

# Be still and be present: Psalm 46 and the challenge of super-modern anxiety

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores Psalm 46 as a theological response to the pervasive experience of anxiety in super-modern life. Drawing on Kirk A. Bingaman's concept of 'new anxiety' and Marc Augé's theory of super-modernity, this interpretation views contemporary restlessness as both a psychological and spiritual condition arising from over-stimulation, disconnection, and uncertainty. Against this backdrop, Psalm 46 offers an alternative vision of stability grounded in divine presence and trust. A close literary and theological reading of the psalm reveals a movement from chaos to calm: God as refuge in turmoil (vv. 1–3); God's sustaining presence in the midst of instability (vv. 4–7); and God's sovereign command to 'be still' (vv. 8–11). This stillness is not passive withdrawal but an active posture of faith – an invitation to re-centre the self in God's unshakable reality. By reframing anxiety through the lens of divine presence, Psalm 46 offers a theological framework for resilience, stillness, and hope. It speaks to the intersection of theology and mental health by affirming that peace emerges not from control or certainty, but from communion with God. The psalm functions as both a pastoral and theological resource, offering individuals and faith communities a means to encounter healing, stability, and renewed presence amid the relentless pace of modern life.



## Introduction

Contemporary life is characterised by an unprecedented acceleration of information, interpretation, and expectation. This constant flow demands attention, shapes one's perceptions, and conditions the formation of opinion and meaning at a pace that often exceeds our capacity to process it.<sup>1</sup> Within this accelerating pace, psychologist Kirk A. Bingaman argues that a cultural shift has given rise to a form of 'new anxiety',<sup>2</sup> a phenomenon which he later describes as super-modern anxiety.<sup>3</sup>

Anxiety itself is not new, yet its contemporary expression is distinctive. One of its most corrosive effects is the way it draws us away from the present moment. Whether absorbed in anticipated futures or unresolved pasts, we find ourselves increasingly unable to be grounded in the here and now. J. Michael Jordan defines how 'Anxiety is not about what is happening right now and my ability to respond to it or not; it is about possible future events (or future consequences of current or past events) that are beyond my control and may impact me or my loved ones negatively.'<sup>4</sup> This carries significant implications for mental and emotional well-being as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Kirk A. Bingaman states, 'Digital technology is fundamentally changing what it means to be human, in particular what it means to be a religious or spiritual human being, as it becomes an "irreversible" process': Bingaman, "Religion in the Digital Age: An Irreversible Process", *Religions* 14 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010108>. To some extent, digital technology is exerting increasing pressure on human nature, disrupting spiritual well-being, and contributing to super-modern anxiety. Furthermore, Edmond J. Bourne states '[...] our environment and social order have changed more in the last thirty years than they have in the previous three hundred years. Digital information technology has changed our lives drastically in less than twenty years. The increased pace of modern society and the increased rate of technological change have deprived people of adequate time to adjust to these changes': Bourne, *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* (New Harbinger Publications, 2020), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Kirk A. Bingaman, *Treating the New Anxiety: A Cognitive-theological approach* (Jason Aronson, 2007), 6. In addition, Bingaman posits that so-called 'fear entrepreneurs' induce anxiety through fear-based tactics to market and sell their products (p. 2).

<sup>3</sup> Kirk A. Bingaman, "A Pastoral Theological Approach to the New Anxiety", *Pastoral Psychology* 59, no. 6 (2010): 667.

<sup>4</sup> J. Michael Jordan, *Worship in an Age of Anxiety: How Churches Can Create Space for Healing* (IVP Academic, 2024), 11.

spiritual formation, since many people's encounter with God is frequently mediated by attentiveness to the present moment.

The persistent drive to produce meaning and maintain a sense of control amid accelerating change contributes to this instability. As meaning accumulates faster than we can integrate it, our inner world becomes disoriented, mirroring the wider turbulence of super-modernity. What results is a form of spiritual and psychological fatigue that leaves little room for stillness or trust. This article explores these dynamics by offering a brief overview of anxiety, then examining Bingaman's concept of 'new anxiety' within super-modernity. It then turns to Psalm 46, a text that not only names the chaos of human experience but also offers a theological vision of grounded presence. This article argues that Psalm 46 offers more than a confession of divine protection; it articulates a theological framework of attentiveness grounded in divine presence that addresses super-modern anxiety.



