



Series: Knowing God (Winter 2022)

Date: January 2, 2022

Speaker: Spence Shelton, *Lead Pastor*

Text: Psalm 46

Title: Psalm 46: Be Still

Starting Point Plug

Happy New Year Mercy Church! S.P. plug.

Intro to series (brief) & sermon

Turn to Psalm 46. This chapter of the bible is absolutely brimming with a good word for us today, so I don't want to dilly dally. 5-week series is called Knowing God and it will be in the Psalms. It's called Knowing God because we are meant to know God. Not just know about him but know him. He is a Person...we are made to know. And walk with. And the reason many have un-impactful spiritual lives that feel disconnected from the rest of life - is because we treat God as a subject matter. And he's not. He's a person. He's the living God. He's not a moral code to follow, he's not a religious ritual to uphold, he is not a conversation topic to avoid on holidays. He isn't a supernatural force, and he isn't the divine clockmaker who started the world but no longer has anything to do with it now that it's running.

He is the living God. And he created you to have a close, deep, intimate relationship with him. So deep and intimate that even the best human relationships are just weak reflections of what it can be like with God. And in that knowing him - there is life. There is power in knowing him. So, I want us to get to know him. Like we would a friend. And the Psalms are a great place to start because they are like conversations with God. We are going to learn how to walk & talk with God this month. And I believe experience the fruit of renewed faith as a result.

And we start in a psalm that has really challenged me. I read a Psalm a week as a part of my devotional life. I read the same psalm every day for a week. Rotate through every 3 years. Towards the end of last year, I read Psalm 46. It convicted me. It challenged me. And it brought me renewed closeness and freedom in my relationship with God. And so, I offer it to you hoping the same will happen.

In fact, the main driving point of this sermon today is a small step that has brought about big impact in my walk with God. two simple words. Be. Still. Be Still. And I'm going to call you to BE. STILL. Silent listening to God every day. For 5 minutes. And I hope to show you why.

For the choir director. **A song of the sons of Korah.**
According to Alamoth.



Normally I don't spend much time on the headings of the Psalms but this one is significant and kind of cool considering our sermon we just heard last weekend. One of our ministry residents, Trey Gouch, preached on Numbers 16. Where a guy named Korah rebelled against God and as a result, God opened the earth and the earth swallowed up Korah and his followers. And this Psalm shows us that those sons of Korah who were spared, by the pure mercy of God, devoted themselves to making much of the glory of God. And that resonates with me because we who have been spared from going into the pit...spared because of the mercy of God who swallowed up Christ instead into the grave instead of us...can join in this entire psalm with the sons of Korah. Every word you hear is a word you can pray back to God. The structure of our sermon is just the structure of the psalm. It divides into 3 sections. Each section we will let God speak to us in these words. It's going to build. I'll just try to help you see the truth and how you and I can respond. Ready? Let's go.

God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. 2 Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas, 3 though its water roars and foams and the mountains quake with its turmoil. Selah

Selah - pause. Take in what was just said before you receive what comes next. Let's pause and consider The TRUTH of verse 1. And then the response in the opening of verse 2. And the rest of verse 2 and 3 drive the universal & all-powerful reality of the truth home.

Here is the truth: **God is our refuge and strength**. If I had one verse for you to memorize it would be this one. I think you would be blessed to memorize Psalm 46 and make it your anthem in 2022. I really do. BUT if I had one verse it would be Psalm 46 verse 1.

GOD is our refuge and strength. He is the refuge. That's our place of retreat. That's where we run to when we are **out of energy**, when there is **nothing left** in the tank. It's where we go when we are **stressed** with the amount of things being thrown at us. It's where we go when we feel **under attack**. It's where we go when we feel **overwhelmed**. It's where we go when we are **scared**. When we are **embarrassed**. When we are **hurting**. HE is where we go. He is the person we run to. Why? Because he is a helper who is always found in times of trouble. He is ever present. He is always going to be there, and he is **ABLE** to keep us.



- Ex: child I knew I could run to parent's room. No matter what. THEY. Wasn't the room, it was them. Parents. God says a parent's job - represent him.

Psalm 91 says we take refuge in the shadow of his wings. Proverbs 18.10 says the name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are saved. This is our God. a mighty fortress. In fact, you know the old German monk Martin Luther - his favorite psalm was Psalm 46. He sang it on the way to be put on trial for preaching the gospel and standing up against the corruption of the catholic church at the time.

