

**SHHH...**  
**Psalm 46**

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Car alarms. Leaf blowers. Sirens. Jackhammers. Boom cars. Airplanes. Trucks. All create the omnipresent, destructive, deafening din. We live in a most noisy world.

Have you been to a restaurant lately. Try to hold a conversation. You'll hear repeated a myriad of times, "What did you say?" "Could you repeat that?" "It's so loud in here." According to Consumer Reports, excessive noise is the top complaint diners have—ahead of service, crowds, or even food issues. Tom Sietsema, the restaurant critic for the *Washington Post*, says that noise is, by far, his chief complaint about the restaurants that he reviews. Things have gotten so bad that Sietsema now takes a decibel meter, adding sound ratings to his restaurant reviews.

And Americans are the worst. Let's admit it – we are a loud lot. In fact, in one particular Irish pub, they have a posted ban on loud Americans. When Europeans imitate Americans, they shout. (Julia Belluz, "Why restaurants became so loud—and how to fight back," <https://www.vox.com/2018/4/18/17168504/restaurants-noise-levels-loud-decibels>)

Noise is so out of control, this constant cacophony of confusion, that *Futurism* has declared noise as the next great public health crisis. With soaring noise levels, they fear that society will turn into a deaf, noise-addled dystopia. (Neel V. Patel, "Noise Is The Next Great Public Health Crisis," <https://futurism.com/future-noise-pollution>, 12/19/2017)

Intrusive noise disrupts, distracts, and detracts from our regular functioning. There is a price to be paid for the constant pounding of noise in our ears. Hearing loss. Heart disease. High blood pressure. Chronic stress. Learning disabilities. In fact, one article stated that children from noisy homes suffer ill effects including less cognitive growth, delayed language skills, increased anxiety, and impaired resilience. And that's coming from Purdue University. (Elizabeth Scott, "How Noise Pollution Might Be Stressing You Out," [www.verywellmind.com](http://www.verywellmind.com), 7/16/2018)

Shhh.... Just how loud do you need to play the TV?

A siren can emit a noise of 120 decibels – a level that corresponds not only with hearing loss, but also the human pain threshold, according to the World Health Organization. (Kate Wagner, "City Noise Might be Making You Sick," [www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com), 2/20/18).

People are starting to use terms like "second-hand noise," like we used to describe second-hand smoke. It's put into the environment without your consent, and yet has a negative impact on your health.

I know you've been right beside this guy at a red light. You hear this awful booming and banging. It kind of vibrates your rearview mirror. You look left and right, expecting to see a police helicopter landing, the noise is so bad – only to discover it's the radio, the booming bass from the sound system in the car next to you. Maybe a low rider. *Environmental Health Perspectives* says the hearing damage done to that driver is the equivalent of standing right next to a Boeing 747 plane with its engines in full throttle. In fact, we can produce more sound in a single automobile stereo system than the Beatles had to project their whole concerts during the days of limited amplification.

In Tokyo, Japan, everyday citizens are having to wear earplugs as they go about their daily lives. Noise is everywhere. (Ron Chespesiuk, "Decibel Hell: The Effects of Living in a Noisy World," [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov))

There is no break. In fact, I'd never even heard of this one, but I found a researcher from Cornell University by the name of Christopher Clark who has discovered that we've even created ocean noise pollution that is wreaking havoc on marine life. The whales can't even hear each other anymore due to the seismic air gun surveys used to locate oil and gas reserves in rock layers under the seabed. (Richard Shiffman, "How Ocean Noise Pollution Wreaks Havoc on Marine Life," <https://e360.yale.edu>, 3/31/2016)

The dog is barking. The baby is crying. Both the cell phone and the doorbell are ringing at the same time. The TV is two notches too loud. And the teenager is in his room blasting what he calls music and we call noise pollution. The walls are vibrating from his woofer.

In the midst of the noise and the chaos, the barking and the crying, the ringing and the pounding, you want to hear the voice of God. You want to hear "Quiet, please." You want to be still and know God.

Shhh....

We live in a noisy world. Can you even hear the voice of God?

Psalm 46 – "Be still and know that I am God" – is a call for the quietness in the midst of our chaos. It's a call to relax and ease the stress that buzzes noisily about us.

