

A sunset over a body of water. The sky is filled with soft, pink and orange clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon, casting a shimmering reflection on the water. The text 'BE STILL' is overlaid in large, bold, black letters.

BE STILL

STUDY GUIDE

We live in a day and time when we take for granted the need for us to be still. We can easily find ourselves stressed, out of sorts, in turmoil, anxious...and the list goes on and on. During this series, we're going to explore four different Psalms to see what wisdom they provide during some of life's more challenging moments. In them, we'll learn what they can teach us about the importance of being still.

It's been said, "When we can't find the words to pray for ourselves, the Psalms speak. When our joy is indescribable—the Psalms speak! When our grief is inconsolable—the Psalms speak! When our enemies appear to be all around us—the Psalms speak! When we find ourselves in debilitating crisis—the Psalms speak! When the diagnosis is not what we prayed for—the Psalms speak!" Let us be open to all God has for us as we walk through the Psalms and allow them to speak God's word of comfort, hope and quiet to us.

WEEK ONE – AUGUST 7

BE STILL DURING UNREST

BE STILL

Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, “What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

READ: Psalm 4

As we look at and consider Psalm 4, we’ll find it reveals a journey of lament. This psalm was likely originally written when calamity had befallen God’s people or David had been attacked or betrayed. Some were turning from the Lord to the gods of Canaan. The introduction of this psalm tells us it was written by King David and came with instructions that this was to become part of the regular worship and prayer life of God’s people in worship. It’s a psalm of lament—which contains a pattern of speaking to God, then describing God, then describing a people or a situation, and then ends by speaking to God again.

So, what does it mean to lament? The dictionary defines lament as follows: “to express sorrow, regret, or unhappiness about something.” Lament is a tool God’s people use to navigate pain and suffering. Lament is vital prayer for the people of God because it enables them to petition God to help deliver them from distress, suffering, and pain. Lament prayer is designed to persuade God to act on the sufferer’s behalf. Lament’s primary motivation is to take whatever distress before the throne of God, as the psalmist does, and await His response.

The tone and style of lament prayer varies. It may appear argumentative in style or humble in tone. As such, different terms describe various nuances to lament prayer. For instance, penitential prayer confesses sin and reveals one kind of distress that needs relief—namely, forgiveness from sin. Other forms of lament prayer present to God different kinds of distress—where there is no confession of sin. These include suffering over sickness, being oppressed by enemies, or even suffering as a result of God’s actions. In both penitence and general lament prayer, the hope is God would see and respond to our prayer. Despite its variety in tone and style, such prayer remains fundamentally rhetorical speech. To ignore this reality is to fundamentally misconstrue lament’s purpose and effects. Some misconceptions should be exposed.

Sometimes lament prayer is characterized as irritating complaint—or worse, adolescent whining: moaning about hardships in life instead of facing them head-on. After all, suffering and trial produce something in the life of the believer: patience, perseverance, etc. For this reason, we shouldn’t whine about suffering but rather embrace it as a good gift from God! In this way, Christians construe all suffering as “soul-building.” Yet this psalm, among other texts, shows us followers of God indeed must speak to God this way.

We need to remember we neither possess the mind of God nor the perspective of God (as He sees all, knows all, and is all in all). As a result, we must go to God when we're confused or we see injustice, or when we experience pain. Lament prayer is not God-denying language—but God-affirming language that reveals a radical faith in God and a firm understanding of our dependence upon Him for all things.

Psalms 4 gives us a model which teaches those things we need to do in our times of unrest:

CRY OUT TO GOD (4:1): David cries out to God because He knows Him to be righteous and merciful. David has a lifetime track record of calling on the name of God in times of strength (Goliath comes to mind) and crying out in distress to God (when chased by Saul, sinning with Bathsheba, experiencing the death of one son, and the betrayal of Absalom). This is familiar territory for David. He's asking for relief. "Make a spacious place for me." The call is for us to be still and remember God is listening.

- In times of unrest, do we take the time to be still and cry out to God? Is it even on our radar?
- Do we turn to Him first—or do we seek our answers elsewhere?
- Do we take the time to really listen to God?

