

The Discipleship Project-Fall 2020

Series 1: The Peace of God

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Series Big Idea: Because Jesus offers us His peace, we should have peace flowing through our lives.

Lesson 1.1: The God of Peace

Lesson Big Idea

Because God is the God of Peace, we should have peace flowing through our lives.

FOUNDATION

Scripture Focus: Judges 6:24 (PPT)

Gideon never saw himself as a warrior, a swordsman, or even a dynamic and influential leader. He was simply a survivor in a difficult day of Israel's history. Their enemy had become so strong and oppressive that they were in despair as to how they were going to survive. Just before harvest, the Midianites swarmed in and reaped the grain, leaving nothing behind. Cattle and sheep were taken, and the land was left barren after these attacks.

The people of Israel cried out to God for help. Even though they had drifted from God's original purpose, when everything seemed to turn against them, they remembered their covenant. God heard their cry and set in motion the events that would bring relief from the oppression of Midian.

Gideon, an unassuming young man, was threshing wheat in a winepress to hide from the Midianites and to prevent them from rushing in to steal the grain he had managed to reserve from the harvest. In this obscure hiding place, an angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon proclaiming, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." Gideon was not impressed. Maybe he was depressed. "Pardon me, my Lord," Gideon responded. He certainly did not see himself as a warrior, and now he questioned whether or not the Lord was present with them. Their ancestors had been delivered from Egyptian slavery, but now it felt as though they were again slaves in their own land subjected to the abuse of their oppressors. Where was God in this situation?

God was not bound in the past, but rather focusing on the present, and planning for their future. He reminded Gideon, "I am with you, and *I will* be with you." Gideon was not convinced God had the right person. He confessed personal inferiority, weakness, and fear, but God saw what he could become.

Though it would be a process to take Gideon from where he was to where God wanted him to be, God was patiently leading him. Gideon's response to this initial encounter with God was to build an altar to worship. There he found that God was the Lord of Peace, *Jehovah-Shalom*. In the chaos of trouble Gideon found solace in his relationship with the God of Peace.

FRAME

The Book of Judges is not encouraging literature with feel-good stories. Rather, it records one of the darkest chapters of Israel's history. It is the written record of their downward spiral and continual disobedience to the God who had delivered them from bondage in Egypt and had brought them into the Land of Promise. All of the dire warnings of the past had been forgotten, and they had forsaken their covenant relationship with the one true God, instead, embracing the pagan practices of cultic religions.

The conditions of their chaos are illustrated in numerous stories of oppression and deliverance. When troubles came, they called out to God and a judge was raised up to lead them. In story after story the cyclical pattern of defeat, despair, desperation, and deliverance was repeated. Their lack of spiritual stability caused failures in moral judgment. Four times the writer recognized that, "There was no king in Israel," and twice he followed that statement with the observation, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (See Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25, NKJV)

- **How is Israel's moral decline reflected today in our social and political climate?**

One deliverer, **Gideon**, (PPT) stands out in the Book of Judges as a most unlikely leader who was transformed by God's enablement to bring peace in a time of chaos. Peace only arrived when this timid and introverted man came to terms with his calling from God.

The Crisis of Gideon (PPT) was as much about him as it was about the spiritual and political condition of the entire nation. He was filled with insecurities and felt inadequate to do anything about Israel's situation. Even when the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "The Lord is with you," Gideon protested, "If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?" (Judges 6:12–13, NIV). (PPT)

The ragged edge of fear and frayed nerves along with his desperate attempt for survival caused him to bluntly voice his doubt. He was a man of insecurity who dared not believe that God was present to do anything in their situation. This was a moment of conflicted emotions and a crisis of his faith in the God of the covenant.

The Call of Gideon (PPT) was direct and clear, but God was patient with his negative responses. Gideon needed some convincing. It was not enough to see an angel or even speak to God's representative. He needed more assurance that this was indeed God calling him to lead a rebellion against the oppressive tyrants who had ruled against the Israelites. The Midianites were stronger, well fed, and numerous compared to the people of Israel. This calling had to be more than an apparition or the delusion of a half-starved man grasping for a solution.