## **I. THE PSALMIST SPEAKS OF THE REASSERTION OF CHAOS (v. 1-3).**

We speak naively of terra firma. It isn't. Geologists have discovered that the continents are actually afloat, continuing to be built and changed by moving plates. Volcanoes are the earth's heat vents lying near the plate perimeters which are also earthquake-prone. What we have then is a dynamic, living, changing planet set in an exploding, expanding universe. Creation as pictured by deists, like a clock that had been wound up and left to tick along on its own, just doesn't work. In fact, creation is a great, drama that seethes with the unexpected but has a meaningful purpose that will reach culmination.

The Psalmist, in Psalm 46, these first 3 verses describes the world exactly this way. The earth cannot be our fixed position. The Psalmist is describing a time when chaos, when evil seeks to reassert its primacy over both the natural world and in the world of human affairs. This is a noisy, hectic, chaotic disastrous scene. The earth is quaking. Mountains are slipping into the sea. The sea, so often in ancient texts, represents the watery chaos. Tidal waves roar in foam. It's the language of the Hebrew prophets. Chaos in nature and in human affairs – not yet fully subdued – still trying to reassert itself. God Himself had acted before – God's good order had already emerged from primeval chaos.

You remember, in Genesis 1:1-2. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void and darkness was over the surface of the deep and the spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Notice verse 2.

## **II. WE WILL NOT FEAR (v. 1-3, 4-7)**

Since God is our refuge and strength, the very present help in trouble, we won't fear even though chaos should seek to reassert itself in our lives. God has been in the business from the beginning of making order out of chaos and, so, we don't have to be fearful.

Though the foundation of creation itself should shake and warp, we don't have to fear. We can't know what circumstances in the life of the Psalmist prompted the Psalm to rush from his heart. Was there an enemy – an individual – a nation – that seemed to hold the upper hand? Was there a catastrophe in his own personal life? I don't know, we can't be sure, but whatever was happening to him he likened it unto a crashing of order, peace, and control in his life.

Some of you here this morning are at that very stage today. It seems as if your very world is coming unraveled. Nothing seems certain to you any longer, even the mountains of life seem to be slipping away. The tidal waves are roaring and crashing, the earth quakes! Maybe it's a relationship in your life. A relationship with a husband or a wife. A relationship with a child or parent. A struggle to be a single parent. A struggle to care for an aging mother or an aging father.

At the very moment that you thought that at least you had your life in order then you can't even be certain of the ground underneath your feet – the terra firma. The Psalmist's depiction of the world is your depiction of the world. But even as the Psalmist saw the uncertainty of his life, he saw the certainty of God. The certainty of God's availability to stay the course. It was as if he weighed the evidence in the balance. The power of chaos – of water, of darkness, of earthquakes or volcanoes – and the power of God. He measured them with care and declared with confidence – we will not fear. God is our refuge. That means God is our shelter. God is our strength. That is, his might is exerted against His foes. Thus God both protects us as our shelter and fights for us. He is both our shield and our sword for He is always with us – a very present help in trouble.

The word for trouble here means distress, cramped quarters, constricted feeling. God is here to help when the pressure mounts – when the world closes in upon us. So, the confession comes from the Psalmist and from our own lips, therefore, we will not fear. Our fear is gone because of the provision of the presence of God. Hurricane and tidal wave cannot touch us and neither can

earthquake or avalanche. Through it all God, the Creator and Sustainer of this lively planet holds us fast.

Next, verses 4-7. A reassurance of God's presence and power. With God the waters are no longer life-menacing seas but a life-giving river. The picture of God's help as the quiet water supply of the besieged. (Isaiah 8:6). Over against the watery chaos is God's river, the perennial stream watering Zion is the river of God's mercy and His spirit and it makes His people glad. In the midst of God's city, Jerusalem, there is the Tabernacle of The Most High. God is in the midst of her as she shall not be moved. Since God lives in Jerusalem, He is her stability. Moreover, when the sun rises and the nations march into battle, God is Jerusalem's security. He need only utter his voice and the whole earth will melt. God is our stability and our security. While all else is moving, the city of God will not be moved though the kingdoms tottered, the city of God is steadfast. Just as His voice was decisive in the formation of the world, His voice will be decisive in dissolving the world.