## **Anxiety**

Anxiety is a complex phenomenon that resists simple definition, in part because one of its defining features is a response that is often 'disproportionate to environmental threats.'<sup>5</sup> The concept of intolerance of uncertainty (IU) provides a helpful framework for understanding this experience.<sup>6</sup> At its core, IU reflects an unwillingness to tolerate not knowing what may occur in the future, even when the likelihood of negative outcomes is minimal.<sup>7</sup>

Anxiety, understood in this way, is fundamentally future-oriented, directing attention toward what might occur rather than what is present and disrupting attentiveness to the moment. This orientation shapes not only emotional well-being but also engagement with meaning, time, and trust, revealing anxiety's existential and spiritual dimensions alongside its psychological character.

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<sup>5</sup> Donald Capps, *Social Phobia: Alleviating Anxiety in an Age of Self-promotion* (Chalice, 1999), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Jordan, *Worship in an Age of Anxiety*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Robert M. Holaway, Richard G. Heimberg and Meredith E. Coles, "A Comparison of Intolerance of Uncertainty in Analogue Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Generalised Anxiety Disorder", *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 20, no. 2 (2006): 158.



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Stanley Rachman describes anxiety as a ‘tense, unsettling anticipation of a threatening but formless event’, a definition that captures its pervasive and enduring character.<sup>8</sup> While anxiety is closely related to fear, the distinction between the two is less important here than their shared capacity to orient the self toward anticipated threat. Anxiety sustains a state of vigilance that lingers beyond any immediate danger, maintaining attention on imagined futures rather than lived realities.

Of particular significance is anxiety’s constriction of presence. As attention becomes absorbed by possible outcomes, the present is reduced to a means of securing future resolution rather than inhabited as meaningful in itself. This dynamic mirrors broader cultural patterns in which uncertainty is managed through anticipation, interpretation, and control.

When viewed through this lens, anxiety is not simply an individual psychological condition but a mode of relating to time.<sup>9</sup> It prepares the ground for what Bingaman later describes as ‘new anxiety’, in which the struggle to remain present is intensified by the accelerated pace and excess of meaning characteristic of super-modern life. In this way, anxiety reveals how personal experience is deeply entangled with wider cultural conditions, making it a necessary starting point for contemporary theological reflection.

In contemporary culture, anxiety pulls attention away from the present toward an uncertain future, as the pace of life and excess of meaning intensify uncertainty. Within this context, Bingaman’s concept helps situate individual experience within the pressures of super-modern life.



### **New anxiety**

Bingaman describes this concept as a form of anxiety shaped less by the loss of meaning than by its excess. In contrast to earlier theological accounts, such as Paul Tillich’s, who has expressed anxiety as a ‘loss of an ultimate concern, of a meaning that gives meaning to all meanings’,<sup>10</sup> contemporary anxiety arises within a cultural milieu dense with significance and interpretive pressure. Rather than confronting an existential void, individuals now face a surplus of meaning that is difficult to assimilate.

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<sup>8</sup> Stanley Rachman, *Anxiety*, 3rd edition (Psychology Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Jingyuan Liu and Hong Li, “How Individuals Perceive Time in an Anxious State: The Mediating Effect of Attentional Bias”, *Emotion* 20 (2020): 761–72.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Collins, 1952), 54.

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What produces unease is not emptiness but the strain of negotiating competing demands and fragmented narratives that resist coherence.

Bingaman draws on Marc Augé's concept of super-modernity to frame this condition. Super-modern life is marked by acceleration and transience, in which events arise and disappear so quickly that individuals struggle to attach lasting significance to them. Meaning has not vanished; instead, there is insufficient time or space to absorb it before attention is redirected elsewhere. As a result, the present moment becomes increasingly unstable.<sup>11</sup>

Within these conditions, the present is rarely inhabited for its own sake. It becomes something to be processed, explained, or endured while attention remains fixed on what is coming next. The demand to interpret unfolding events fosters a constant future-orientation, reinforcing anxiety rather than alleviating it. Efforts to stabilise experience through anticipation and control often intensify uncertainty, as the future remains fundamentally unpredictable.

The persistent drive to impose meaning on experience fosters emotional fatigue and detachment from the present, diminishing sustained attentiveness. As social and informational pressures continue to accelerate, the demand for constant production and processing only intensifies. Augé's following observation clarifies this dynamic:

What is new is not that the world lacks meaning, or has little meaning, or less than it used to have; it is that we seem to feel an explicit and intense daily need to give it meaning: to give meaning to the world, not just some village or lineage. The need to give meaning to the present, if not the past, is the price we pay for the overabundance of events corresponding to a situation we would call 'supermodern' to express its essential quality: excess.<sup>12</sup>

This dynamic produces a form of disorientation that is both cultural and personal. Anxiety no longer arises solely from individual apprehension but from participation in a world that rarely pauses long enough to allow meaning to settle. The pressure to remain informed, responsive, and forward-looking erodes the capacity for stillness and attentiveness, qualities traditionally associated with spiritual depth and trust.