"We sing this Psalm to the praise of God, because God is with us, and powerfully and miraculously preserves and defends his church and his word, against all fanatical spirits, against the gates of hell, against the implacable hatred of the devil, and against all the assaults of the world, the flesh and sin."

*(New Slide) Come, let us sing the 46th Psalm, and let them do their worst.
" - Martin Luther ¹*

¹ As quoted by William Plummer in *PSALMS* (Banner of Truth, 1867) in the *Geneva Commentary Series*.

Let Covid do its worse. Let governments do their worst. Let the devil himself do his worse. Because even if they do...God. The alpha and omega. Is my refuge. In fact, there is a wonderful understanding in scripture where the way forward will feel like the way backward. Psalm 34 says those who feel like their hearts are breaking and are crushed by life...that's who God is closest to.² What is that about? It's not that God is out to make you suffer. It's that as you are emptied of the things of this world...you are ready to be filled with the fullness of God. See God's grace is not just that he will be enough as your refuge. It's that he will fill you in a way the world never has. THAT's how he gives grace to the humble. He fills them. Because they've got an empty tank.

And just like he is our refuge - He is our strength! We cannot separate these two really because both are the products of him being always found in times of trouble. He secures and comforts us and simultaneously strengthens us! He doesn't do just one. BOTH happen in the presence of God. Security from the attacks of the world and from the attacks of our mind. But also - he strengthens us! He grants us endurance for the day that is supernatural!

² Dane Ortlund, *Deeper* (Crossway Wheaton, Ill 2021) 38.



That's why Hebrews 12.12 says strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees. It's because in the presence and refuge of God you will find that strength! He doesn't just supply the strength.... HE IS the strength! You don't come to him to give you strength. You let him be your strength.

So, let me ask you the hard question I had to ask myself last fall: what is my refuge and strength? REALLY? I might agree with this verse and nod. BUT...what is it really? In times of trouble what are you singing? In times of stress and doubt and fear...Listen to me - nothing you are turning to other than the Lord will provide refuge & strength.

- Food will not hold up as your refuge and strength - "comfort...food." you keep eating your feelings and eventually your bad habits will give you what? Heart strength? NO...heart disease. There is a medical name for it. SAME is true for alcohol.
- Porn - will not give you refuge and strength. It will not make you glad. It will make you numb. And when mountains tumble into the depths of the sea...will porn be there to strengthen you? NO. porn doesn't strengthen. It weakens. Weakens your senses, numbs your heart and numbs your ability to build close relationships with anyone, especially a spouse.

- Work - work is not a refuge. It takes and it takes. It doesn't give you strength. it gives you adrenaline followed by more stress. And when the mountains tumble into the seas - it will not strengthen you. It will not be your refuge. It MIGHT give you a severance package. Then it's gone.

And we go to all these things and many more because we fear what is coming next in our lives. We fear the future we can't control. These are false spaces of refuge we turn to. False sources of strength. And I promise they will leave us empty and afraid.

But when God is your refuge and strength...you don't have to fear anything! So here is the first point of our message today: a truth and a response.

God is our refuge and strength, therefore we will not be afraid

By the way he is MY refuge and YOUR refuge which makes him OUR refuge. And I cannot stress enough how powerful the words of a brother or sister in Christ are in moments of fear. I've got an older mentor in my life who has challenged me recently about how I respond to fear. He looked at my life and showed me where I was living in



fear. Fear of failure both at work and at home. And man, what came out of that was a simple question - is God really my refuge and strength? Because if he is...I won't make decisions based on fear of failure. But standing in the refuge and strength of God I will do what brings honor and glory to him!

And if the mountains topple into the depths of the seas - I'm good. I'm better than good. I'm secure and strong. Because God - the mighty eternal king of kings - he is my refuge and strength. In fact, the next few verses start to draw our eyes all together off the distress of the day by reminding us the eternal nature of this refuge and strength and of our place in it.

4 There is a river — its streams delight the city of God, the holy dwelling place of the Most High. 5 God is within her; she will not be toppled. God will help her when the morning dawns.

6 Nations rage, kingdoms topple; the earth melts when he lifts his voice. 7 The Lord of Armies is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah

Look at the contrast between verse 3 & 4. Verse 3 you have the seas of the world roaring and foaming. But verse 4 you have the steady streams of the river that flows into and out from the city of God. The great fear of a city in

time of war was the water supply being cut off during a siege as long as the water supply was secured the city could hold out against attacks for an indefinite period.