### **III. BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD.**

Look at verses 8-11. "Be still and know that I am God." This is a vision of things finally to come, although the victories of the present are a foretaste of them. The word for behold is generally used for seeing with the inward eye, as a "seer" or prophet sees. Although the outcome is peace, the process is judgment. The reassuring words, "He makes wars cease..." are set in a context not of gentle persuasion but of a world devastated and forcibly disarmed. This sequence, with tranquility on the far side of judgment, agrees with Old Testament prophecy and apocalypse, and with the New Testament. (e.g., Isaiah 6:10-13; 9:5, Daniel 12:1, 2 Peter 3:12 and forward).

So, too, the injunction, "Be still..." is not, in the first place, comfort for the harassed but a rebuke to a restless and turbulent world. "Quiet!" – in fact, "leave off!" might be a better translation. It resembles the command of Jesus to another raging sea: "Peace! Be still!"

Cease striving. Shhh....

Who among us can't identify with the Psalmist here? If we could identify with this crumbling world, how much more his striving restlessness?

Do you remember sister Corita Kent, the famous little nun who made posters and became known as a kind of leader of worship around the country? When John Killinger was at Vanderbilt University to chair "a worship season," he wrote a letter to Sister Corita to ask if she would come and lead the worship services during this special emphasis.

In a few days, a postcard came addressed to Killinger. On the other side of the post card it simply read, "Dear, I am trying to be quiet. S. Corita." Killinger assumed she meant that she wouldn't come. He didn't call her or write her to ask. Nobody wants to let his or her life slip away in wasted moments though much of the time what we call wasted may be the richest and most productive of all. On the rare occasions when we allow ourselves a long soak in the tub, we often emerge dripping with ideas. A pointless afternoon poking around town can reap surprising rewards – from etchings to inspirations, and always a replenished store of images, understandings, and ideas. The

pleasure that lingers afterward is alone will worth the investment. The experience and its memory are well worth the price.

What's your hurry?

We have lost the art of being still – of being quiet. We can't dare to wait and I'm the worst of all. Did you know that there's even a high-tech frosting that can be used on a cake so you don't have to wait for the cake to cool? We don't even have time for cakes to cool anymore.

We are in a hurry to get home at night, so we can go to bed early, so we can get up for work, so we can go home again. We spend the weekend trying to get a jump on the week ahead. We are so oriented to the future, that we don't live for a moment in the present.

Be still and know that I am God!

When we can never stop to smell the roses, we become mechanical. So rushed. Why, when we pull into the driveway, must we hustle our children out of the car? So what if they want to piddle – we're home – but the sense of rush, a sense of striving has become so much the norm that we don't even question it.

Be still! "Leave off," says the Psalmist. Take time to know that I am God. God brings that direct prophetic word and as He brings peace to the earth, so He brings peace to the heart. We can experience now that reality – Be still and know that I am God.

To know that God is God is to experience Him in the quiet of our hearts. This is relational, not merely theological, knowledge. It is letting God's peace settle down upon us. It is knowing Him as our security and stability in the storm. Be still and know that I am God.

But, you are in a hurry. America is in a hurry. Time has skyrocketed in value. The value of any commodity depends upon its scarcity. In time, what was once abundant is now going to the highest bidder. A man in Florida bills his ophthalmologist \$90 for keeping him waiting one hour. A women in California hires someone to do her shopping for her – out of a catalog. Twenty bucks will pay someone to pick up your cleaning. Greeting cards can be purchased to express to your children things you want to say but don't have time to. "Have a great day at school" or, "I wish I were there to tuck you in."

