

Counseling Psalm 46: Be Still and Know He is God

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For some of our counselees (and for some of us counselors), there are times where it seems like the earth is giving way, the mountains are crumbling into the sea, the waters roar, the nations rage. This workshop explores ways to help our counselees be still and know that He is God. Because of the gospel, we can know true rest in Christ, rather than noisy strivings in our own efforts.

Goal: to help the counselee be able to become still enough to seek God in the midst of chaos, and be able to rest in Him and His perfect character.

Overview of Psalm 46¹

Author: the sons of Korah - a group of men whose father was Korah. Several Psalms are attributed to them.

Setting: nothing in the Psalm ties it to any particular moment in redemptive history

Type: hymn of praise

Main Message: God is our fortress, therefore we need not fear

Structure:

- vv. 1-3: God is a refuge for us during calamities in creation
 - Extreme cataclysm
- vv. 4-7: The God of Jacob is a fortress for us during combat with foes
 - Contrast with quiet waters of a river with its streams.
 - The city of God
- vv. 8-11: The God of Jacob is a fortress for us until the end of time
 - All must be silent, humble themselves, and exalt him. God's

Key Words/Expressions:

- **Refuge:** *fortress* (vv. 7, 11) – Normally speaking, a refuge (v. 1) or fortress (vv. 7, 11) is a place where people are safe from calamity and combat. Remarkably, in this psalm the refuge is not a place but a Person, namely, the God of Jacob. Finding our refuge in God is a common theme in the Psalms (e.g., 14:6; 61:3; 62:8; 73:28).
- **River** (v. 4) – In both the ancient and modern worlds people tend to build cities by rivers or other large sources of fresh water. Yet the inspired irony here is that Jerusalem is not situated on the banks of a river. In the days of the sons of Korah, Jerusalem's main source of water was the Gihon spring, yet in faith they trust that since the LORD is in their midst he himself will provide for them as abundantly as if their city sat on the banks of the mighty Nile.
- **The city of God** (v. 4) – His holy habitation, the city of Jerusalem
- **Earth melts** (v. 6) – The verb used here means either “to totter” (cf. 75:4) or “to melt” (cf. Jer. 49:23). In either case the earth, which is normally so stable, now becomes utterly undone simply at the voice of God. This same God has set a day on which heaven and earth and its very elements will be dissolved by fire (2 Peter 3:10, 12).
- **The LORD of hosts** (vv. 7, 11) – God's personal name is Yahweh, or I AM WHO I AM (Ex. 3:14), or the LORD. A host is a big army or a large multitude of creatures. Thus, the LORD of hosts is the supreme commander of the armies of heaven (i.e., the angels) and all the nations and creatures on the earth. He also commands the heavenly hosts, which are the billions of stars in the night sky.
- **The God of Jacob** (vv. 7, 11). God's commitment to His own promises is evident in every step of Jacob's journey away and return to the Promised Land. Jacob is the Father of the 12 tribes of Israel.

¹ Major source: Jason Van Vliet, “ON PSALM 46: An Excerpt from ‘Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms – Study Resource,’” *Reformed Perspective*, July 29, 2020, <https://reformedperspective.ca/on-psalm-46-an-excerpt-from-christs-psalms-our-psalms-study-resource/>.

- **Be still** (v. 10) – Cease striving (NASB1995), sink down, release, relax
Note: some commentators write that “be still” is directed toward Israel’s enemies, others say that the message is to the people of God.
 - **Mark 4:39** And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.
 - “There is a silence and stillness that should overtake us in the presence of someone that is so overwhelmingly holy and glorious. The call to all is to be still before our holy, awesome, and glorious God.” (John Casteel)
- **Know** (v. 10) – notice; be aware of; experience

Themes/related passages

- God is Sovereign
 - vv. 1-3 – over creation; vv. 4-7 over the nations; v. 10 over the earth
 - **Exodus 14:13** And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again.
- God is with us
 - v. 1 – a very present help; v. 5 - in the midst of the city of God; vv. 7, 11 – The LORD of hosts is with us
 - **Isaiah 7:14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name *Immanuel* (God with us).
 - **Isaiah 43:1–3a** ¹ But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. ³ For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
 - **Matthew 28:19–20** ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- Water
 - vv. 2-3, 4
 - Raging seas can bring death and destruction, rivers whose streams make glad by sustaining life.
 - **Genesis 2:10** A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.
 - **Revelation 22:1–2** ¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.
- Be still/cease striving and know He is God
 - v. 10
 - Psalm 37:7
 - Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices!

- Lamentations 3:22–26
 - ²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
 - ²³ they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
 - ²⁴ “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”
 - ²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.
 - ²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.

Heartwork

Write out Psalm 46. It is helpful to outline the Psalm and then answer these questions:

1. What seven phrases describe God in this Psalm?
2. When trouble comes your way, how long does it take you to think of God?
3. When you finally DO think of God, what kinds of thoughts about God come to you in your distress?
4. God is our refuge and strength (Psalm 46:1). Why does it sometimes seem that you don’t “experience” the strength of God working in you? He promises the strength, and He promises He IS your strength. What do you think is the issue when you seem to be without any strength in hard times?
5. We often don’t “feel” that God is near, present or even helping. What should we do in these times?
6. If God being our fortress (Psalm 46:7) is not about “protecting us from all bad stuff in life”, what do you think He is a fortress from? What is the biblical meaning of this idea? (Suggested cross references ... be sure to look at the verses around these also: 2 Samuel 22:2, Psalm 18:2, Psalm 31:3, Psalm 59:16, Psalm 62:2-6.
7. What do you learn from this Psalm that stables your soul in trouble? Is your faith in God ruling you during the difficult times, and what does that look like?

Karen McMahon, “Letting Psalm 46 Guide Our Thinking - Association of Certified Biblical Counselors,” <https://Biblicalcounseling.Com/> (blog), October 13, 2021, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/letting-psalm-46-guide-our-thinking/>.

If music ministers to your soul, here are some related songs to listen to throughout the week

- A Mighty Fortress sung by Matt Boswell - <https://youtu.be/TBUfe8AzRao>
- Be Still My Soul, sung by Libera (traditional acapella boy's choir) - <https://youtu.be/hqgC1tqifV8>
- Be Still, Be Still, My Soul (Psalm 46) by Sovereign Grace - <https://youtu.be/sPsgG1zY9-g>
- Psalm 46 – Lord of Hosts by Shane and Shane - <https://youtu.be/2emelR7IGmw>
- Still by Watermark - <https://youtu.be/kwJE-SqPpNM>
- Be Still and Know by Christy Nockels - <https://youtu.be/kwJE-SqPpNM>
- Be Still (Psalm 46:10) by Matt Papa - <https://youtu.be/i2opz1dhsFI>

Resources

Berg, Jim. “Panic Attacks and Anxiety.” Quietening A Noisy Soul, <http://www.quietinganoisysoul.com/video-helps/panic-attacks.htm>.

Margaret Glass. “Emotional Ambush! - Association of Certified Biblical Counselors.” <https://Biblicalcounseling.Com/> (blog), March 9, 2023. <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/emotional-ambush/>.