

Refuge

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[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweep from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. And as always, if you'd like to learn a little more about us, you can go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page and other social media.

But hey, we are excited today just to jump into the Word of God in a brand new series from Psalm 91. And we're excited to just let the Word of God immerse into our lives, transforming us more and more into the image of Christ.

And like I said, we are in this brand new series starting today called Secret Place. It's Psalm 91, verses 1 and 2, and the message is called Refuge.

From 2nd to 12th grade, right here in this community, I lived in the same home out in the country, not too far from Sandusky. And I loved it. Clifty Creek across the street, woods behind our house, five acres of our own property, bicycles to ride, no cell phones to bog us down.

And I remember not too far down our gravel road was a big concrete culvert that went under the road to allow overflow from the creek.

[1 : 17] But it was usually dry. So I would go and I would hide out right there in this thing, thinking that no one could ever find me. In fact, and kids do not do this because it was absolutely wrong, but I had gotten mad about something my mom said or did and I decided that I was going to run away.

And I mean that very loosely. So I loaded up my book bag. I went down to the secret place for about an hour. I ate my snacks. I got bored and I came home realizing, wow, that was a dumb idea because I have a loving home.

And when my mom found that book bag later, she absolutely wore me out. But that was a secret place where I would escape from the noise of life as a little boy.

And you know what? We have our own secret place in Jesus where we find refuge today. And if you weren't with us over the last five weeks, we just finished a series on where the Holy Spirit is leading us as a church family through much prayer, counsel, discussion, and more prayer.

And over the next three years, we want to continue to move forward, storming the gates of hell, like this church has been doing for almost 200 years. This is just a continuation with our generations being faithful to what God has entrusted to us.

[2 : 42] And then we talked about moving in closer to Jesus through discipleship. That is personal growth. Next came moving with our next gen as we raise them up to faithfully follow Christ.

We even want to move out of these four walls impacting Greensburg and beyond with the life-changing message of Jesus. And the reason I reference our last series is because Satan doesn't want any of these godly initiatives to happen.

He doesn't like biblically healthy churches, and he will do everything in his power to bring confusion, chaos, and lies into the equation. And listen, because I've seen this so many times, you have too, he'll even use good people to cause chaos.

Because according to John 10.10, and you probably know this, say it with me if you do, Satan comes to what? To steal, kill, and destroy anything godly, especially a Jesus-first church with a Jesus-first plan to help people belong to, believe in, become like him.

Now, if you went through this series and were like, yeah, sign me up. I want to grow in Christ. I want to see FCC make a greater impact in our world. Here am I, Lord.

[3 : 59] Send me. If you're like Isaiah, if that's you, then buckle up because spiritual warfare is real. But here's the good news. You are more than a conqueror through Christ Jesus.

He is your secret place. And while we can't do this in our own strength, we know that in Christ, you have everything you need to walk in victory, resting in the shadow of the Almighty.

And we've followed up our move series with this one called Secret Place. So grab your Bibles, head to the Psalms, about a third of the way through in the Old Testament.

Whenever you say it like all of them together, you'll make it plural, Psalms. But when you talk about one psalm, it's singular. So we'll be in Psalm 91. Psalm 91.

But the psalms are simply a collection of heartfelt songs, prayers, worship, raw emotions, all in one, real life, from people like David and Solomon and Moses and Asaph, the sons of Korah and others.

[5 : 03] And as we come to Psalm 91, we don't know for sure who the Holy Spirit inspired to write it. It doesn't say. But King David is probably the most suggested author because the language matches many other psalms that he wrote.

Others lean towards Moses because it shares some themes with Psalm 90 that comes right before it. But regardless, this psalm is powerful, showing us we don't need to fear because in our God, we take refuge.

Now, before we read it, I got to tell you, I love the language in the New King James Version. So I'm going to do something in this four-week series that I've never done and I may never do again.

I'm going to preach at least our main passage here from Psalm 91. I'm going to preach this from the New King James Version, the NKJV. But you should have no problem following along in the normal NIV, the New International Version that we normally use.

