

**“Be Still and Know
that I am God”**

January 2022

Southlands Church Fast

Psalm 46



An Introduction from Alan Frow

Over the decades as a church, God has powerfully fortified and led us as we have sought Him together through prayer and fasting.

Perhaps more than ever before, we feel our need for His presence and empowering.

On New Year's Day, the Lord drew my attention to the well known verse in Psalm 46, "Be still and know that I am God." Every morning since then I have meditated on this magnificent Psalm that communicates such calm confidence in the midst of crisis.

It is not merely a promise of peace to us. It is a promise of God's ever-expanding kingdom of peace through us. Over the centuries, God has used this Psalm to fortify His people in times of turmoil.

Now, in our time, we have a chance to draw upon God's ever-present help in trouble and to believe His Word that we will still see the great works of the Lord in our day.

Psalm 46 will be the overarching theme for our Church Fast this year as we ask for these truths to become realities in our lives.

Why Do We Fast?

Fasting has long been a powerful component in the life of Christian worship. Jesus began his public ministry after 40 days of prayer and fasting in the wilderness. He spoke of fasting in the Gospels (Matt. 6:16-18; 9:14-15) and the early church practiced it (Acts 9:9, 13:2, 14:23). Fasting has been a part of the Southlands story too, and many significant moments of direction and vision for the church have come directly out of church-wide fasts.

But what is fasting *for*? Is it just some sort of sanctified diet? In short, fasting is for mission. More specifically, it's a practice of *formation* that equips us *for mission*.

- 1) The physical hunger we feel in a fast intensifies our longings for Jesus. In our pain and discomfort we desperately seek God, cry out to him. We recognize more clearly our dependence on God and our hunger and thirst for more of his presence.
- 2) The combination of prayer and fasting (the two always go together!) helps remove distractions and allows us to focus on Jesus. The time we don't spend eating is more time we can spend in silence, prayer, listening to God. In our busy lives, fasting helps us create space to meditate on God's Word and allow the Holy Spirit to speak.
- 3) All of this is not just for our own spiritual enrichment, but for our missional effectiveness. It is significant that just prior to beginning his public ministry, Jesus fasted. The 40 days in the wilderness was for Jesus a preparatory time, a season of struggle and temptation and isolation (similar to the 40 day period the Israelites spent in the

wilderness prior to entering the Promised Land), and yet one that clearly catalyzed his forward momentum in mission.

4) We are fasting because we want Southlands, as a church but also as individuals, to be formed for mission. The purpose of wilderness, for Israel and for us, is that we be refined and prepared, as a set-apart people, to bring the blessing of God to all nations.

Tips for Fasting:

- If this is your first fast, ease into it. Don't feel the pressure to go without food for all three days. Start with fasting a meal a day, then gradually build up to a full day.
- An intermediate fast would be what is known as a "Daniel Fast" this is where you abstain from choice food, meat, and wine and only eat vegetables and drink water.
- If you are fasting from food, we typically encourage a juice fast which would include fruit juice and soup/broth and water.
- We only recommend a full water only fast if you have experience fasting and/or participated in one of these other versions before.
- The idea behind fasting is to abstain from a routine habit/practice for the sake of spiritual hunger. You may not be able to fast from food due to health reasons, etc. so consider abstaining from social media, television, or any other habitual practice in your day that you can set aside for the sake of focused prayer.
- The fast begins after dinner on Sunday night. Don't eat a massive, greasy meal as your last meal. You'll regret it!
- At some point during each day of the fast, find a 30-minute time slot (at least) to read that day's devotion. Ideally this is in a quiet, distraction-free place where you can have uninterrupted time.

Bring your juice and ask Jesus to be your nourishment! Feasting on the word of God will do wonders for a growling stomach.

- On each day there will be a theme and a passage of Scripture to contemplate. The idea is to read *and meditate* on the Scripture for a good 15 minutes, and then spend 15 (or more) minutes in prayer.
- The meditation part is key. It bridges the gap between hearing from God (in Scripture) and speaking to him in prayer. Puritan Thomas Manton said this: "What we take in by the word we digest by meditation and let out by prayer." This will be the model for our daily devotionals during the fast.
- If your days are full and you can't find the time to take a break, consider reading through the booklet on Sunday night, to prepare your heart for what's to come.
- If you have kids this is a great opportunity to introduce them and include them to the concept of fasting. Make sure you clarify the purpose of fasting in an age appropriate manner. Much of how they will participate will depend on their age so here are some age appropriate suggestions:
 - Age 5-9. Abstaining from candy, soda and dessert.
 - Age 10-13. Abstaining from one meal during the day. This HAS to be done wisely and with faith, if it is an intense sports season consider a protein drink as a meal replacement.
 - 14 and older. Depending on the maturity of your child, they can make the same choices that you, as an adult would make.
- If you do have children that are abstaining from food, this is obviously a great opportunity to be more intentional with family prayer and/or devotions.

