

Confident Composure in Chaos

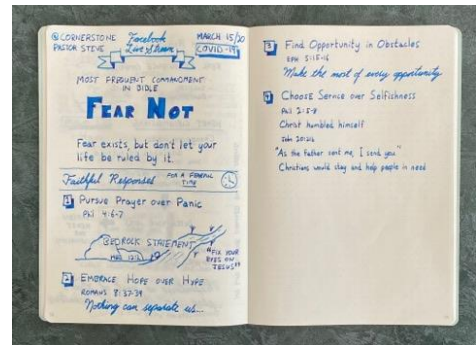
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Psalm 46

Good morning everyone. I'm Steve Shaw, Cornerstone's Discipleship Pastor.

You know, a couple of people sent me photos of the sermon notes they took during last Sunday's live stream. This is one of them.



So here's my invitation to you today, and this applies to people of all ages—kids, youth, adults. If you take handwritten notes of today's message, take a picture of your notes and send them to us. Maybe you'll want to add some artistic flare like this person did. Either way, we'd love for you to send us your sermon notes from today.

Speaking of last week's message, if you were with us, you might remember that we got our alliteration on. We looked at four faithful responses for a fearful time. Do you remember what they were? Maybe you noticed them in the sermon notes we saw a moment ago.

The first one was: **Pursue prayer over panic.**

The second: **Embrace hope over hype.**

The third: **Find opportunity in obstacles.**

And the fourth was: **Choose service over selfishness.**

Have you been able to personally lean into any of those four responses this past week?

I hope so, and I hope it's made a difference for God and for good in your life and the lives of those around you.

But it's still a time of rapid change, and I wonder:

How have you been hanging in there everyone? How are you doing?

Feel free to comment on that if you like.

These are unprecedented days indeed, at least in terms of our own life and times.

So today, we're going to turn to the ancient words of scripture—tried and true words through which God has been giving people hope and strength for millennia in the face of all kinds of trials and tribulations.

That hope and strength can be ours today – it can be yours today— because these ancient words are every bit as true and applicable now as they've ever been.

Our text is Psalm 46. I'll be reading today from the New International Version. Please follow along as I do:

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
- ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
- ⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
- ⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.
- ⁸ Come and see what the LORD has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.
- ⁹ He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
- ¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."
- ¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

This psalm declares that **in God, we can have confident composure in chaos.**

So there's some more alliteration for you. Hey, it's not like I'm usually an alliteration guy when I preach, but for some reason, that's just how the messages have flowed out of me lately.

In God, we can have confident composure in chaos. That statement is quite biblically rich, and in the time that remains, we're going to look at **what it means, why it matters, and how to get it.**

1. What it means.

We don't know the circumstances in which this psalm was composed, but clearly, it was a time of crisis.

¹ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,

³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.

Whatever the nature of this crisis was, it was severe enough that it felt to the psalmist as if the two most stable and immovable things he could think of— the earth and the mountains— were collapsing, just crumbling away.

And the imagery of the sea— its waters roaring and foaming— is super-significant.

Maybe you were aware of this, maybe you weren't, but the sea is an incredibly important image in the Bible. From the Bible's first pages to its last, the sea represents the forces of chaos.

If God is working to establish a good creation, the evil forces of chaos, symbolized by the sea, *oppose* God's good intentions for creation and for his people. The forces of chaos want to unravel and dismantle God's good order in this world.

In Genesis, the Bible says:

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

The words *formless and empty* are a translation of the Hebrew phrase for chaos. That phrase is *tohu wa-bohu*. Everyone at home say *toho wa-bohu*.

And in these verses, what symbolizes these forces of chaos? The waters of the deep. In other words, *the sea*. The Spirit of God hovers over those waters, and in the verses that follow, what does God do? He creates order out of chaos.

