



SESSION 4

OUR PEACE

▶ **The Point**

God's peace helps us rise above our circumstances.

▶ **The Passage**

Judges 6:11-16,22-24

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

I grew up in a time when “peace” was a popular slogan, but it was also an excuse for a way of life that was often anything but peaceful. It’s hard to imagine anyone who wouldn’t want peace, but the daily news feeds make us painfully aware that peace is severely lacking: wars and skirmishes around the world; riots on college campuses; and political unrest in our communities. We long for authentic peace.

Peace is not simply something needed “out there.” We need peace in our churches, our homes, and our own hearts. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could live with an absence of conflict in our lives, a time with no squabbling or obstacles? Even when we experience moments of “peace and quiet,” they are often short-lived. Peace is possible, and it is a peace that is far more than just an absence of conflict. The Old Testament judge Gideon lived in a time of conflict, but he discovered a peace in the midst of his circumstances. He discovered he could trust God to give peace because He is our Peace.

▶ **The Setting**

Once the Israelites were settled in the promised land, they forsook the Lord and worshiped other gods. God punished them by handing them over to their enemies. When the Israelites cried out to God, He would raise up an individual to deliver the people. Unfortunately, the Israelites never seemed to learn and time and again returned to their false gods. On one occasion, God handed the Israelites over to the Midianites for seven years, after which the Israelites cried out to the Lord for deliverance. (See Judg. 6:1-10.)

What does the Bible say?

Angel of the LORD (v. 11)—A heavenly messenger who is either a being sent by God or God Himself, the angel of the LORD is thought by some to be the pre-incarnate Christ.

Midianites (v. 11)—A people descended from Midian, the son of Abraham by his wife Keturah, the Midianites lived mainly east of the Jordan River and south of Edom.

Manasseh (v. 15)—The firstborn son of the patriarch Joseph. Manasseh's descendants settled in the promised land half on the east side of the Jordan River and half on the west side.

The LORD Is Peace (v. 24)—Gideon had experienced God's peace as the Lord accepted his offering and blessed him. With this assurance, Gideon could confidently carry out the Lord's commands.

Judges 6:11-16,22-24

11 The angel of the LORD came, and he sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites.

12 Then the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said: "The LORD is with you, valiant warrior."

13 Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened? And where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about? They said, 'Hasn't the LORD brought us out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian."

14 The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!"

15 He said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's family."

16 "But I will be with you," the LORD said to him. "You will strike Midian down as if it were one man."

.....

22 When Gideon realized that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, "Oh no, Lord God! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!"

23 But the LORD said to him, "Peace to you. Don't be afraid, for you will not die."

24 So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD Is Peace. It is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites today.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, locate a one-minute portion of a video clip of ocean waves with soothing music. Prepare to share the video clip using your laptop or tablet. Instruct volunteers to spend one minute without thinking of any of the stress or cares they may have at this time; ask them to imagine themselves alone on a beautiful beach, with nothing to do and nothing to worry about. Challenge class members to enjoy a time of peace before asking Question 1.

Notes

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 37 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“Where do you go when you need some peace and quiet?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 38 of the PSG. Introduce the key theme of God as our Peace by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 38 of the PSG: **“God’s peace helps us rise above our circumstances.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking the Lord to show us the many ways He has helped us rise above our circumstances. Thank Him for His peace as we engage in our Bible study.

Dotted lines for taking notes.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

Judges 6:11-13

¹¹ *The angel of the LORD came, and he sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites. ¹² Then the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said: "The LORD is with you, valiant warrior."*

¹³ *Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened? And where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about? They said, 'Hasn't the LORD brought us out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian."*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Judges 6:11-13 on page 39 of the PSG.

RECAP: Read the first paragraph after the Scripture on page 39 of the PSG.

It's one thing to be in the same room with people, but it's quite another for the people in that room to enjoy peace and unity. That was the case with the tribes of Israel. In the Book of Judges, the Israelites had entered the promised land, and the land had been divided among the tribes of Israel. But even though Israel occupied the land, no longer were the people united in heart and mind. They had lost the sense of being a unique people; they had compromised God's standards. The closing verse of the Book of Judges well summarizes this period: "Everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (21:25).

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to offer additional information on the background for the conversation Gideon had with the angel of the LORD.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 39 of the PSG: **"Where do you see people questioning God's goodness and presence today?"**

TRANSITION: Peace eluded Gideon when he looked at his circumstances. In the next verses we see that peace eludes him when he looked at his shortcomings as well.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What do you find surprising about these initial verses?

Judges 6:11-13 Commentary

[Verse 11] The Midianites were oppressing the Israelites because of the Israelites disobedience to God. (See Judg. 6:1-10.) True peace eluded them as long as they looked only at their circumstances. Eventually the Israelites cried out to God, and a messenger, identified as **the angel of the LORD**, came to talk to a man named Gideon. The angel of the LORD appears elsewhere in Scripture. (See Gen. 16:7-13; 22:11-12; Ex. 3.) Some scholars think he was a supernatural being sent by God, either an angel or possibly Jesus in a visible form (the pre-incarnate Christ, the second Person of the Trinity). This being speaks with God's authority and in places seems to be God Himself. Describing the angel of the LORD's interaction with Gideon, the writer states, "The LORD turned to him" (v. 14) and "the LORD said to him" (v. 16). Other passages in Scripture also seem to identify him as God Himself. (See Gen. 16:13; Ex. 3:4.)