REMEMBER OUR TRIALS ARE BOTH PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL (4:2): While some trials are physical, almost all trials have spiritual ramifications. David would be well aware of this (like the time he came back to Ziklag after fighting for the Philistines to find the Amalekites had raided Ziklag and taken their wives, children, herds, and wealth). Before David rallied his men to go after the Amalekites and recover everything that had been taken, they had to acknowledge the spiritual toll this physical attack had taken on them. The call is for us to be still and to clear our hearts.

- In times of trial, do you think we take the time to assess the spiritual toll they take?
- Why do you think this is important?

LIVE AS SOMEONE GOD HAS CHOSEN AND HEARS (4:3): We need to remember our identity as a child of God and person of worth. In times of trial, it's important for us to remember God knows us—He loves us—and He's aware of what's happening in our lives. We need to remember He's for us and is always more ready to answer than we're ready to ask. David wanted nothing to do with false gods and speaks out of his identity as one who is known, called, and anointed by God. He's leaning into his identity as God's child. He had found God to be faithful in the past and is leaning into His faithfulness. The call is for us to be still and focus on God.

- What does it mean to you to lean into your identity as a child of God?

QUIETING YOURSELF AND WORSHIP—ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU’RE ANGRY (4:4, 5): It’s not a sin to be angry, but it is a sin to allow our anger to rule us in such a way that it causes us to sin. We likewise need to understand the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger. The call is for us to acknowledge our anger. We need to remember it’s okay to tell God we’re upset—but at the same time, we need to be careful we don’t allow that anger to prevent us from worshipping. So, amid those times, we need to learn to quiet ourselves. And as we do, we need to pray, worship, and put our trust in God.

- Do you find it easy or difficult to quiet yourself in times when you’re upset or angry?
- What are some ways you can quiet yourself in those times of turmoil and anger?

REMEMBERING WHAT BRINGS YOU JOY (4:6, 7): David likely takes a walk down memory lane and reminds himself of God’s faithfulness—which, in turn, gives him great joy! God helped him defeat Goliath. God protected him from all kinds of enemies. God forgave his sin and restored his heart. God gave him courage and wisdom to lead. The old song reminds us to “count your blessings” when we find ourselves in a difficult spot. That’s not a bad idea after a time of lament—count your blessings and remember what brings you joy!

- Do you think we take the time to count our blessings and give thanks to God?
- What keeps us from doing so?
- What needs to happen in your life to begin to do so?

RESTING WELL (4:8): It’s difficult to over-estimate the physical, emotional, and spiritual toll a time of trial and heartache can take on every aspect of our being. It’s equally difficult to over-estimate just how helpful a good night’s sleep can be. The call is for us to be still, remember God’s faithfulness, and find our rest in God.

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*

WEEK TWO – AUGUST 14

BE STILL DURING SUFFERING

BE STILL

Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, “What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

READ: Psalm 37:1-24

Psalm 37 is an acrostic poem (where the first letter, syllable, or word of each line or paragraph spells out a word, message, or the alphabet) that deals with the one question we always ask: why do bad things happen to good people? Why am I suffering? This psalm of David emphasizes the importance of patience and trust as we actively wait for God’s response to why the wicked prosper and the faithful suffer.

If we’re going to grow and mature in our faith, we must develop a theology of pain and suffering—where we understand how God moves and acts in our lives during these times. If we’re being honest, we would admit we usually try to avoid pain whenever possible—whether physical or emotional. But what if pain and suffering have a purpose? The purpose of physical pain is often to increase awareness of a deeper and more significant underlying problem. The purpose of relational pain may be to move us toward a place of forgiveness and reconciliation. Emotional pain is often an indicator of some heart work we need to do in order to become our best selves. Pain and suffering often has a purpose. The same is true in our spiritual lives. Trials, tribulation, guilt, restlessness, conviction, and the like all serve a purpose in the deeper work the Holy Spirit is trying to accomplish in our lives. In fact, if we’re ever going to become all God desires, we need to develop and embrace a theology of pain. Why? Because it’s during our times of deepest pain and adversity God often does His deepest and most significant work in us.