And here you have the river whose streams make glad the mighty city of God. The river is the river of Revelation 22.1

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the city's main street. -- Revelation 22:1-2

It flows from the throne of God and of the lamb. That's Jesus. See it's Jesus who says

37 ...“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him.” -- John 7:37-38

I want us today for a minute to be still long enough to embrace and rest in the promise of the eternal citizenship we have in Christ's city. And in the present gladness we can have in the presence of Christ. Regardless of what happens in the ever-changing circumstances of our world, we can be glad. Because our hearts are resting in the hope of the city of the highest God.



Heaven, not earth, can determine my joy

See I say this because I have seen A LOT of stressed-out angry reactions from Christians over COVID, over RACIAL strife, and over POLITICS. Those are the big three of the past 2 years. And those are just our shared experiences. In addition, there are the individual circumstances we face. And I look at Psalm 46 and I see nations will RAGE. kingdoms will topple. BUT THEN - the whole earth melts when GOD lifts his voice. And my soul is reminded and presently I am thankful that my first and primary allegiance is to a kingdom that cannot be shaken. And that brings peace to the present moment. Whatever the moment is.

That morning dawns imagery - in ancient warfare that's when the enemy would attack. At first light. And I can't help but think of

- Ex 14.24,27 - **Morning** watch, daybreak - when the Egyptians were attacking Moses & Israel on the run - that's when God conquered the Egyptians
- 2 Chron 20.20 - In the **morning** Jehoshaphat led Judah out to battle & when they sang to the Lord, the Lord ambushed the enemy armies & even turned them against one another.

When the morning dawns - God will help her. God will help us. See he is our refuge after the battles of this day and our strength for the battles that come the minute we open our eyes on the next day. Because we are always in him, anything that comes at us comes at God. And verse 7 says - the Lord of armies is with us! The god of Jacob is our stronghold.

*Morning - on the 3rd day - Jesus arose. Defeated the enemy. Gives us victory. The gospel announces the dawning of the victory of Jesus over sin and death. The victory of God over Satan. The victory of the church over the powers of this world. God himself, who rose at dawn to give you victory - will forever help you when the morning dawns on your day. And in heaven...a morning will dawn that will never reach dusk. Eternity in the presence of our refuge and strength.

8 Come, see the works of the Lord, who brings devastation on the earth.

9 He makes wars cease throughout the earth. He shatters bows and cuts spears to pieces; he sets wagons ablaze.

The Psalmist now turns to the matchless power of the Lord and invites us to come and see it. He brings devastation on the earth. Verse 9 brings in this imagery of



a conquering king after a major battle. It was common, as a show of strength in ancient warfare for the victorious general or king to gather all the weapons of his vanquished foe and burn them in a fire. The psalmist is saying...PEOPLE OF GOD - REMEMBER What he has done! Remember how he defeated Sennacharib? Remember how he defeated the Midianites without using a single man from Gideon's army? Remember how he surrounded the hilltops with his army when Elijah appeared surrounded? And then this Psalm gives even greater meaning to the Christian - REMEMBER HOW HE GOT UP OUT OF THE GRAVE? REMEMBER HOW HE DEFEATED SIN AND DEATH? REMEMBER HOW HE SET YOU FREE FROM BONDAGE TO SIN? REMEMBER! Remember how he saved you?

Our memories are so short. The enemy loves to keep our memories that way. We think faith is only future oriented and forget that faith is also grounded in the past. That's why we gather together for worship. Why we need one another so badly. Because every Christian in here is a work of the Lord. COME, SEE THE WORKS OF THE LORD! See these sinners he saw fit to save. These adulterers, these addicts, these liars, these pretenders, these misfits & rebels - look at how he has worked in us! Look at how he's working in those we know!

And then with this fresh awareness of his power on our minds, GOD speaks.

10 "Stop fighting, and know that I am God, exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth." 11 The Lord of Armies is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah

Stop fighting. Most translations read this - Be Still.

I like Be Still better though I appreciate the CSB's heart here. This is a psalm about battle and the Lord is calling us in light of his power the Lord is calling us to stop our own fighting and rest in him. But I think the better translation is "be still." It's truer to the Hebrew word *raphah*. And by the way it's a plural command. In southern Hebrew it would read "ya'll be still."

