

God Is...

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By Rev Paul Graham

Read [Psalm 46](#)



In the 1970s a series of cartoons were published under the heading “Love is...” These were drawn by the New Zealand artist Kim Casali, originally as little notes to her future husband, but then published in newspapers, books, and cards across the world. Each cartoon features a caricature of Kim and her beloved Roberto with the slogan “Love is...” at the top, with a suitably soppy slogan at the bottom to describe some, occasionally obscure, characterisation of love. Needless to say these have proved immensely popular, and are still seen in shops today (visit www.loveiscartoon.com for more if you’d like).

Today’s Psalm features similar sentiments, with a repeated “God is...” featuring a number of times, even bookending the song. We read that “God is...” (or variations on the theme) a refuge, strength, ever-present, a help, in his city, a fortress, etc. At the heart of this is the unspoken concatenation of the two concepts that we’re probably very familiar with: “God is... love.”

The Psalmists echo the Old Testament understanding that Jerusalem was at the heart of God’s presence, with the Temple as the focal point of his love shown through the population’s obedience of his laws. Their security as a nation came from the physical strength of their cities and armies, further evidence of God’s blessing and ongoing support. A strong and obedient nation was a sign that God’s love for them was intact; his children protected by him through the might of their army, city, and defences.

Compare that to our understanding of “God is... love”. God’s love for each of us shown through Christ’s death on the cross; his ongoing love for us shown through his forgiveness of our sins as we confess them to him. His love shown through our relationship with our neighbours; not in shows of strength, but in acts of service. Instead of a building, God dwells within each one of us through his Holy Spirit; our sense of

belonging is based on grace through Christ, rather than obedience to laws set down by his appointed rulers. God's love is not shown through mighty armies or strong fortresses but through sacrifice and humility.

But there's a sting in the tail with this Psalm. Towards the end of the Psalm is one of the most challenging lines in Scripture, and not just to those of us who like to keep busy: "Be still, and know that I am God".

With this phrase, the whole Psalm shifts on its axis and causes us all to sit up and take note. For the first hearers, they would have pointed at their army, their buildings and their temple and said, "If you want to know who God is, there is all the evidence you need". They might have genuinely thought that was God; but we also know from history that they fell into the trap of thinking that it was also evidence of their own strength. They mixed God up with their own egos, and when their egos came out on top, problems started occurring. The instruction to be still, to not rely on their strength, their might and the other temptations around them that might distract them or draw them away from God, would have been quite a gauntlet thrown down.

We too might look at the world around us and see how technological, medical, and academic advances have in some ways superseded our need for God in these practical ways. We might want to say that other things provide us with refuge and help; our homes, work and family for instance. Do we see God as our fortress, or do we rely on our borders, security forces and police for protection? We might even say that knowing as much as we do means that we don't need to know who God is. Is there still a place for "God is... love" when so much else can provide us with what we need?

And this is precisely why this phrase is so challenging. We still need God and an understanding of who he is which can only come when we do something that many of us find next to impossible: we need to be still. Of course, in recent times, there are some of us who have been forced to do this anyway; by not being allowed out, to socialise or to see friends. There have been many ways that those who have been shielding have been distracted from doing precisely what this Psalm instructs; whether it was bringing the Green Goddess out of retirement to show how to do armchair-based exercises, or the lure of the garden, or yet another jigsaw puzzle, or myriad other ways of keeping busy.

But we are still confronted by the challenge of this verse, which goes deeper than the frustration of enforced inactivity or the frantic rushing about of busyness. Being still is more than stopping all activity or putting away that puzzle. It's about shifting our awareness from doing to being, from having to being. It's also not easy for many of us to achieve.

It almost feels like there is an unspoken "I dare you to..." as a preface; do we dare to open ourselves up to stillness and the possibility of an awareness of who God really is? And in knowing who God is, we might find ourselves learning more about who we are; not by doing, but by being.

Spend some time with these words as they are arranged below. Respond as the Lord directs.

Be still, and know that I am God

Be still, I am God

Be I am God