

DAY 1

'Be still, and know
that I am God'²



IN THE NASB TRANSLATION, this scripture actually reads, '*Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.*' *The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold. ...*' (Psalm 46:10–11)

It is a beautiful verse, but one that I think is even more heart and soul-nourishing when read in the context of the entire psalm:

*God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change*

² Psalm 46:10, NIV UK 2011.

*And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea;
 Though its waters roar and foam,
 Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. ...
 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
 The holy dwelling places of the Most High.
 God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved;
 God will help her when morning dawns.
 The nations made uproar, the kingdoms tottered;
 He raised His voice, the earth melted.
 The LORD of hosts is with us;
 The God of Jacob is our stronghold. ...
 Come; behold the works of the LORD,
 Who has wrought desolations in the earth.
 He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth;
 He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two;
 He burns the chariots with fire.
 Cease striving and know that I am God;
 I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the
 earth.’
 The LORD of hosts is with us;
 The God of Jacob is our stronghold. ...*

Today I am reminded of who He is to me. That He is always there, even in my Martha place, and nothing can separate me from His love. I am also gently shown how my constant ‘striving’ drives a slow but steady wedge between us.

The word ‘strive’ is defined in the Chambers English Dictionary as ‘to try extremely hard; to struggle and to contend; to be in conflict’. Cambridge Dictionaries Online defines striving as ‘to try very hard to do something or to make something happen, especially for a long time or against difficulties’. Both these definitions suggest hard work, a sense of constant pushing and straining. I know this feeling well; I have always felt that my life was a constant battle interspersed with brief periods of normality. Even as I have learned to walk with my Saviour, I have struggled

to live in the truth of His words in Matthew 11:30: *'My yoke is easy and My burden is light.'*

Gently but firmly I am drawn again to focus on the words of the psalm above, written by the sons of Korah, and to meditate on the way they use images of nature to describe a relationship with God built on solid foundations. A relationship that is about stillness and faith in the midst of turmoil.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change

How many times have sudden changes in my circumstances left me feeling as if the very earth underneath my feet has shifted uncontrollably? I have never been in a physical earthquake, but I imagine it must be one of the most terrifying experiences in the world. Where do you run to, when the very earth on which you stand trembles underneath your feet? How do you stand still when everything you have taken for granted is suddenly and swiftly taken away? How do you maintain your confidence in each day without constantly wondering if it is just a matter of time before everything comes crashing down again? I have seen many emotional earthquakes; the scars across the landscape of my heart are barely covered with newly grown confidence and inner strength. It feels sometimes as if the slightest tremor could reveal the trenches and fault lines.

I confess before Him that I have learned to live in fear of the earth changing beneath my feet. I work hard so I will have enough, I live in 'just-in-case mode' and I try, often unsuccessfully, to plan ahead for every eventuality. I strive to protect me and mine from the earthquakes, from the tremors, from the aftershocks. I feel myself growing incredibly weary sometimes with the effort of trying so hard, or being 'so responsible' for my own future and sometimes, for other people's. This place of striving, my Martha place, comes decorated with badly applied wallpaper of collapsed dreams, unfulfilled and silent promises, framed pictures of ravaged lands and uprooted hopes. Here, there is no memory of the rainbow that

came after each storm, the new life that emerged from the ravaged soil; here I have learned to forget He who held my hand through the earthquake and calmed the storm within.

I think about the things that represent the stability of the earth beneath my feet to me – my home, my family, my health, my job, my finances, in no particular order. He shows me His hand over and in each of these things, and I know that in the face of His mercy and grace my strivings are like the single beat of a mosquito's wings in a dense rainforest. I hear Him ask:

And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life's span? If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters?

(Luke 12:25–26)

Yet I have done this for so long, Lord! He knows I want to let go, I want to feel the ropes I have held on to for so long slip through my fingers as I relinquish them to His firm hands. I want to sit down and rest my weary legs, I want to lift the weighty bag from my shoulders and stretch them out. I want to rest in His arms, curl up like a baby, place my head on His chest and hear the gentle rumble of His love soothe me to sleep like a babe. So I dwell on His words...

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS

(Matthew 11:28–29)

He invites me into His rest. It is a special place... He is here and I can lay all these burdens at His feet. He admonishes me gently from the book of Isaiah 30:15–18, even as He did the Israelites, pointing out the futility and, indeed, the dangers of my own striving.

*'In repentance and rest you will be saved,
In quietness and trust is your strength.'*

*But you were not willing,
And you said, 'No, for we will flee on horses,'
Therefore you shall flee!
'And we will ride on swift horses,'
Therefore those who pursue you shall be swift.
One thousand will flee at the threat of one man;
You will flee at the threat of five,
Until you are left as a flag on a mountain top
And as a signal on a hill.
Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you,
And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you.
For the LORD is a God of justice;
How blessed are all those who long for Him.*

He longs to be gracious to me, to invite me into a place of repentance, rest and salvation, of quietness and trust.

I sit quietly as I begin to understand that He alone is the solid ground underneath my feet. This mortal earth may indeed change, but He is the same as He has always been; He is the solid ground that never changes. My God of Abraham, my God of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua... the same One who parted the Red Sea. I do not have to be afraid of this earth changing under my feet; I see that I need to stand firm in the knowledge that it will always change and that's OK because I do not stand on mortal ground. I stand on He who made the heavens and earth. Like a child I am carried on His shoulders, and as He stands astride the shifting earth, and commands it to be still, I know I am safe here.

And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea ...

(Psalm 46:2)

I picture mountains, indomitable, towering above everything else since the beginning of time. It is difficult to contemplate or imagine Mount Kilimanjaro or Everest slipping into the heart of the sea. Slippage suggests a slow but unstoppable process,



and I imagine nature railing against it, trying to hold on even as each mountain is subsumed by a sea that persistently gains ground, inch by inch, foot by foot, and swells with pride with each submerged victory.

This is no imagined fantasy; science confirms that the seas are full of submerged mountains. It is a process that cannot be stopped or held back, yet He tells me that for each part of creation disappearing beneath submerged victorious waves, another part of undiscovered territory is revealed somewhere, often unseen by human eyes but below His watchful gaze. The mountains are here to stay and both sea and mountains will be engaged in this waltz to the song of creation till the end of time. It is the way it is. Creation is His and nothing happens without His knowledge. He conducts this orchestra, He choreographs the waltz, He picked the dancers. They are but part of a bigger picture. Each submerged mountain becomes a gift home for teeming sea life, homes for millions of barnacles, fauna, anemones; no crook or cranny is wasted, there is purpose in all things.

I consider the 'slipping mountains' in my life... the things I am holding on to even as they slip away from me, as forces outside my