Be still and know that I am God. There's a command from God to stop everything and be still.

Because I know God is God, I can be still

And the stillness must go beyond mere activity. It must go to the mind and heart. What a confrontation this is to the world's culture of busyness & distraction that we've allowed to creep into our lives.

Michael Zigarelli from the Charleston Southern University school of business - surveyed 20k Christians across the



globe and identified busyness as a major distraction from spiritual life. The world is busy because it finds identity & meaning in activity. Christians have assimilated the world's culture of busyness and are therefore too distracted for God. Like the culture they marginalize God...which makes them too busy for him. Which makes them marginalize God even more.³

For many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it.

- John Ortberg, the life you've always wanted.⁴

You've noticed by now this Psalm is referencing war a good bit. That's because Israel was regularly in battle. And because of their familiarity with war, it was easy to understand just like there is war out there, there is war in the heart & mind. Kingdoms rage out there. Emotions rage in here. We don't STILL them before God though. We ignore them by distraction. And we LIVE by distraction. Just check your screen time against your prayer time. Why I can't have my phone or any device near me when I'm in

³ Michael Zigarelli, "distracted from god: a five-year, world-wide study" Christianity 9 to 5, 2008, www.christianity9to5.org/distracted-from-god. In Comer, ruthless elimination of hurry.

the word each day because it wants to Push Notification me right out of the presence of God.

Ya'll we could even be distracted in our church. We could fill up with programs that keep us busy and meet our felt needs and all the while MISS GOD and have a busy, dead church. And I just refuse. One pastor told me: The deader your gospel, the flashier your church must be to keep up. He's right. Nothing, Nothing, Nothing compares to the power of the presence of God. Nothing compares to knowing Him.

We must be careful never to substitute the power of the presence of God for anything else.

The devil would love nothing more than this. In his book Screwtape letters C.S. Lewis really digs into this. Fascinating read and worth your time. But the short summary of the point he makes is that the devil is actively working against you knowing God. And for us - distraction is such a great weapon.

Ex: Me on 3-day personal retreat. Agony day one.

⁴ John Ortberg, *The life you've always wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for ordinary people* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) 38-39. Found in Comer. 27.



I think we are missing the fullness of God because we never STOP & sit still before him. I think stillness is a discipline of ages past that we Christians need to GRAB hold of with two hands and embrace QUICKLY. We need to sit still before God.

To Shut our mouths and our minds for a few moments and let the knowledge that GOD IS GOD be enough for our souls. We need to be still before him. A servant would never speak first in a king's court. The king always speaks first. Likewise, we need to come into the presence of the Lord and bow down before him and be STILL. And let the presence of God be our refuge and strength. Let him bring rest to our souls and let him strengthen us for the battles of the day.

And that will impact everything else. to 'be still' means not to be anxious or fretting or complaining or boasting. But to ask the Lord to show us who he is until the point that we are STILL before him.

He gives that descriptor to help reinforce the difference between he and us - he will be exalted among the nations, in all the earth. He will. Not you or me.

Even if you reach the pinnacle of fame, it will only be for a moment. No, only one name will be exalted among the nations. And that knowledge - that if you were to go to

IRAN right now and make it into one of the fastest growing church growth movements in the world - one name would be exalted - wouldn't be yours! It would be Jesus. And as those Iranians believers sit STILL before God - it would humble you that wow, God is way bigger than I am. I'm not well traveled. But God has let me worship with Christians in Europe, Africa, Asia, Central America, and the middle east. And what hits me is as I sit there not understanding their language I am always humbled. God is so much bigger than me. He's doing so much in the world for his glory. Not for mine. Makes me laugh at how caught up I am in my own stuff. God is so much bigger. That's why our vision - ends of the earth. Because the best thing for us - is to be caught up in his plan.

Knowing God series is going to have some handles to help you put these psalms to work. Today's: We will call it Listening Prayer.

Action Step: Listening Prayer for 5 minutes / day.

5 minutes a day until we get back together. SHUT EVERYTHING OFF. EVERYTHING. SET A TIMER IF YOU MUST. READ THIS PSALM. AND SAY: GOD, BECAUSE I KNOW YOU ARE GOD AND NOT ME, I'M GOING TO BE STILL FOR 5 MINUTES. It's just 5 minutes. But may it set a new pattern for my soul. Where I am still before my king.



CLOSING