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<sup>11</sup> Bingaman, *Treating the New Anxiety*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Super-modernism*, trans. John Howe (Verso, 1995), 29.

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The struggle with the present moment is not unique to modernity, though it has intensified in recent decades. Writing in the 1650s, Blaise Pascal had already identified this condition, observing that individuals rarely inhabit the present but instead dwell on the past or anticipate a future happiness. His reflections resonate powerfully in this context. As he writes,

Let each one examine his thoughts, and he will find them all occupied with the past and the future. We scarcely ever think of the present; and if we think of it, it is only to take light from it to arrange the future. The present is never our end. The past and the present are our means; the future alone is our end. So we never live, but we hope to live; and, as we are always preparing to be happy, it is inevitable we should never be so.<sup>13</sup>

Under super-modern conditions, this tendency is amplified, as urgency and excess continually draw attention away from the present moment. Anxiety thus becomes not only a response to uncertainty but a habitual way of relating to time itself.

Seen in this light, ‘new anxiety’ names a condition in which presence is persistently undermined by acceleration and excess. This provides the cultural and theological backdrop against which Psalm 46 can be read not merely as an ancient confession of trust, but as a text that, in its call to relinquish control, speaks directly into contemporary struggles with uncertainty, time, and stillness before God.



### **Assurance and peace in Psalm 46**

Read within its proper literary and theological context, Hebrew poetry can contribute to the alleviation of certain experiences of anxiety. Psalm 46 resists offering a quick fix and instead proclaims God’s sovereignty and sustaining presence as the basis for stability and trust.

The psalm is divided into three stanzas, marked by the repeated use of *selah* (vv. 1–3; 4–7; 8–11). Scholars frequently point to a thematic movement within the psalm: from natural evil to moral evil, and finally to God’s decisive response.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2019), 63.

<sup>14</sup> Rolf A. Jacobson and Karl N. Jacobson, *Invitation to the Psalms: A Reader’s*

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God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble.  
Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;  
though its water roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

Psalm 46:1–3<sup>15</sup>

The poem opens by constructing a metaphorical fortress around the individual or community, built from a triad of divine attributes: *מָחֶסֶת* (*refuge*), *עֹז* (*strength*), and *עֲזָרָה* (*help*).<sup>16</sup> As Samuel Hildebrandt observes, each term contributes a distinct dimension to the portrayal of God as a stronghold.<sup>17</sup> Together, they form a layered portrayal of God’s protective presence – one that responds to human disorientation in the ancient setting of this poem, but which can also be identified as a characteristic of super-modern anxiety. Verse 1 invites a renewed focus on the present moment, affirming that God’s presence is active and close. In the midst of uncertainty, this nearness steadies the heart and encourages trust that God’s presence remains sufficient, even in chaos.

The *HALOT* and Hildebrandt translate the Hebrew term *צָרָה* as *anxieties*,<sup>18</sup> while the *BDB* lexicon renders it as *straits* or *distress*.<sup>19</sup> Hildebrandt’s translation offers a distinctive interpretive perspective, framing God as a helper who enters into the depths of human anxiety. Within this reading, divine assistance is understood as an attentive presence that strengthens the individual, quiets anxious thoughts, and reorients attention toward the present moment within God’s sustaining

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*Guide for Discovery and Engagement* (Baker Academic, 2013), 27.

<sup>15</sup> All scripture is taken from the NRSV translation unless otherwise stated.

<sup>16</sup> This theme is echoed in Martin Luther’s well-known hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”, which draws from Psalm 46 to express trust in God’s steadfast protection amid turmoil. Paul Westermeyer, “‘A Mighty Fortress’ and Psalm 46 in Context”, *Word & World* 34, no. 4 (2014): 398–407.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Hildebrandt, *Vast as the Sea: Hebrew Poetry and the Human Condition* (Fortress Press, 2023), 30.

<sup>18</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. III (Brill, 1996), 1053; Hildebrandt, *Sea*, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Clarendon, 1907), 865 [hereafter *BDB*].