God had confidence in Gideon, not just in what he would become, but in who he presently was. He said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand." Then the Lord asked, "Am I not sending you?" (Judges 6:14, NIV). (PPT) God repeated His directive and assured him of His powerful presence.

Gideon was not convinced. His inferiority still prevailed. He lamented, “My tribe is weak; my family is weak; and I am the weakest in my family!” It was ironic that God chose to appear to the one who was most inadequate in his own estimation. Gideon respectfully declined the calling of the Lord. “Pardon me, my lord,” he replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh” (Judges 6:15, NIV). (PPT)

God’s calling makes all the difference. Yes, God qualifies those whom He calls, but sometimes when He calls the qualified, He still has to convince them that they have the ability to accomplish the mission.

God was patient and comforting to the reluctant deliverer. His assurance was **the consolation of Gideon.** (PPT) “I will be with you,” said the Lord, “and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive” (Judges 6:16, NIV). (PPT) That must have been an astonishing, if not somewhat frightening, assertion. The qualifier was God’s promise to be with Him. Gideon had no confidence in himself. The only hope he had for success was found in the promise of God’s accompaniment. God *with us* makes all the difference. If God is *with us*, we can be assured of His ability to accomplish the calling, no matter how impossible circumstances seem to be.

- **Have you ever felt overwhelmed with a calling to do something that seemed to be far beyond your ability to accomplish? Explain.**

A somewhat consoled Gideon needed more assurance, and he respectfully asked for confirmation. “Give me a sign,” Gideon said. He had to know that this was indeed the Lord God who was asking him to do such a great thing. He prepared an offering to the Lord of goat meat in a broth along with an abundance of bread from the meager supplies he possessed. He placed the meat and bread on a rock and poured the broth over the offering. As he did, the angel of the Lord touched it with his staff and a fire suddenly sprang up consuming the sacrifice. Immediately the angel of the Lord vanished.

Gideon suddenly knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he had spoken to the Lord face to face. Now he was overcome with fear for his own life. The words of Moses rang in his ears, where God had said, “No man shall see Me, and live” (Exodus 33:20, NKJV). He experienced the thrill and the fear of the wonder of God in a way few men had ever experienced.

God was quick to assure Gideon that he was not going to die. The fear of death is real, tangible, and often terrifying. But God spoke peace into the concern and trepidation that Gideon was feeling. In response, Gideon built a memorial—a place that would stand as a reminder of this incredible moment in his life. “So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it The Lord Is Peace” (Judges 6:24, NIV).

Gideon identified the Lord as a God named Peace. He conjoined His essence with His character and declared Him to be *Yahweh-Shalom* or “The Lord is Peace.” That title became one of the compound names and attributes by which God would forever be identified.

Gideon built an altar (PPT) (PDG) in a time of crisis after God met him in that special place. Let there always be a place for an altar in our most difficult days. We can be assured that God is with us and He will bring peace into our chaos.

- **Have you found that an altar can be both a refuge in times of trouble and a sanctuary of peace where you can offer thanksgiving for God’s goodness? Explain.**

Gideon’s altar also served as **a place for sacrifice, (PPT)** a place where that which was offered in worship was dedicated “unto the Lord.” Any other dedication would be pointless. A sacrifice is only an offering, unless it is a sacrifice and it is given unto the Lord.

Gideon created **a place named Peace. (PPT)** It may seem odd that he would dedicate a place called “The Lord is Peace” while Israel’s families were under attack and they were living in times of oppression and conflict. However, in the middle of all that was going wrong, Gideon found a place that was right, and it brought him peace. What better name for that place than to identify it for what had happened in his life?

A hospital chapel is designed to be a place of refuge for those who are seeking God’s favor as they deal with a difficult diagnosis or when they are reeling from the sad news of death. It is provided as a place where one might find solace and peace in an environment of uncertainty.

