

## Psalm 46 “Be Still And Know”

- I. Let me ask us this morning. Whoever owned a strange pet? Anyone own a tarantula? A python? A King Cobra? Some might remember we owned a duck named Yolo. **(image)** He was an adorable duckling but turned into one mean teenager **(image)**. Well, former fireman David Van Buren has us all beat. David got Gwendolyn the alligator when he was nine years old. That was 47 years ago. Yes he has had Gwen for almost a half a century. Gwen lives with David in his home...not like in a pen or cage or enclosure but as inside his house. And Gwen is not a little guy or gal. She is 13 feet long. Instead of fish Gwen prefers Domino’s pizza and Chips Ahoy cookies. **(image)** I don’t blame her. But it’s not all domestic bliss for the odd couple. A neighbor complained and the state is threatening to take Gwen on a one-way ride. David is quoted as saying that he will do whatever to keep the pair together. Sounds like a Disney movie in the making. But can you imagine living with a prehistorical killing machine? Walking to the bathroom at night, you stumble on the TV remote and land on the floor eye to eye with a reptile twice your size with rows and rows of glistening teeth? Ok, scratch Disney movie. I am thinking more like horror à la Stephen King.
  
- II. But what if we too, in a sense, are living with a killing machine right in our midst but are completely ignoring it? What if I told you that this killing machine is far more dangerous than Gwen the alligator...as alligators only kill a handful of people in our country whereas this killer kills in the hundreds of thousands every year in the US? What if I told you it isn’t a thing but rather our American obsession? The need for speed. I am not talking about some NASCAR fixation, or a drug, but rather our need to go full speed all the time. And despite living in one of the wealthiest countries in the world and having possibly the best healthcare available, we are the unhealthiest among first world nations. Now, there are many factors why, but one of the leading reasons researchers point to is our stress level caused by our frenzied activity. We are busy people who take great pride in our busyness and frankly it is killing us in the form of heart disease, diabetes, strokes and back acne. Okay I made that last one up...but seriously. It’s killing us. And like the Ginsu knives commercial, that’s not all folks! Our need to be on the go all the time contributes to mental illness, hurts relationships, and most importantly is toxic to our walk or journey with God. It’s lethal to our soul. So for the next several weeks we are going to look at how we can intentionally hit the brakes and slow down not just for our physical health but for our spiritual life and wholeness.
  
- III. The book of Psalms, which are songs of praise, confession, thanksgiving and sometimes complaint, have something very important to say to us about slowing down. Let’s look at **Psalm 46 verses 1-3 NIV** A week ago I took a few days off to go hiking with one of my best friends **(pic)** in the Shenandoah National Park. We climbed up what is supposedly one of the hardest hikes in the park, Old Rag. All morning as we climbed, the sky threatened rain but held off until we got close to the summit and to the rock scrambling portion **(pic)** and then the heavens opened to a full out deluge. Lightning, thunder and buckets and buckets of rain. And when the rumbling started on the bare rock face you literally could feel the ground shake. I have never been in a full outright earthquake before, but being on top of that mountain and both hearing and feeling that thunder, it made my knees go weak with fear. I felt so small, puny compared to the forces of nature around me. And I think that is

what the Psalmist was getting at in these first few verses. In the biblical way of thinking at that time, in their prescientific mindset, the mountains held up the sky and were the foundations of the earth. So if the mountains are quaking, like Chicken Little, they believed the sky was about to fall. But despite this apocalyptic scene, the psalmist says what? God is our refuge, our hiding place, the one we go to in times of fear and uncertainty. In other words, God's got this. I think this is such an important word in the world today. Listen to this theory. I am convinced that hero and zombie apocalypse movies and series are so popular because 1) we feel like the horrors and evils in our world are too big to be handled by just regular folks; and 2) we feel that because of these horrors and evils, we are nearing the end. We feel like the world is coming apart at the seams, and we can't go much longer like it is. Whether this is at the macro level, with threats of nuclear, bio, or chemical war; or micro level, with job loss, addictions, or relationship implosion. At a personal or national level, we feel like the mountains are quaking and the flood is rising. But the psalmist says, "God's got this." So don't give in to our fears but rather this is the time to embrace our faith in the One who created the mountains and the seas, Who ultimately is in control of it all. He is the One we need to run to. Ultimately our politics or politicians won't save us nor will Wonder Woman or Rick Grimes...but God will, as He is our ever-present help in trouble.

- IV. **Psalm 46 verses 4-9 NIV.** City of God is Jerusalem (**image**), where the Holy of Holies resides, the ark of the covenant, God's throne and capital city of His people the Israelites. All the nations of the world might set themselves against Israel, but she will not succumb... because why? God is within her. Those nations may have the power to wage war, but God wages peace. No matter who goes against God's people, even the most powerful armies in the world, they don't stand a chance. As Paul the church planter will later write, if God is for us who can be against us? They don't have a fighting chance.
- V. How many of us are familiar with this image? (**image**) That's the original. Recently it has become a popular meme. Since then you might have seen this one (**image**) or this one (**image**) or this one (**image**). Does anyone know where the original came from? If you do, don't tell us because this is my gig not yours. Kidding. But here is the scoop on the Keep Calm and Carry On. It was originally a poster developed by the British Government during WWII. Nazi Germany had conquered mainland Europe, and Great Britain was the only country at the time standing up against truly the evil empire. Indeed, all nations were in an uproar and our cousins the Brits were surrounded by enemy forces on all sides. To encourage their citizens to embody the whole English stiff upper lip thing, the government printed 2.5 million of these posters. (**image**) Some claim only a few ever actually made it to the public eye. But poster or not, the British lived the message out. For almost a year, they had to endure almost nightly bombing raids that didn't only target military installations but civilian as well. The raids killed around 32,000 civilians and destroyed two million homes. But they continued to keep calm....and they carried on. Until finally the British Royal Airforce won the day. Here are a few images from that time. (**image, image, image**)