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presence. The terms *straits* and *distress* also offer insight revealing that anxious thought may be understood as an experience of constriction – a narrowing of perception and attentiveness that disorients the self. Yet, within this mental constriction, God enters the situation not as a distant observer, but as a present and sustaining refuge.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.  
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;  
God will help it when the morning dawns.  
The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;  
he utters his voice, the earth melts.  
The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Psalm 46:4–7

The transition from verse 3 to verse 4 introduces a marked sense of calm. Whereas verse 3 is dominated by turbulent waters, verse 4 shifts the imagery to a life-giving stream, for ‘the waters of the stream have a “delighting” effect because they bring about fruitfulness and fullness of life’.<sup>20</sup> The imagery of water thus takes a dramatic turn. Hildebrandt poetically emphasises that the imagery in verse 3 represents the point at which calamity meets life: ‘The sound of the word pair “roar and foam” (*yehēmū yehmērū*) makes the rolling waves come alive in the poem’s imaginative vision and crashes the reality of calamity onto the shore of life.’<sup>21</sup> The psalmist then leads the reader from מַי (waters)<sup>22</sup> in verse 3 to נָהָר (river), which is paired with פְּלֵג (stream, brook).<sup>23</sup> Across these verses, the imagery shifts from chaotic waters to a channelled river, and finally to a life-giving stream flowing toward the city of God. This progression signals a reversal from threat and destruction to life within the presence of God, implying that ‘the waters which threatened destruction have been subdued

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<sup>20</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (CC; Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 463.

<sup>21</sup> Hildebrandt, *Sea*, 31.

<sup>22</sup> Although the term may carry a range of meanings, the context indicates that the psalmist portrays the waters as ‘violent’ and ‘overwhelming’: *BDB* 565.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Davidson, ed., *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, 2nd ed. (Hendrickson, 1850), 625.

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and thus transformed into the river of life.<sup>24</sup> In a similar manner, anxious thoughts that once endangered an individual's well-being mirror the raging, chaotic waters. Yet, like the stream that brings gladness to the city of God, a life-giving presence emerges, bringing peace amid turmoil. Rebecca Watson observes that:

[...] the writers of the Old Testament experienced fear and vulnerability in relation to the sea: they saw themselves as creatures caught up in forces greater than themselves and against which they could not protect themselves. [...] In the Hebrew Bible, the sea is recognised as being entirely under divine rather than human control: a strong sense of creaturely vulnerability, fear of this dangerous aspect of God's creation and awe at his mastery of it precludes any thought of seeking to manipulate this environment.<sup>25</sup>

This interpretive background illuminates the imagery of Psalm 46, in which chaotic waters signify human vulnerability which are countered by the life-giving stream that flows from God's presence. The juxtaposition signifies that even the most fearsome forces remain held within God's sovereign care.

Verses 4b and 5 parallel verse 1, as the triad of attributes of refuge, strength, and help are now located within the city of God. In contrast to the mountains in verse 2, which can be shaken (מֹרֵט), the city of God will not be shaken (מֹרֵט); it will not be moved. Stability and refuge are therefore found in the presence of God.<sup>26</sup> Verse 5b underscores that, just as the sun rises each day, new challenges and troubles inevitably arise for the city, yet God's sustaining presence remains constant. In a similar manner, each

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<sup>24</sup> Sidney Kelly, "Psalm 46: A Study in Imagery", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89, no. 3 (1970): 309.

<sup>25</sup> Rebecca Watson, "Creatures in Creation: Human perceptions of the Sea in the Hebrew Bible in Ecological Perspective", in *Ecology and Theology in the Ancient World: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Ailsa Hunt and Hilary F. Marlow (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 91–92, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350004078.ch-008>.

<sup>26</sup> 'By extension, Jerusalem becomes the nucleus of stability from which the peace and order promoted by YHWH are expected to expand to the whole earth.' Gérard Nissim Amzallag, "The Cryptic Theme of Psalm 46 and the Theology of the Korahites", *Revue Biblique* 122, no. 1 (2015): 28.

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day brings its own trials, while the text affirms that divine presence accompanies these moments, sustaining endurance amid ongoing uncertainty.

This temporal framing resonates intertextually with Ecclesiastes 1:5, ‘The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises’, a verse that articulates the cyclical rhythm of human experience. As Ecclesiastes portrays repetition as a defining feature of life under the sun, Psalm 46 responds by asserting divine constancy within that repetition. While troubles recur like the daily rising of the sun, YHWH remains unchanged within the cycle. Jerusalem thus functions symbolically as a locus of stability amid chaos, representing the divine presence at the centre of recurring disorder.