As we come to look at and consider Psalm 37, we’ll consider what it has to teach us about being still. We’ll find it calls us to:

BE A PATIENT PARTNER WITH GOD—REALIZING LIFE IS FRAGILE AND TEMPORARY (37:1-9):

This psalm is a direct contrast of Psalm 36—which describes the way of the righteous. Nothing and no one lasts forever—the wicked are like grass that will wither and die. Whatever the present source of suffering is, it has a definite lifespan. In this psalm, we’re reminded when faced with pain, suffering, and unrighteousness, the best play is to TRUST in the Lord and do good—COMMIT your way to the Lord—BE STILL before the Lord and wait patiently for Him—and REFRAIN FROM ANGER and turn from wrath as it only leads to evil—which will one day be cut off. We’re reminded here God always plays the long game—and while things may seem overwhelming and impossible in the present, God holds the future—and we have no reason to fear.

- How difficult is it in the midst of times of suffering for you to trust God, commit your way to Him, be still, and refrain from anger?
- What are things that help? What are some things that hinder?

REMEMBER THE WICKED WILL ALWAYS REACT, BUT WE'RE TO REMAIN HUMBLE THROUGH

ALL SEASONS (37:10-15): The wicked will not last, but the meek will inherit the earth (see Jesus' teaching in The Beatitudes) and will experience peace. We need to understand meekness doesn't mean weakness. Its root meaning refers to incredible strength under restraint. It's been likened to the bit in a horse's mouth. We're reminded in this psalm the wicked will always react and will always seek to strike down the righteous. We're told we shouldn't be surprised by this, and we should take solace in the promise God knows their plans and laughs. Their day is coming when God will level out all injustice and alleviate all pain and suffering. The call is for us to remain humble and trust God.

- Do you find it difficult or easy to remain humble and calm in the midst of adversity—in those times when it appears evil is winning?
- As Christ followers, how might we help bring calm and hope in those times?

BE THANKFUL AND GENEROUS (37:16-22): We sometimes wonder why the wicked seem to prosper and always seem to get everything they want, but David reminds us God keeps score using a different scale of success and failure. It's far better to be rich in righteousness and holiness than to seemingly have every sign of outward success—yet be spiritually poor. God has a way of providing what His people need in times of want and plenty. He expects us to be thankful for His faithfulness and generous with His resources.

- Can you recall a time when you wondered why the wicked seem to prosper?
- Do you find it easy or difficult to trust God to meet your needs (not necessarily your wants)?
- Can you recall a time when God supplied all your needs (not necessarily your wants)?
- What does it mean to you to be a good steward of the resources God has blessed you with?

ALLOW GOD TO LEAD AND WALK WITH US (37:23, 24): We can trust God. He'll guide us well. He always sets the feet of His children in pleasant places. Once again, God plays the long game. He's faithful. He can be trusted. If we read on in verse 25, we find David proclaiming, "Once I was young, and now I am old. Yet I have never seen the godly forsaken, nor their children begging for bread."

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*

Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, “What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

READ: Psalm 46

Psalm 46 is the psalm that inspired the well-known hymn by Martin Luther, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”. Psalm 46 is a psalm of Korah that celebrates God as the king of the universe who is also close and intimate with His people just when they need Him to be. In this case, God is the fortress and strength that’s always present and visible during times of confrontation and strife. Life is filled with adversity and confrontation—differing ideas, differing values, differing worldviews, differing understandings of truth. We seem to be specializing in confrontation these days.

When facing confrontation, Psalm 46 teaches us to be still by:

REMEMBERING GOD IS THE CONSISTENT PRESENCE DURING CHAOS (46:1-3): When we’re confronted with adversity—especially unexpected adversity—it can feel as though the bottom is falling out of our lives. The call is for us to remember God is truly our refuge, our strength, and our ever-present help. God is the one consistent thing we can stand on when life’s crumbling around us.

- Where are you facing adversity and confrontation today?
- In those times, do you find it easy or difficult to remember the refuge we have in God—that He’s our strength and our ever-present help? How do these promises help?

LOOKING FOR GOD TO ARRIVE AND BRING NEW LIFE (46:4-7): These verses paint an incredible picture of the life-giving restoration that comes when we place ourselves in the presence of God. He becomes for us like a life-giving stream that flows in the city of God. When God’s present, we come under the protection and provision of the Lord. When we place ourselves in the hand of God, He comes to stay with us and becomes our fortress. A Mighty Fortress is our God!