Now, if we jump forward to the very end of the Bible, what do we read? In Revelation 21, we read of a new heavens and a new earth. We read of how in that future, God will totally restore his creation, once and for all. And we're told that at that time, *there will no longer be any sea*.¹

Those words aren't to be taken literally, as if the new heavens and new earth won't include oceans. Rather, it is *symbolic* language, indicating that through Jesus, God will ultimately and utterly defeat the dark forces of chaos once and for all. There will be complete and total stability and security, and order, and God's creation and all God's people will thrive forevermore.

If you think about what's been going on these last couple of weeks, it feels pretty chaotic, right? For many of us, life feels pretty *tohu wa-bohu* right now.

Doesn't it almost feel as if the earth is about to give way under your feet? That the so-called "mountains" you thought were so secure and immovable are suddenly on the verge of toppling over?

Things you may have taken for granted just a couple weeks ago may not seem so sure and certain at all anymore. Things like:

- Your health and well-being, and that of your loved ones
- Your routines and schedule
- Your plans
- Your job, your income
- Your financial future

And the COVID-19 pandemic isn't just affecting us personally, it's affecting the world.

¹ See Revelation 21:1

Psalm 46 speaks of how nations are in uproar.² And as we've seen, this virus is no respecter of national boundaries. It's part of the chaos all nations are facing these days.

So the psalmist leaves us with very few clues as to the exact nature of the crisis the people of God were facing when he first composed Psalm 46.

Scholars tells us that this is an indication that the psalm has been intentionally crafted to be applicable in any and every crisis that God's people could ever possibly encounter. In any era, at any time, God is an ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore, as God's people, we can have confident composure in chaos. Let's talk now about why this matters so much, especially in a time like this.

2. Why it matters.

It matters because nothing is truly solid, trustworthy, and lasting except for God.

Over these past two weeks or so, it feels like everything has changed. But guess what? God hasn't changed.

You and I need to be reminded this pandemic has done nothing to change the fact that God is still our "refuge" – a secure fortress in whom we can take shelter, whatever the circumstances. And he is still our "strength"—the one who himself becomes the inner fortitude and courage that we so need in times of crisis.

Times of crisis are no fun. But they do serve to remind us that true and lasting security can never be found in God "plus" anything else.

Lasting security can never be found in God "plus" your health.

Lasting security can never be found in God "plus" a predictable routine.

Lasting security can never be found in God "plus" your plans panning out as you had hoped.

Lasting security can never be found in God "plus" your job, or God "plus" continuing to have the income level you've become accustomed to.

² See verse 6.

Lasting security can never be found in God “plus” your financial investments performing well.

A crisis like the one we’re in is very effective at exposing what your “pluses” are—those things you’ve been relying on apart from God for your sense of security and well-being.

What are your “pluses”?

All of our “pluses” can be lost. But God can never be taken away from us. Nothing can ever separate us from his love for us in Jesus. Not a pandemic. Not even death itself.

Psalm 46 teaches us that lasting security is found in God, *period*. Full stop.

Pastor Rick Warren puts it this way:

You never know God is all you need until God is all you have.

God *alone* is our refuge. God *alone* is our strength.

So, even if things as secure and immovable as the earth and the mountains should give way, even when the seas of chaos should roar and foam, even when powerful nations become unstable, we can still experience confident composure as God’s people. Why? Because no matter what happens:

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.³

Those words are repeated twice in this psalm, in verse 7 and then again in verse 11.

And they relate to how we can get such confident composure in the face of chaos.

3. How we get it.

God tells us how to get it in verse 10, where he says:

Be still, and know that I am God.

God’s loving challenge and call to us in these chaotic times is:

³ See verses 7 and 11.

Be still. Cease your worrying, hurrying, and scurrying. Because only in stillness will you know that I am God.

And only in stillness will you begin to remember that I am with you, both now and always, your refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Only in stillness will you be reminded that I have loved you with an everlasting love, and that nothing can ever separate you from my love.

Only in stillness will you learn to live into the hope that I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. I will make this whole world new one day, and wars will cease to the ends of the earth,⁴ and there will be no more pandemics, no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

Only in stillness will you realize that, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells".⁵

What does the psalmist mean when he speaks of this river whose streams make glad the city of God?