But let's start here in Psalm 91. And we're just going to look at these two first verses today. Okay, Psalm 91.1. Now, one thing a casual reader may not pick up on is that these two verses are jam-packed with four different Hebrew names for God that talk about different aspects of His character that are on full display when you and I are dealing with real life.

[6 : 48] So let's start with this old school outline today, okay? And by the way, if you go to the Church Center app, kind of a white app, Church Center app, you can download that and you can connect to First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana, and you can see it that way if you go to sermons under Take Notes.

But here's the first thing. Let's talk about the place, okay? The place. Where do we dwell? We dwell in the secret place of the Most High. Now, the NIV says in the shelter of the Most High.

Now, I am thankful that in our Sunday services, and I know that you're listening to this maybe from your car or from home, wherever you are, but in our Sunday services this morning, we are having our worship leaders in all three services do a song called In the Secret by Andy Park.

And I love this song because it takes me back to Bible college. I would have been either a sophomore or junior in 2004 when we first started singing these lyrics in chapel.

But here's what some of those lyrics say. In the quiet, we listen for your voice. In the stillness, you are here. In the quiet, you woo us to yourself.

[8 : 07] You invite us through the door to know you more. And listen, you don't come into the secret place for just anybody. This is the presence of the Most High.

This is the Hebrew name for God, El Elyon, meaning the sovereign God that we can put our trust in, the one and only who is the real deal above everything else when all these other idols will fail.

And if our actions are the real indicator of what we worship, how often do we try, and listen, I am so guilty of this too, how often do we try to make other people and other things into our secret place?

How often do we have idols? It could be good things even, like a relationship, maybe your husband or your wife, or if you're younger, a boyfriend or a girlfriend.

And yet it is so unfair to expect them to be for you what only the Most High can be. And if you watch movies, man, this is drilled. I mean, just our culture immerses us in this.

[9 : 10] It is drilled into your head that your spouse is what completes you, right? You complete me. And this is the lie from Satan. Man, they can be an absolute blessing.

I am so grateful for my wife. She is so good for me and just rounds off all those rough edges. But she is not meant to be God in my life.

And if I expect that from her, it is going to lead to a crash. And for those of us who are parents, we can make our kids our secret place, putting them above God, even vicariously living through them.

And there's a fine line here where you want to be their biggest cheerleader. You want to encourage their dreams and their passions. Nothing wrong with that. But when my kids and their success are the altar where I worship, uh-oh, we're getting a little close, aren't we?

When their success is the altar where I worship, when that's the most high priority, it won't satisfy. And it's a real temptation. I don't care if your kids go pro.

[10:10] It won't satisfy. And it's a real temptation to get our priorities out of whack for our kids for getting the legit most high God needs to have first place in my life and in theirs.

We could give so many examples of this, like ministry and what I'm doing for God. That can become an idol. It can become my secret place. How about a couple brewskis to take the edge off the end of the day and 20 years later, we can't survive a day without a case of beer or even something harder. How about food addiction? Man, I can struggle with this one. Easily become an idol. My career and climbing that ladder, proving to everyone how important I am. Having that fancy home, that expensive car, fancy drinking container, name brand clothes, community title, and the list just keeps going.

See, we as people have this tendency, even as followers of Jesus, to run to all sorts of other places that are wells that will run dry. And listen, we discover that through life.

The things we thought would fill us up absolutely do not. But there's only one place where you'll find real refuge, healing, rest, joy, hope, grace, and peace.

[11:23] And it's in the secret place of knowing Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Let me ask you this. How many of you have heard of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar?

Okay, maybe you've heard that name before. Nebuchadnezzar. If not, it's okay. We're talking prideful, arrogant, crazy rich, grew up worshiping all these false gods, enjoyed trying to be a god basically himself.

And yet God used him as an instrument of judgment on the people of Judah when they were disobedient to God, allowing them to be taken into exile. And that's when old Nebuchadnezzar's journey of encountering the Most High began.

God had a journey for him to come to know the real God. From Daniel interpreting dreams to seeing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walk out of the fiery furnace unharmed, not burnt.

His pride, even though he had moments where he would realize it, his pride would come swelling back up until God finally said, Enough. And this guy, I mean, it tells us he literally went insane, living like an animal for seven years in the wilderness before he repented to the God of Israel.