This theological posture finds further resonance in the teaching of Jesus, particularly in Matthew 6:34, where the emphasis on the sufficiency of the present day mirrors the psalm’s temporal focus. Jesus’ exhortation not to be anxious about tomorrow reflects the same theological logic at work in Psalm 46: divine faithfulness is not exhausted by present turmoil and does not diminish amid the uncertainties of the future. Together, these texts articulate a shared scriptural vision in which trust is grounded not in the absence of disruption but in the enduring presence of God across time.

Verse 6 marks a shift from cosmic disorder to political upheaval, as the nations (גוֹיִם) rage (הִמָּה) , echoing the tumult of the sea from verses 2 and 3. The psalmist intentionally employs the same verb (הִמָּה) to parallel cosmic and political instability, thereby equating their threatening force. Moreover, just as the mountains shake (מוֹט), so too do the kingdoms collapse (מוֹט). This poetic symmetry underscores that both mountains and kingdoms, conventional symbols of strength and permanence, ultimately melt (מוֹג) at the sound of the Lord’s voice, revealing God’s supreme authority over both creation and human power. Verse 6 underscores the power of God’s voice; the Psalmist uses powerful language, stating the whole earth (אֶרֶץ) melts (מוֹג) as ‘he utters his voice’. Such language evokes a theophanic portrayal of God, in which divine speech alone is sufficient to dissolve chaos and impose order. The imagery suggests that situations experienced as overwhelming storms are brought into submission by the sound of YHWH’s voice, emphasising divine sovereignty rather than human intervention.

This depiction resonates strongly with Psalm 29, which employs storm imagery to convey the power and majesty of the Lord’s voice. As Martin G. Klingbeil has demonstrated, storm language within the Hebrew Psalter,

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including thunder, lightning, and dense clouds, functions as a central feature of the Heavenly Warrior metaphor, highlighting both divine power and theophanic presence.<sup>27</sup> Klingbeil further notes that this imagery parallels Ancient Near Eastern iconography associated with Ba'al, in which similar storm motifs visually symbolise authority as both storm and warrior deity.

In Psalm 46, however, such imagery is reoriented to affirm YHWH's unrivalled supremacy, as the divine voice alone brings both the natural world and human kingdoms to dissolution before him. John Goldingay's translation of verse 7 is particularly illuminating: 'YHWH[']s] Armies is with us, Jacob's God is a haven for us.'<sup>28</sup> This rendering foregrounds the protective and militaristic dimensions of divine presence, portraying YHWH as actively engaged on behalf of his people. Within the broader metaphorical framework of the psalm, this assurance functions as a counterforce to destabilising threats, whether external political powers or the internal pressures associated with uncertainty.<sup>29</sup>

Come, behold the works of the LORD;  
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.  
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;  
he burns the shields with fire.  
'Be still, and know that I am God!  
I am exalted among the nations,  
I am exalted in the earth.'  
The LORD of hosts is with us;  
The God of Jacob is our refuge.

Psalm 46:8–11

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<sup>27</sup> Martin G. Klingbeil, "Mapping the Literary to the Literal Image: A Comparison Between Sub-metaphors of the Heavenly Warrior Metaphor in the Hebrew Psalter and Iconographic Elements of the Storm- and Warrior-god Ba'al in ANE Iconography", *Die Welt des Orients* 39, no. 2 (2009): 205–22.

<sup>28</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89* (BCOTWP 2; Baker Academic, 2007), 72.

<sup>29</sup> In *The Message* (NavPress, 2002), Eugene Peterson renders יהוה צבאות as 'God-of-Angel-Armies', a paraphrase that evokes the image of divine sovereignty exercised through heavenly forces on behalf of those who are threatened and vulnerable.

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Verse 8 marks an imperative turn within the psalm, addressing all who are encompassed by its vision and calling them to ‘come’ and ‘behold’ the works of the Lord.<sup>30</sup> This summons directs attention to divine activity that may otherwise remain obscured by uncertainty and anxious thought. The desolation the Lord brings to the earth ‘may, at first sight be alarming, yet the focus rests here not on an ecological crisis, but on God’s crushing of military equipment, on God’s breaking, shattering, and burning of human tools of terror.’<sup>31</sup> The emphasis here falls on God as warrior, not as one who perpetuates warfare, but as one who brings war to an end.<sup>32</sup> J. Clinton McCann Jr. writes, ‘Whereas Israel often sought security in military might, v. 9 affirms that God the warrior fights for peace. The final occurrence of the refrain thus reinforces what v. 9 and the whole psalm have affirmed: Ultimate security derives from God alone.’<sup>33</sup>