In the Bible, the city of God is usually understood to be Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the home of God's temple, God's dwelling place on earth in Old Testament times. The place of God's special presence.

But the psalmist speaks of a *river* whose streams make glad the city of God. And here's the funny thing about that. Jerusalem didn't actually have a river flowing through it. Its water was supplied by aqueduct.

The psalmist is using metaphor again. He's not speaking about a literal river. The river is a symbol of God's presence flowing in and through the lives of God's people.

You see, Old Testament Jerusalem was but a pointer to an infinitely greater holy city, the true city of God in heaven. The Bible refers to it as the New Jerusalem. It's the place of God's throne, and of his immediate presence.

⁴ See verse 9.

⁵ See verse 4.

And if we jump ahead once more to the very end of the Bible, what do we read? In Revelation, John sees a new heavens and a new earth, and that there is no longer any sea. We talked about that earlier. In Jesus, the forces of chaos have been overcome.

And then in verse 2, John says this:

I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...⁶

The heavenly city comes down to earth, and in Revelation chapter 22, the final chapter of the Bible, this is what John writes:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.⁷

Does that sound kind of familiar? What did we read in Psalm 46?

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

The river whose streams make people glad—whether in Old Testament Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem— or in your life and mine right now amid the chaos of a pandemic— that river is the presence of God.

Now is the time to distance yourself from the physical presence of people, but not from the presence God. If there ever was a time to get as close to God as you can, it's now.

And the way to do that is to be still. To settle into your home, and make the most of this time by seeking him in prayer, scripture, and silence.

That you might *know* that he is God—personally, experientially, intimately.

That the river of his presence might *flow* into your life and make you glad—confident and composed— in spite of the chaos.

That Jesus himself might speak into your unsettled heart and mind the very same words that he once spoke into the chaos of a raging, stormy sea:

⁶ Revelation 21:2a (NIV)

⁷ Revelation 22:1a (NIV)

Peace, be still.⁸

We'd like to offer you a free resource that includes several exercises to help you be still and practice God's presence. It's called the *Practicing the Presence of Jesus Worksheet*, and it's available at this web page. I encourage you to download a copy and experiment with the exercises in the week ahead: www.cornerstonechurch.ca/resources.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus, we feel so vulnerable right now, especially to illness, to financial loss, to the pressure of being cooped up, either together or by ourselves—each of which can come with challenges. But in the psalm we studied today, you say that even if the earth and the mountains should fall away, nothing can take away the inheritance of infinite love, resurrection, new heavens and new earth that we have in you. Thank you Lord Jesus that by your Spirit you are with us, always, to the very end of the age. That come what may, you will never leave nor forsake us. As we praise you for this, our anxiety begins to ebb. As we regain our confidence and composure in you, let us live in that confidence and composure, and then out of it, let us love and serve others in your name. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Like last Sunday's closing prayer, I found today's closing prayer online, from New Testament scholar Scot McKnight. I thought it was perfect to close today's service with given what today's message was all about. So let's pray:

Lord of All Creation, the One who brought order from the chaos,

From the disorder prior to creation through the disorder after Adam and Eve,
Into that disorder you made a covenant of blessing for all nations with Abra'am,

From the disorder of exile in Egypt you delivered the people of Israel,
Into that disorder you gave them your Law and your Land,

From the disorder of rebellious leaders and corrupted prophets,
Into that disorder you sent ordering visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Daniel,

⁸ See Mark 4:39.

From the disorder of exiles and aches for a Messiah,
Into that disorder you sent to us your Messiah, Jesus

And gave us the Spirit.

Grant to us Order in our Disorder,

That we may cast aside the disorders of our life
and find your good order through it all.

Through Christ our Lord,
Who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, one God,
Now and Forever.

Amen.⁹

⁹ See: https://www.christianitytoday.com/scot-mcknight/2020/march/order-in-chaos.html?fbclid=IwAR2vGXYZcxIS1bSIEuEcZ4Pm_4HLemImru01Q5cBIRJ947_JynF5uwVixXU