[12:39] And here are his own words that are inserted into Daniel chapter 4 verse 34. It says, At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, so these are his words, raised my eyes toward heaven and my sanity was restored.

Isn't that a picture of repentance? He realized his sin, called out to the God of the universe to forgive him, to heal him, and it says his sanity was restored.

Then it says, Then I praise the Most High. So, same name here, right? Same name for God. I praise the Most High. I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

His dominion is an eternal dominion. His kingdom endures from generation to generation. Church, hear me. There's only one secret place that satisfies.

There's only one El Elyon, God Most High, that can be your refuge in times of plenty and times of need. His name is Jesus and his arms are open wide for you.

[13:42] So, let's talk about that, okay? Let's talk about the posture. What does my posture need to look like? And the very first words of Psalm 91.1 say this, He who dwells, and we just looked at in the secret place of the Most High.

So, we know that the secret place is a place of refuge and it's only found in El Elyon. But did you notice that you and I have a decision to make based on this passage?

What's it say? We have to what? We have to dwell in his presence. So, that means that I can choose to flirt. I can choose to just visit with Jesus occasionally, which is easy to do on a Sunday morning.

I can do those things, but I can still keep my distance enough to not dwell in his presence. So, I try not to let him tell me what to do, right? And church, I may have just opened up a can for you, but can we do something today?

Can we pull off the I got it all together mask? Will you take off that mask that you got it all together and just let down your guard for a second?

[14:49] Maybe even do a group repentance session here. Let me start. My name is Ray Sweet. Hi, Ray. And sometimes I can convince myself that I'm too busy with life, even doing things for God, that I don't stop to dwell in his presence like I should.

And guys, I miss the most important thing, sitting in the secret place with the Lord being changed into his image. Maybe I'm just a freak. I don't know. But I have a strong feeling that I'm not the only

one who sometimes neglects this critical, most important part of every day.

So, who wants to repent? And all that word means is a change of heart. It's making a commitment to turn away from that old way, and I'm following the Lord.

Who wants to repent and say, El Elyon, I am sorry that my posture is not always to dwell in your secret place. Help me to put first things first, to not forsake my first love, and watch in amazement as you change me from the inside out.

Therefore, changing everything around me, because when I am changed in your presence, it affects everyone else. So, if you truly want this, man, make that repentant decision today.

[16:04] And I'm with you. So, let's put it this way on your outline. Stop visiting God and start dwelling in Him. Can we do something else kind of radical and very biblical?

Can we do what the early church did and hold each other accountable? You know, iron sharpening iron, where we look at each other and say, Hey, are you visiting or are you dwelling? The Old Testament book all about godly wisdom is the book of Proverbs that was written by Solomon.

The wisest man to ever live. Not always the smartest, but the wisest. When he was walking in God, by the way. But Proverbs 18.10 says, The name of the Lord is a fortified tower or a strong tower.

The righteous run into it and they are safe. Or isn't it cool how in the Gospel of John and in the New Testament, John 15.5, Jesus says, I am the vine and you are the branches.

See, we get in big trouble when we get that backwards and we think that we're the vine. But He's the vine. He's the source. We're just the branches. He says, if you remain in me and I remain in you, you will bear much fruit.

[17:12] Apart from me, you can do what? Nothing. He's saying, stop visiting and start dwelling in my presence. And I don't know if you've noticed, but it kind of changes everything when we get our posture right.

Because when I start having the wrong attitudes flowing out of me, when I'm letting pride control me, when I start getting bitter and narcissistic, do you know what the common denominator always is?

I'm not abiding. I'm not dwelling like I should. So we know the place that we desperately need to be. We know the posture of dwelling in His presence through His word, through prayer, through obedience, through serving.

Now let's talk about the protection that He offers. Protection. And I'm not sure why this comes to my mind, but one of the scariest things, at least for me, when I was a 7th grader at North Decatur was, and you know that 7th through 12th grade is all in the same building.

So when I was at North Decatur, I would walk through the hallways as a 7th grader in the afternoons. See, back in those days, and I don't know if it still works this way or not, but the morning classes were in the 7th and 8th grade hallway, and those were just around kids your age, so not a big deal.