**America – the country of shortcuts and fast lanes. We're the only nation on earth with a mountain called "Rushmore." Time – according to pollster Louis Harris – may have become "the most precious commodity in the land." Do we really have less time or is it just our imagination?**

**In 1965, in testimony before a Senate subcommittee, it was claimed that the future looked bright for free time in America. "By 1985," predicted the report, "Americans would be working 22 hours a week and would be able to retire at age 38. The reason for this reduced work week is the advancement of computers in our country. They will do everything for us."**

**The truth is, the average leisure time has shrunk 37 percent since 1973. The average work week has increased from 41 to 47 hours. Why didn't the forecast come true? What did the Committee overlook? They misjudged the appetite of us as consumers. As the individualism of the '60's led to the materialism of the '80's, the free time gained for us by technology didn't make us relax, it made us run. Gadgets provided more time – more time meant more potential money – more potential money meant more time needed – and around, and around it went. Lives grew louder as demands became greater. And as demands became greater, lives grew emptier.**

Leave off! Be still and know that I am God.

Listen to the words of God. “Be still ... cease striving ... leave off ... be quiet ... and know that I am God.” Notice as he continues. “Cease striving and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.” The word for exalted means to be lifted up, to be raised high. We think of a victorious coach being carried away from the field by his team receiving the praise of the fans. God will be raised high and both creation and history will bow to His sovereign will and give him glory. We know that this will take place when Christ returns to manifest the fullness of God's kingdom. As Philippians says in chapter 2, “every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God.”

The Psalm ends with a repetition of verse 7 – almost like a refrain. Is God big enough to deal with our personal problems? Is He big enough to deal with the crises that we face in our world? Violence in our cities, volcanoes, hurricanes, shifting plates, and comets? The God of Psalm 46 commands angelic hosts – volatile nature, expanding creation, historical chaos, wars, and rumors of wars. He is the Lord of many. The Lord of hosts. He's going to be exalted in the earth.

Some of us come today needing to be reassured of the power of the Almighty. We are stressed out. We haven't taken the time to know the power of God. You know, life does take its toll. **In the early 1900's the top 10 killers of humankind in the United States were all infectious diseases. In the 1990's, it is estimated that the top 10 killers of humankind are all stress-related diseases. Dr. Paul Tournier, a celebrated Swiss physician and psychiatrist, once noted, “Most illnesses do not, as generally thought, come like a bolt out of the blue. The ground is prepared for years through faulty diet, intemperance, over work, moral conflicts, slowly eroding the subject's vitality. Man does not die, he kills himself. Every act of physical, psychological, or moral disobedience of God's purpose is an act of wrong living and has its inevitable consequences.”**

I heard someone once say, “The important thing is not what you eat but what's eating you.” The truth of the matter is both are important. What eats at us is important for stress is a real killer. Mental stress causes anxiety and depression, physically it leads to heart disease and cancer, arthritis, live-threatening gastro-intestinal problems, ulcers, and drug and alcohol abuse. Stress leads to domestic violence, even homicide and suicide. It became such a serious problem that experts say that coping with stress is the #1 health priority.

Lord, ease the pounding of my heart with the quieting of my mind. Steady my hurried pace with the vision of the eternal reach of time. Give me, amid the confusion of the day, the calmness of

the everlasting hills. Make the tension of my nerves and muscles fade with the soothing of the singing streams that live in my memory. Help me to know the magical restoring power of sleep. Teach me the art of taking minute vacations, of slowing down to look at a flower, to chat with a friend, to pat a dog, to read a good book. Remind me each day of the fable of the hare and the tortoise that I may know that the race is not always to the swift but there's more to life than its increasing speed. Let me look upward to the branches of the towering oak and know that it grew great and strong because it grew slowly and well. Slow me down Lord. Inspire me to send my roots deep into the soil of life's enduring values that I may grow toward Your will for me. Amen.

Some of you are here today and your life is at that moment of chaos and for you, indeed, you need God's refuge – his shelter and his strength. Because in your life the mountains are slipping into the depth of the sea. The waters are roaring and foaming and the mountains are quaking. You need to come to that river of the providence and the presence of God. A stream in God's holy city – the dwelling place of the Most High. You need to hear today that God is in control – that He will not be moved. That God will help those who are his people when the morning dawns. That even should the nations themselves uproar and the Kingdoms begin to totter that with the voice of God even the earth can be melted. To know that the Lord of hosts is with us and that the God of Jacob hears our stronghold. Come, says the Psalmist, look at the works of the Lord. He wrought desolations on the earth. He can make wars cease. Who among us couldn't hear the words of the Psalmist to cease striving – to stop hurrying and know that God is God.