God is our Fortress // Psalm 46

To the choirmaster. Of the Sons of Korah.

According to Alamoth. A Song.

1 God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.

6 The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

7 The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

8 Come, behold the works of the Lord,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.

9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;

he burns the chariots with fire.

10 “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 of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

Day 1 // Peace Amidst Turmoil

Psalm 46: 1-3

To the Choirmaster. Of the Sons of Korah. According to Alamoth. A Song.

1 *God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.*

2 *Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,*

3 *though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah*

Psalm 46 is a song written by the sons of Korah, a family of the tribe of Levi. This psalm was intended to be sung so that man can remind their soul that God is mightier than any troubling situation.

The authors of Psalm 46 do not belittle the fear caused by the trouble we face. In fact, the lyrics compare the trouble to that of roaring water and the earth quaking! The poetic nature of this song evokes not just the facts of trouble, but also the feelings of trouble. In verse three, the descriptions of the waters that “roar and foam” and the mountains that “tremble” evoke the visceral and intense feelings we experience in trouble.

Have you ever stood next to the ocean as powerful waves crashed nearby? It's like standing next to the wavebreak at the Wedge in Newport Beach. The sound is deafening. The power of the wave is both awe-inspiring and fear-inducing. You are defenseless in comparison to the wave 'roaring and foaming' wherever it pleases.

What trouble have you faced recently that has left you feeling daunted and defenseless?

Have you ever experienced an earthquake? Those living in Southern California in 1994 would have experienced the 6.7 magnitude Northridge earthquake. At 4:30 am millions of SoCal residents were jolted out of bed to: feel the ground roll underneath them, to hear the sound of picture frames smashing to the ground, and to feel the walls shaking vigorously around them - for an angouing 20 seconds!

What troubling situation has shaken you recently?

That trouble you are experiencing is real and appropriately frightening. The call of Psalm 46 is not to deny how you feel about the trouble you face, rather it is to stand on the truth that God is greater. To whatever trouble we face, we can declare that: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Martin Luther, the mighty man of God who was responsible for the start of the Reformation in the 1500s, often stood on the truth of Psalm 46 for the daunting trouble he faced throughout his life. The psalm was so influential to him that he wrote the hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." The beginning of the lyrics sing:

*A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.*

Take the situations that daunt you and shake you in front of God. Read or sing Psalm 46: 1-3 and the beginning of Luther's hymn and prayerfully respond in the following ways:

1. Ask God to reveal how He is your "refuge and strength" in your trouble.
2. Invite God to reveal to you how He is very present help in your trouble.
3. Pray that God may help you in your trouble.

Join us tonight for the first night of prayer. While this psalm/song certainly has individual applications, it is a communal song which is meant to be recited and declared in community. Notice the plural pronouns (with boldness added) below:

Psalm 46

1 God is **our** refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore **we** will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

See you tonight!

Day 2 // Joy Amidst Affliction

Psalm 46: 4-7

⁴ *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.*

⁵ *God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.*

⁶ *The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.*

⁷ *The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah*

Where will we turn as life unravels? Where will we look for help, for strength, for refreshment? The past couple of years have been draining. We need a refill! Where will it come from?

After the sons of Korah mention a few of the “worst possible outcomes” they can imagine (verses 2-3), they turn to the only hope they could rely upon: the powerful, refreshing presence of God (verses 4-7).

Let’s pray alongside the Psalmist as he offers us hope.

“There is a river...” Living in a desert like California, we could not survive without rivers. The Psalmist envisions God’s people in a desert of life. Dry, parched, fatigued, tired. Feeling just about how we all probably feel right now while fasting. Depleted, shriveled, maybe even despairing. Then he points his people toward God and says, “Behold! A River!” God is repeatedly described as a River for his people.

In prayer, imagine your life feels like a desert. But then God, by his Spirit, begins to trickle downstream as a river into your life. He saturates your pores; he refreshes your Spirit; he brightens your eyes. The River flows through you and into the world around you. By God's Spirit, he refreshes your home, your workplace, your school, your neighborhood.

Thank Jesus for the refreshment of new life that comes by his Spirit's presence.

"[T]he holy habitation of the Most High..." God has always wanted to live with us. His first attempt was in the Garden of Eden, but our ancestors didn't want him. So, God relentlessly pursued ways to be present in our lives: dreams, visions, tabernacle, temple, prophets, miracles. Finally, and ultimately, he sent his son Jesus to live with us, and Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit to the church so that God might make a home in each of us.