[18:21] But the afternoon was all over the building with 7th through 12th graders rubbing shoulders. And I'm not sure those older kids, I mean, I'm sure they could probably care less about me.

They probably didn't even think about me. But I was convinced that they were looking to run over me and even give me an atomic wedgie. But I had a secret weapon, my brother. And he wasn't afraid of anything.

And I specifically remember beating an older and kind of a rough kid in basketball who then attempted to pick a fight with me. He was like 3 or 4 years older than me, which wasn't fair at all. And all it took to make him leave me alone were two initials. D.J., my brother. And as much as I appreciated having that secret weapon as a kid, D.J. would be the first one to agree today that he doesn't compare to God.

He doesn't compare to El Shaddai. And here's how the last part of verse 1 puts it. He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, watch this, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

[19:27] El Shaddai simply means the all-sufficient, all-powerful one, God Almighty. Not only is he the source of our blessings, but also none of our problems are too big for him.

And if David was, in fact, the author, and that's where I lean, I don't know, but that's what I think, it would make sense that he uses this picture of a shadow. He does it about four different places. But in Psalm 63, 7 and 8, it says, Because you are my help, God, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you.

Your right hand upholds me. So what a cool picture of probably like a baby bird under the wings of its mother, completely safe.

Now, we have a mom in our church who's in her late 30s who has just been dealt a rough hand.

Okay, we'll just put it that way. She has intense pain that's debilitating.

[20 : 25] It's just awful. Most days, she even has a pain pump that doesn't always seem to work like you'd think it would. And since we're in a small group together, so we're very close with this couple, we see this struggle.

And yet, she's one of the most joyful people that I've ever been around. She has a trust in God like, I'm not sure I'd have if I dealt with what she deals with. And as I read this passage, I couldn't help but just thank God for her example because while she's human, and she has her moments like we all do, of course, she leans so hard on the Lord as her strength.

She truly rests in the shadow of El Shaddai, knowing that he is the source of blessings and he is our protection when problems come. And this morning, I just want to ask you and me both, are you resting in the shadow of the Almighty in El Shaddai?

And here's the difficult thing about life. We've laid hands on our friend and we have prayed and begged God to heal her body. We believe that he can and I've seen that he can and I've felt the Holy Spirit even in those moments just moving in a powerful way.

And still, still, she hasn't been healed yet. And we don't understand why some are healed and others aren't, but here's what I've discovered. His ways are perfect.

[21 : 44] He's always moving with a purpose that is for our good and for his glory. And also, she's ministering to every nurse, every doctor she sees. And only in heaven will we know the full impact that she has made, even in her rough circumstances that have sent a ripple across the pond of eternity for the kingdom of God.

So let's get real here. What problem do you bring listening to this audio today? What's your source of struggle, your heartbreak, your frustration, your hurt?

What's your bitterness? What makes you feel like you're just numb? Whatever it is, there's one solution, El Shaddai. But like this passage says, we must abide in the shadow of his wings, in his protection.

And I love the words from Billy Graham's daughter, the famous evangelist's daughter, Anne Graham Lotz, well-known author and speaker. She said, no storm is so great, no wave is so high, no sea is so deep, no wind is so strong that Jesus cannot either calm it or carry us through it.

So we have the place, the posture, the protection, and last is the profession. The profession. And I mean declaration. And listen, we're not subscribing to the name it and claim it theology where we think we get to decide what God's will is, often letting selfishness and worldly desires claim things in the name of God that seem more about my personal kingdom than about his, okay?

[23 : 18] So we're not doing the name it, claim it thing. But don't throw the baby out with the bathwater either. There's power when we speak God's word out loud, when we believe, when we profess it, when we walk in it.

Look at Psalm 91 verse 2 from the New King James. One more time. It says, I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress, my God.

In him I will trust. I will say of the Lord. So he's declaring that. See, this verse uses two more Hebrew names of God that reveal more of his character and heart over his people.

First, it uses Yahweh. And you've probably heard of that. You know, you're saying no way. I'm saying Yahweh, you probably have. I'm sorry. Sorry about that. But it says Yahweh, the great I am. That means covenant keeper. The God who never changes when everything around me does. I was talking with some guys at our men's breakfast about this just about a week ago. And we were talking about how moral issues that 30 years ago were seen as just wrong, ungodly, unscientific, delusional.