VI. Maybe some of us here this morning might feel like you are under siege. Feel like you are surrounded on all sides. Feeling friendless, alone, or simply besieged by all the demands of life...with bills to pay, cars that need to be repaired, or a hostile working environment. So hear what the psalmist is saying this morning. If we are a child of God, just like the city of Jerusalem at the time this psalm was written, He lives within us and we won't fall. Again if God is with us, no one can stand against us. This doesn't mean that we are not going to face illness, disease, job loss, relationship trouble, etc., but that God won't let us go...that He will be with us in these painful times and ultimately will give you and me the strength to get through. Like the Brits, in the end, we too will find victory.

**VII. Pslam 46:10-11 NIV**

VIII. The psalmist describes a world in chaotic motion, but what does He call us to do? To stand. Stand still. A year or two ago I discovered the strangest phenomenon. I would be at all these outdoorsy kinds of locations like a park, a hiking trail, near a river, or even on the pier at the ocean, and I would see these non-outdoorsy types walking around gazing at their phones with great interest. How did I know they were not outdoorsy types, you ask? I am not trying to be judgmental here but when you see someone wearing a Legend of Zelda t-shirt who looks like they haven't seen the sun since the last time Halley's comet made a swing by our solar system and have Mario Kart earrings, you get the idea that they are not outdoorsy types. So why would these folks who normally would be getting their PS4 on be soaking up the fresh air? Any guesses? Yes. Pokemon Go (**image**) I know this is now passé...so 2016! But if you somehow missed this craze, let me explain. It's an app on the smart phone that meshes our reality with virtual reality. So you can hold your phone out and you can see on your phone's camera a majestic oak tree before you but behind the tree you can spot an alien-looking Japanese anima creature jumping up and down breathing fire. And if you are quick and agile enough, you can capture said creature by shooting at it via your smart phone. Hence it brings together both the geeks and the scouting types. Fortunately, or unfortunately depending on how you look at it, this fad, like all fads, has faded....and the gamers have left the woods to return to their dark tech-filled basements. But I still find the whole concept intriguing. That you can have this whole world, albeit virtual world in Pokémon's case, without even knowing it's there. You just have to have the tools or app to discover it.

IX. I cannot help thinking about the similarities with God and God's presence in this world. He is right here waiting to connect with us, wanting to hear from you and me, His children, but because of our busyness and our constant running, we miss Him. Running from event to event in our own little world, we miss the much deeper, richer one. So in order to get our very divided attention He says in Psalm 46 to "be still" which in the original language according to scholars is even more forceful and it is really a command "to stop." Like hit the brakes. And recognize He is right there before us, if we would only take a moment and look out through our spiritual eyes. Use the tools that are available. But I imagine you might be sitting there thinking, "Well that sounds nice and all but what does that even mean and what tools are you talking about?"

- X. I have scheduled Fridays to be my Sabbath Day. A day set aside to connect with God and rest because my Sundays are not that for me. But full disclosure, they have simply become, in the past year, just another workday. But not this past Friday. I don't know if anyone can relate, but have you ever had those moments when you have all this work to do and you just blow it off? You take one look outside and the sky is Carolina blue and the temperature would even make Goldilocks happy (not too hot, not too cold, but just right) so you decide to do something fun? That is what I did this past Friday. I went kayaking on the Dan river. **(pic)** At first my mind was muddled as I started. My to do list was growing exponentially. But about 10 minutes in, a transformation occurred. Even though my body was still in motion as I paddled, my heart and mind became still. As I looked at God's creation all around me, not another soul to be seen, I became acutely aware of His presence. I began talking to Him in a way that I honestly haven't in some time. It would be so corny for me to say that a peace like a river came over me, right? Well, but it did. The chaotic world where I live most of the time, worrying about everything from war with North Korea to how am I going to fix my aging car to how am I going to grow our church, faded away and there was just God and me. And to quote Pastor Bob from last week I knew everything was going to be OK. So as I made my way down the Dan, I recalled that God is ultimately in control, which means that I am not. Truly a relief. While everything may seem chaotic and the foundations of our world may seem like they are being ripped away, God is still very much on His throne. And my heart and mind and soul found rest again. I actually had a Sabbath.
- XI. So this is what I am saying this morning. We need to find the tools, the app, either literally or figuratively, that enable us to be still, to stop and know He is God. We all can't kayak the Dan daily but we need to find our own way to connect with Him. To hit the brakes on our crazy chaotic activity even if it's just for a few minutes so we can see the world just beyond our own. So we can detect not a Pokémon, a Peekachoo, or whatever, but that God is right there standing closer than our next breath. We will be helping you in the weeks to come on how to do this. But please do. Not only is our physical health at stake, not only are our psyche and our important relationships on the line, but our very souls are too. It's time to slow down before it's too late.

Challenge: Read Daily devotion-  
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