The altar that Gideon constructed was **a place that remained. (PPT)** It stood the test of time. The altar remained at least until the time the Book of Judges had been written. That is the reason the text recorded, “Unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites” (Judges 6:24).

Memorials serve to preserve memories and are built as places of permanence. They are places to remember the past faithfulness of God and inspire future faith. May our altars have that lasting quality of endurance.

- **Are there places in your spiritual experience that you look back to as reminders of God’s faithfulness? Explain.**

There are some methods that we may employ to help us **find the peace of Christ in times of crisis. (PPT)** While this may not be an exhaustive list, perhaps it will serve to prompt your own development of a formula for finding peace in challenging times.

1. **Create a personal place of prayer. (PPT) (PDG)** The psalmist wrote, “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust’” (Psalm 91:1–2, NKJV).
2. **Commit yourself to God’s calling. (PPT)** Psalm 37 tells us, “Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:5, NKJV).
3. **Confirm that He is with you and He is your peace. (PPT)** This was Paul’s benediction, “Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all” (II Thessalonians 3:16, NKJV).
4. **Continue a lasting legacy of devotion. (PPT) (PDG)** Biographies of Pentecostal pioneers and the testimony of our elders share the faith of our founders with succeeding generations. Likewise, the impact of our devotion during times of crisis will be an enduring memorial and a lasting witness to our families and friends. Moses commanded, “Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren” (Deuteronomy 4:9, NKJV).

Know that the God of Peace is present. (PPT) He is eternally present, and He is with us. He is the, “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14). He is Jesus Christ, and He is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, NKJV).

Because of who He is, we can **believe His promises. (PPT)** Receive the God of Peace, Jehovah Shalom! Resist the temptation to surrender in the face of trouble. He promised to prepare a place for us (John 14:1–3). Know that His promises are true.

We must **embrace His peace. (PPT)** We have a choice in the matter. He said, “Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1). We are not helpless and battered about without recourse. Fear is our enemy. The unbridled mind will wander into the deep abyss of fear and depression. Helplessness and discouragement will lay claim upon our souls, but do not allow them to prevail. Resist the enemy. Stop the other voices. Hear the one who speaks peace.

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). **(PPT)**

Confidently **resist the temptation of anxiety. (PPT) (PDG)** Fearful fretting produces anxious nervousness, which is the complete opposite of what God desires for our lives. Jesus desires to bring us peace. Peace in the Hebrew text is shalom, which implies more than peaceful feelings. Shalom is “wholeness, completeness, harmony, prosperity, welfare, and tranquility,” all which God desires for us.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6–7, NLT)

- **How is anxiety a temptation? Do we enjoy worry? What are God's instructions concerning it?**

FINISH

After a few initial challenges, Paul's second missionary journey began when Paul invited Silas to accompany him. Things went well at first as they began visiting and encouraging believers and spreading the gospel into new areas. However, when they purposed to go into the province of Asia the Holy Spirit prevented it. Then they sought to visit Bithynia, but again the Spirit stopped their plans. Finally, in Troas, Paul received direction through a vision. He saw a man pleading to him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9, NKJV). They immediately made plans to go, concluding that God had given this vision for direction.

Even when following the call of God there may be opposition, conflict, and trouble that weigh heavy on our emotional and physical stamina. Though Paul and Silas had great results in Macedonia beginning at Philippi, they were also arrested, beaten, chained, and imprisoned. Even after the miraculous deliverance through the earthquake-prison break, there was continued conflict with many in the region. This is what Paul referred to when writing to the Corinthians. He confided, “When we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us” (II Corinthians 7:5–6, NKJV).

MANUSCRIPT

Not everything goes according to our plans. “That’s life,” is the commonly used explanation when things go awry. Often, as Christians, we talk in glowing terms about how wonderful life is when you know Jesus. That is absolutely true; however, that is not the complete picture of the Christian life. Christians still have challenges, conflicts, mood swings, disappointments, and fears. The difference is in our opportunity to take our problems to the Lord in prayer and to experience His peace.

When fears assail, when conflicts abound, and when all seems lost, remember God is our consolation. The God of Peace is our comfort.