[24 : 27] I mean, most of the society agreed. Those things now are readily accepted and cheered and defended today. More of the population agrees with them.

Listen, facts do not matter to some. And anyone who believes God's word and disagrees with false teachings, you may be labeled terrible and untrue names.

And we got to be okay with that. And yet we stay faithful. We speak truth in love from God's word, knowing that we are honoring Yahweh. As Hebrews 13, six through eight says, so we say with confidence, the Lord is my helper.

I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Now watch this, verse eight. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Mic drop, okay? And I will say of my awesome Yahweh that he is my refuge and he is my fortress.

[25 : 33] He is the strong tower I can run to and he is my secret place. Then we see one more name when the psalmist says, my God, in him I will trust.

So this is the Hebrew name Elohim. Really cool because it brings in another element here. Elohim means all powerful creator.

So he is the secret place that I can run to as I dwell in the shadow of the almighty. He is my refuge and my fortress, my strong tower.

And now we end verse two by saying, of course he's awesome and powerful and protective and loving because what else should I expect from my creator God? Now watch this come full circle.

This is really cool by the way. And God just rocked my world with this. In Psalm 139, 13 through 15, David is just praising God.

[26 : 29] And he says, for you, God created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. That's why we believe in life and we will not back down on that issue.

Verse 14, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well. Watch this. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made where?

In the secret place. It comes full circle. He says, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. So when God created you with your unique look, personality, laugh, quirks and all, okay?

And we all got them. He made you in the secret place and you were under his care and his protection. And guess what? Just like Psalm 91 says, we're still in the secret place when we choose to dwell in his presence.

When we choose to make Christ our refuge from before our birth to the day we take our last breath to eternity in his presence, let's dwell in the secret place.

[27 : 31] And you can write this down. When you know him, you'll fear nothing else. There's no fear when you're in Christ. And when you know El Elyon, the most high who we can put our trust in, when you know El Shaddai, the all-sufficient one who can handle any problem we face, when you know Yahweh, the covenant keeper, never changing God, when you know Elohim, the one who created you and loves you, you'll know that you can live in his presence.

And your security is not based on an absence of trouble, but on the presence of the Almighty. So I think the perfect way to end this message is for you and I both to give a profession of what we believe.

But I don't want you to say it just because I'm asking you to. I want you to say it because you believe it. So if you got your Bibles open, I know it's a little harder when you're not sitting in church with a screen that shows you these words.

But if you're sitting at home and you got your Bible open to Psalm 91, 1 and 2, let's just go ahead and read this together. And like I said, we're going to read this from the New King James Version. Psalm 91, verse 1, I'll go slow. He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

[28 : 50] I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God. In Him, I will trust. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for the Word of God speaking truth into our hearts this morning. Father, thank you that you are good and righteous and holy.

Thank you that you not only invite us into your secret place, but our lives started off in your secret place under your protection. And you want nothing more than for us to make the daily decision to dwell in the shadow of your wings, to dwell in the secret place, to dwell under your protection and in your hope.

So Father, I just pray over anyone listening to this who may not know you as Lord and Savior, that right now will be a time where they will make that decision to say, Jesus, I make you the Lord of my life because I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired.

I'm so worn out by doing this on my own and I surrender to your Lordship. You are my God and I will worship and serve you and live for you all my days.

[30 : 04] Lord, I just pray that you will do that in the hearts of anyone who is listening today who doesn't know you. And Father, we who do know you just thank you for the hope that you give and

ask that you'll give us the strength to seek your face and to walk in the purpose that you give us.

We pray this in Jesus' holy and precious name. And God's people said, Amen and Amen. Hey, once again, my name is Ray Sweep from First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana, FCCGreensburg.com.

Hey, if you have any questions, if you want to talk about following Jesus and just what that looks like and talk about baptism, if you just have questions about faith in general or our church, you can reach out to us in a couple different ways and we can start that conversation.

You can call 812-663-8488. That's 663-8488. That's First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana.

Or you can email me at ray at FCCGreensburg.com.

Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. Have a great week. Thank you.