Verse 10 introduces a sudden shift as God himself speaks, declaring, ‘Be still and know that I am God.’ According to McCann, ‘Be still’ inadequately captures the force of *הָרַף* since modern readers often interpret it as an invitation to meditation or relaxation. McCann instead prefers the rendering ‘stop’, as reflected in the ESV, or more forcefully, ‘throw down your weapons.’<sup>34</sup> Within this context, McCann’s translation appropriately interprets the verse as a summons to cease hostilities and place trust in God’s deliverance. William P. Brown writes, ‘The command reflects a

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<sup>30</sup> *הָרַף* – to see, behold. ‘A sensory event. The verb usually denotes the seeing of something done by or associated with God (Exod 24:11; Num 24:4; Job 19:26; Psa 11:7; 63:2; Isa 1:1, 13:1).’ Martin Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven: God as Warrior and as God of Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 102.

<sup>31</sup> Hildebrandt, *Sea*, 45.

<sup>32</sup> Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1–72* (Abingdon Press, 2002), 229. Furthermore, in ancient custom, weapons and chariots captured in victory were often burned as a sign of triumph and finality (Josh 11:6, 9; Isa 9:4; Hos 2:20; Exod 39:9). Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 463.

<sup>33</sup> J. Clinton McCann Jr., “Psalms”, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. IV, ed. Leander E. Keck (Abingdon Press, 1996), 866.

<sup>34</sup> However, the *BDB* does offer ‘relax’, ‘abandon’, ‘be quiet’, and ‘do nothing’ as possible translations (pp. 951–52). Craigie also opts for ‘relax’; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC 19; Word Books, 1983), 345. Goldingay opts for ‘stop’ prompting one to acknowledge God as their refuge; Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 72. Calvin opts for ‘be still’; John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 2, trans. James Anderson (Baker Book House, 1979), 204.

new reality, an equilibrium established by God's dramatic intervention in which the weapons of war are silenced, and chaos subsides.<sup>35</sup> Within a contemporary hermeneutical framework, both 'stop' and 'be still' offer complementary readings that address the anxiety of the super-modern age. The verse calls for relinquishing illusory control and recognising the sufficiency of God's presence.

This summons to relinquish control and attend to the present moment finds a close intertextual parallel in Qoheleth's poem in Ecclesiastes 3:2–8, which underscores the inevitability of life's seasons and the limits of human agency. Despite persistent efforts to secure or master the future, the text affirms that much of life unfolds beyond human influence, locating wisdom not in control but in responsiveness to the rhythms of existence and in a willingness to inhabit uncertainty. As Mette Bundvad observes,

Of all the passages in the book of Qoheleth that thematise time explicitly, the poem in 3:2–8 and Qoheleth's subsequent discussion of it are the most firmly anchored to the temporal realm of the present. The poem conjures up an image of a present filled with activity and life experience – a depiction which is also connected to a more abstract understanding of the present however: the deceptively simple poem on the rhythms of daily life is overlaid with abstract reflection on the character and value of the present in human existence.<sup>36</sup>

Read alongside Psalm 46, this emphasis on the present moment reinforces a shared biblical vision in which faith is expressed not through mastery of the future but through trustful presence amid life's various seasons and recurring disruptions.



## **Conclusion**

This article has highlighted anxiety in super-modern culture as a condition shaped not only by psychological factors but by patterns of temporal

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<sup>35</sup> William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 116.

<sup>36</sup> Mette Bundvad, *Time in the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 90.

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dislocation, excess of meaning, and a persistent difficulty with inhabiting the present moment. Drawing on Bingaman's account of 'new anxiety', it has situated contemporary experiences of unease within broader cultural conditions that undermine attentiveness, stability, and trust.

Read against this backdrop, Psalm 46 offers a theologically grounded response to super-modern anxiety. Rather than promising immediate relief or escape from disruption, the psalm articulates a vision of divine presence that stabilises human experience amid chaos. Its imagery of refuge, stillness, and divine sovereignty reframes anxiety not as a condition to be eliminated, but as a context within which attentiveness and trust may be reoriented toward God.

By foregrounding presence over control and stillness over mastery of the future, Psalm 46 provides a theological framework that resists the future-oriented pull of anxiety characteristic of super-modern life. In this way, Psalm 46 demonstrates the enduring capacity of biblical poetry to address contemporary experiences of anxiety and offers a theological framework in which stillness, presence, and trust remain viable responses to uncertainty.