We, the people of God, are the dwelling place of God on earth. Imagine that! In prayer, meditate on the reality that God is in you. He is in the gathered church.

"[S]he shall not be moved...God will help..." When God is in our midst, we benefit big time. The Psalmist tells us that we will not be moved. To "move" is to be thrown over, fall down, stumble, fail, crumble under the pressures of life, give up on what matters most. That won't happen to God's people if he is in our midst because God "will help."

Meditate on the stability that God's presence provides. He gives us confidence. He strengthens us with hope for a bright future. Thank Jesus for rebuilding the muscles of your soul.

“He utters his voice...” The Psalmist notices that government leaders, politicians, influencers and the broader culture get angry. Culture sometimes feels like it stands against our faith in Christ. We feel marginalized and shunned. It can feel like we’re not even allowed to say anything in our defense. But God can! When he speaks, “the earth melts.” God is our shield and defender. We cannot change the “powers that be,” but God has ultimate authority.

Thank Jesus that he is in charge. Thank him for his powerful voice that changes circumstances, brings truth and justice, rescues those who are hurting.

“The LORD of hosts...our fortress” Of course, God alone, who has supreme power, can handle any situation all on his own. But he wants to reiterate his invincibility, so he reminds us that he has an army. “Hosts” is the biblical term for “heaven’s army.” God enlists angelic soldiers to come to our aid, protect us and strengthen us.

In prayer, imagine angelic soldiers joining you throughout your day. They come to work, go to school, visit the doctor and spend time with your friends. What happens to your mindset, attitude and emotional state when you have such strong companions? Thank Jesus that he is your fortress and protector; he is your defender; he is with you moment by moment with the full power of heaven to help in whatever ways you need.

Live today with the knowledge that God is with us to refresh, revive, strengthen and protect us.

See you tonight for prayer!

Day 3 // Confidence for the Mission

Psalm 46:8-11

8 *Come, behold the works of the Lord,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.*

9 *He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.*

10 *“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 of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah*

Did you notice how “*confidence that God’s Kingdom of peace will increase*” is a central theme in these verses? The problem we face is that as we think of this past season or current circumstances, our confidence in God bringing peace may be on shaky ground. We may find ourselves skeptical that God cares, let alone has the power to overcome chaos with the wholeness of His peace.

Thank God for Psalm 46: 8-11! Without meditation on these verses, aided by the Christian discipline of reminding ourselves of the truth of who God is, we may be tempted to believe our insecurities, that our skepticism is warranted. However, as we repent of our sinful and fleshly presumptions about God’s character, we will notice our confidence in the greatness of who God is grow, and our propensity to worry and become anxious diminish.

Let's go verse by verse and submit our thoughts about who God is by meditating and applying the truth of who God is to our lives and circumstances:

vs 8:

- The psalmist invites us to observe the destruction of our enemies, to think about how the power of God has utterly destroyed them.
- We know that our enemy is not people but sin and Satan. Spend time recalling, with gratitude, how God has defeated the chaos of sin and Satan and has brought peace through Christ and His finished work on the cross.



vs 9:

- Verse 9 speaks of weapons that have been used against us but are broken through his power... identify some of the weapons that the enemy is using against you and our communities.
- Take some time and contend in prayer that God would move in power and break these weapons of the enemy.

vs 10:

- Notice how God calls us to action, not action to fight in our strength, but action to find peace by quieting our souls in Him. This verse really challenges us to trust God with the consequences of being fully obedient to him.
- Take time to think about the things that you don't trust God with and

try to accomplish out of your own strength. If you're wondering what they are, they are the things that cause you anxiety, fear or frustration.

- Now, spend time repenting of your sin... the sin of wanting to be in control, the sin of anxiety, the sin of arrogance that you are the answer to the problem, the sin of not trusting God. Spend time acknowledging that you are powerless to fix your circumstances and that God is your only hope.
- Notice the promise that God declares about himself in the last two stanzas of verse 10? He will be exalted! Yes! This is good news for you and me! Our job is to quiet our souls in God's ability to overcome and His job is to exalt himself over circumstances. For God to be exalted over all circumstances is for our good and our best outcome.

vs 11:

- The Psalmist seems to recap the Psalm by ending with praise. Let's follow his lead and end with praise and thankfulness. Spend time in prayer thanking God for his immutable character.
- Here are some things the Psalmist points out if you run out of things to praise God for:
 - God is powerful in His works
 - God desolates His enemies
 - God breaks the weapons of war used against us
 - God is exalted in the nations and the earth
 - God is with (for) us
 - God is our fortress

See you tonight at Brea at 6pm as all Southlands congregations come together to ask, seek and knock in prayer!