- Do you think we open ourselves up to allowing God to bring new life into us—to restore us?
- Can you recall a time when you felt restored and refreshed in God’s presence—when God, by the Holy Spirit, breathed new life into you?

ACTIVELY LOOK FOR AND PARTICIPATE IN THE WORKS OF GOD (46:8, 9): We don't get to sit passively and let God do everything for us—we have to do our part. So be on the lookout and watch for God to be at work—and when you see God at work, be willing to get your hands dirty.

- Do you think we see or feel the need to participate in the works of God?
- What are some ways you, as an individual or together as the group, might be the hands and feet of Jesus? Where is God calling you to “get your hands dirty?”

RESPONDING WITH A STILLNESS AND FAITH THAT REVEALS GOD AS THE HERO AND NOT YOURSELF (46:10, 11): These verses help us shift the focus off ourselves and our powerlessness in a situation to God and His power in any and all situations. The call continues to be, “be still.” We're called to “be still” and know the Lord—to “be still” and know He is God—to “be still” and know God is exalted among the nations. God is BIG. I am small. God is POWERFUL. I am powerless. God is STRONG. I am weak. BE STILL and get some much-needed perspective. The Lord WILL BE EXALTED in all the EARTH. The Lord Almighty is with us!

- How might we face life differently, especially the trying difficult times, if we would learn to truly “be still” and acknowledge God?

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*

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READ: Psalm 62

Psalm 62 is a psalm of David that serves as a confession of faith—declaring God is our rock and foundation all throughout life. As such, it’s a reminder material wealth or man-made power will one day be lost. This confession, however, is a reminder all is not lost—because we have a hope that’s eternal and steadfast. God is with us and is the beginning and end of all things, therefore we can withstand losses and difficulty. All of us will experience grief and loss at some point—and when we can hold onto our faith in the face of loss, words like despair, grief, and death do not get the last word. Hope does. Grace does. Life does.

When facing times of loss, Psalm 62 teaches us to be still by:

REMEMBERING OUR STORY OF FAITH AND SALVATION (62:1, 2): We’re reminded in this psalm God is our rock and salvation—and in Him, we find our rest. It’s important for us to remember this is not all there is, and God is bigger than anything we might be facing. He’s like an unshakable fortress that stands strong and never falls when matters of life and death confront us. When we experience loss—especially unexpected loss—it can feel as though our whole world is caving in on us. It’s during these times it’s important for us to remember the Lord our God—who is the source of our salvation—the One who is our strength and stay—as well as the many ways we’ve experienced His grace in our lives.

- Why is it important for us to remember our story of faith and salvation?
- How has doing so helped see you through times of loss?

REMEMBERING HURT PEOPLE HURT PEOPLE (62:3, 4): It’s sad to say, but times of grief and loss often reveal the true character of the people with whom we share life. While we would hope it brings the best out of people, the sad truth is it can—and sometimes does—expose our deepest brokenness. Hurt people hurt people. We can also find they’ll try to take advantage of us in times of grief and loss.

- How have you experienced this in your life?
- Can you recall a time when perhaps you were tempted to lash out at someone out of your hurt?

TAKING TIME TO REST AND REMEMBER GOD’S STORY IN YOUR LIFE (62:5-8): We’re called to take rest in the assurance God is on the job—that He’s working together for our good as we love Him and as we live as He has called us to according to His purposes. Our future security isn’t dependent on anything we or anyone else does for us. Our salvation has been secured by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—and nothing can shake the assurance of that hope. We’re called to always trust Him in all things and find rest as we place our faith and hope in Him.

- In times of loss, why is it so important to take the time to “be still” and find rest in the Lord?
- Can you recall a time when resting in the Lord restored your soul?

REMEMBERING WE’RE ALL EQUALLY FRAGILE AND BROKEN—AND LISTENING FOR GOD AND BEING CONFIDENT IN HIS RESTORATION (62:9-12): We all stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. None of us is righteous. None of us can save ourselves. We need to hear and lay claim to these three promises: 1) God is STRONG; 2) God is LOVING; and 3) God will REWARD us according to our faith.

- Why is this so important?
- Do you think we take the kind of time we should to “be still” and claim these promises?

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*