster painted dark blue, with Psalm 46:1 appearing in white as a raised etching: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." (NIV).

I was sickly as a child, so I spent much of my childhood in my room, especially in bed. I prayed that verse so many times as childhood illnesses and other issues arose. As I look back, it was probably the first Bible verse that I memorized and hid in my heart as the Bible instructs us to do. (Psalm 119:11 NIV, "I have hidden your word in my heart...") It provided immeasurable peace and comfort, as if God were wrapping His arms around me to let me know that everything was going to be alright. It wasn't until I was confirmed at church at the age of 13 when I received my first personal copy of the Bible that I first studied the deeper meaning of the entire chapter of Psalm 46.

The chapter contains many comforting words that are helpful during difficult times, and especially during these current challenging times in our world. Recently, Psalm 46 specifically came to mind as I was praying about all the

pain and suffering that has been inflicted upon so many innocent people amid the chaos of riots, soaring rates of violent crime, the southern border and the Afghanistan crises, looming and current military conflict on multiple fronts, disturbingly deteriorating social mores and disappearing ethical norms, and a pandemic that is wreaking global havoc, not only on the health of citizens, but on the very fabric of society. It is as if our civilization is coming apart at the seams. But Psalm 46 puts everything in perspective:

*"God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the
earth give way and the mountains
fall into the heart of the sea, though
its waters roar and foam and the
mountains quake with their surging.
There is a river whose streams make
glad the city of God, the holy place
where the Most High dwells.
God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.
Come and see what the LORD has
done, the desolations he has
brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the
spear; he burns the shields with fire.
He says, "Be still, and know that I am
God; I will be exalted among the
nations, I will be exalted in the
earth."
The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*
Psalm 46 (NIV)

Hidden within this chapter are the well-known words, "Be still, and know that I am God..." On the surface this command appears to be a simple request to exalt the Lord, but it's probably one of the most difficult to fulfill. As I see it, being "still" encompasses three different realms: physical, verbal, and mental. From a very young age, I found it challenging to be physically "still" (I caught myself tapping my leg while typing this story as my mind wanders off-track, and I just looked at my cell phone when it vibrated.) Yes, I was a squirming, fidgety, "ants in the pants" child, who

never really grew out of it. If attention deficit would have been a clinical diagnosis when I was a child (ADHD wasn't formally recognized as a distinct medical condition by the American Psychiatric Association until the late 1960s), then I probably would have been labeled with it. But even more challenging for me is to be verbally "still" – to refrain from speaking whatever is on my mind. I know I should listen more and talk less (I pray for this every day, usually multiple times) and that my prayer time should be devoted equally to talking and listening, but I find that I do most of the talking. And being mentally "still" is a constant battle. When I try to quiet my mind and concentrate to allow God to speak, the devil is right there filling my thoughts with trivial things and trying to crowd out God's words. Despite my inclinations, I realize the importance of striving to be still and trust God because it leads to the second half of verse 10: "...I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." So, as difficult as the task of being still might be, it is a requirement in order for God to be exalted. I must let go of my worldly thoughts to open myself to God's message.

During the most difficult times of prayer, God's word instructs us to rely on the Holy Spirit to help us to pray. Romans 8:25-27 (NIV) says, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God." So even if I cannot still my body, mouth, and mind, I can rely on the Holy Spirit to intercede on my behalf. The next verse in Romans provides an immense sense of comfort: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, NIV). Isaiah 65:24 (NIV) also provides encouraging words regarding our prayers: "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear." While we are struggling to speak and find God, He is already finding us, listening, and responding.

It's easy to become discouraged with all of the ugliness and evil in the world, and the rampant rejection of the Lord. But in the book of Genesis, God spoke and creation appeared; which tells us that God is the creator and has control over all His creation. Paul explains this concept in Colossians 1:16-17 (NIV): *"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."* Ultimately, God has dominion over everything that happens in this fallen world, and nothing, whether good or bad, occurs without His knowledge and authorization.

We need to remember that God is always here to help, providing refuge, security, and peace regardless of the situations occurring around us. God will not fail to rescue those who love Him and call on His name. We must not fear when we *"hear of wars and rumors of wars"* (Matthew 24:1) and other end-time activities. Jesus told us through discourse with his disciples that these events will occur so that they/we could be calm amid the storm. Even so, as the events of our times more and more resemble the precursor to end times, there is no need to be gripped by fear. The Bible is clear: *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."* We must have confidence that God's power is

complete and His ultimate victory is certain. And because we are His children, despite whatever worldly troubles face us, we can rest assured that Jesus has overcome this world on our behalf, as it is written in 1 John 5:4-5 (NIV): *"...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."*

How glorious it is that we live in God's world, created for us according to His plan. *If He is for us, who (or what) can be against us?* (Romans 8:31)

The Recoil of Essentials Oils: When Multi-level Marketing of Unproven Cures Infiltrates the Church

By W. Steven Pray

Introduction

It all began so innocently. In the 1970's, my wife and I were invited to a meeting that promised we would become rich. I specifically asked this trusted friend if it was related to Amway, and my friend denied it. We drove 200 miles to the mysterious meeting, and it turned out to be a pitch to sell Amway products, just as I had suspected.

Fast forward to the present day in a hypothetical situation based on actual events. You, a Christian pharmacist, are sitting relaxed in church, awaiting a spiritually uplifting sermon. After the pastor makes a few introductory remarks, the sermon takes an unexpected turn as he advises his flock not to get vaccinated for coronavirus. Rather, he touts the efficacy of a popular brand of essential oils in preventing and treating coronavirus. He reveals that his family can sell these products to his parishioners. Your curiosity is piqued. You carry out an online search and find that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has warned this Multi-Level Marketing (MLM) company to cease advertising their products as treatments and preventives for COVID. You also discover that the minister's family is recruiting church members to sell the products with them, claiming that "joining the team" is a once-in-a-lifetime business opportunity, able to yield extravagant wealth for all participants. The family is holding recruitment meetings in church buildings. Among the oils they sell are bottles labeled "forgiveness," "faith," "finances," and "humility." The family claims that their lemon oil improves circulation; and a product called "Thieves" (a popular essential oil) can kill "germs."

This article will explore the encroachment of MLMs in churches, how they may be pyramid schemes in disguise, examine fraudulent medical products sold through MLMs,

and provide Biblical references relevant to the issue.

What Is An Illegal Pyramid Scheme?

A crucial point in this discussion is the definition of pyramid schemes: they are illegal investment frauds in which victims are convinced to give a predator money by promises of extravagant profits.¹ As more and more people join the scheme, the early investors are paid off with money from later investors, making it appear that the promise of great profits is indeed true. Eventually, the scheme collapses, and later investors are left with nothing. A Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) investor alert entitled, "Beware of Pyramid Schemes Posing as Multi-Level Marketing Programs," listed hallmarks of a pyramid scheme²:

1. Promises of high returns in a short time period
2. Easy money for little work
3. Buy-in required
4. Recruiting others yields fantastic bonuses
5. No physical products are sold

What is Multi-level Marketing?

Simply put, MLM is presented to proposed investors as a money-making opportunity.³ On the surface, that seems harmless enough. Some well known examples of early entrants into MLM are Amway, Tupperware, and Mary Kay.^{4,5} Each one promised significant profits through "direct selling" products to others, and also by recruiting others into the MLM. MLM schemes have proliferated to such a degree that an exact number of companies is impossible to ascertain. A discussion of MLMs would be appropriate for a secular journal, but it especially has a significant and compelling impact in the life of the Christian pharmacist. The first of many worrisome issues for the Christian pharmacist are the legal concerns that underlie MLMs.