The angel of the LORD came and **sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite**. The clan of the Abiezrites was part of the tribe of Manasseh. (See Josh. 17:2.) Ophrah was probably located in the northwestern part of Manasseh's territory on the western side of the Jordan River.

Gideon was down in a **winepress**; he **was threshing wheat**. The purpose of threshing wheat was to separate the grain from the stalks. Normally, this was done above ground, over a flat rocky surface on a high spot. However, because Gideon was afraid of being seen by **the Midianites** (see Judg. 6:1-5), he was trying to hide his grain by using a wine vat that had been carved into the rock to thresh the wheat.

[Verse 12] The angel of the LORD's greeting—"The LORD is with you, valiant warrior"—could have been understood as a simple greeting from a traveler. The words could also have been an acknowledgment of respect. The words for *valiant warrior* could have referred to a person's social status. Apparently, Gideon and his family were prominent members of this region. Gideon's father, Joash (see v. 11), had constructed a sizable altar to the (false) Canaanite deity Baal (see vv. 25-26), and Gideon had at least ten servants. (See v. 27.) On the other hand, the greeting spoken from a divine perspective could also reflect God's promise to be with Gideon and to enable him to be the deliverer his people needed.

[Verse 13] Gideon's response indicates he understood the words as a normal greeting and so responded with a question: "**Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened?**" Gideon wanted to know why his generation was not seeing the same kinds of **wonders** as when God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Instead of feeling that God was with them, they felt that He had **abandoned** them to the oppression of the Midianites. God had already given the answer to Gideon's question through the prophet He had sent to the Israelites in response to their plea for His help. (See vv. 7-10.) Though God had given His people clear directions on how to worship and serve Him, they had refused to trust and obey Him. That was why they were suffering. That was why there was no peace in their land.

Judges 6:14-16 Commentary

[Verse 14] Just as God has done countless times with people, He would not permit Gideon's lack of faith to stop His divine plan. God's peace eluded Gideon as long as he was focused only on his own shortcomings rather than focusing on God. Notice that this time the biblical writer did not say the angel of the LORD spoke to Gideon but that **the LORD turned to him**. Though apparently at this point Gideon still did not realize the true identity of his guest (see vv. 13,22), the writer wanted his readers to be clear about who was speaking. Just as God had spoken a clear and direct word of divine commission to Moses (see Ex. 3:10), He placed His call on Gideon: **"Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!"**

[Verse 15] While God was promising to supply all the power Gideon needed for this great task, Gideon was still looking at his situation only from a human point of view. From Gideon's address of his visitor with the words **"Please, Lord,"** it is unclear as to whether or not at this point he had recognized the heavenly nature of this visitor. In any case, again Gideon asked the right question: **"How can I deliver Israel?"** As if God did not already know, Gideon modestly informed Him that his family was not great and powerful and added that he was the youngest in his family and therefore the least qualified for such a huge task.

After Joseph rose to power in Egypt, he had two sons. He named his firstborn **Manasseh** because God had enabled him to forget his grief at having been sold into slavery by his brothers and all the troubles he had experienced as a result of his enslavement. (See Gen. 41:50-52.) Before Joseph's father Jacob died, he included Joseph's two sons in his blessings and inheritance of his own sons. (See 48:1-20.) After Joshua led the twelve tribes into the promised land, he assigned the tribe of Manasseh one section of land on the eastern side of the Jordan River (see Josh. 13:29-31), and another section on the western side. (See 17:1-18.) Gideon was a descendant of Manasseh.

[Verse 16] Gideon's guest is again identified not as the angel of the LORD but rather as "the LORD" Himself. In response to Gideon's question, God promised that His presence would go with Gideon into battle—**"I will be with you."** God also promised that the battle would be easily won—**"You will strike Midian down as if it were one man."**

When God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint a king to replace Saul, God told Samuel, "Humans do not see what the LORD sees, for humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). God chose the most unlikely individual from the family of Jesse to be king, a young shepherd boy named David. Similarly, Gideon was the least from among his family. Gideon genuinely did not think he had the ability to do the task being given to him, and he was right. However, God never calls anyone to a task without providing all that is necessary to accomplish that work. (See 2 Cor. 9:8; Phil. 4:13; 1 Pet. 4:10.)

Judges 6:22-24 Commentary

[Verse 22] Gideon was beginning to realize that peace comes to us as we look to God. He asked for a sign to confirm that God's presence would be with him and that he would be victorious over the Midianites. Gideon asked that he be allowed to prepare and bring his visitor a gift before he left. (See Judg. 6:17-18.) The word translated "gift" in verse 18 could also be translated "offering." Gideon rushed to prepare an extravagant meal for his guest. This was more than generous hospitality; it was meant as an offering to God. (See v. 19.) When Gideon returned with his offering, he was instructed to put the meat and bread on a stone and to empty the pot of broth over them. (See v. 20.) As the angel of the LORD placed the tip of his staff on the stone, flames erupted, consuming the offering. Then the angel of the LORD vanished. (See v. 21.) The fact that the entire offering was consumed confirmed that Gideon had indeed found favor with the Lord.⁵

At this point Gideon clearly knew that his visitor was **the angel of the LORD**. God had told Moses, "You cannot see my face, for humans cannot see me and live" (Ex. 33:20). Gideon realized that he had **seen the angel of the LORD face to face** so he feared for his life. Gideon did not distinguish between the Lord's messenger and the Lord Himself. He knew that either way he could not survive the visible presence of the Holy Lord God.

[Verses 23-24] Though he no longer saw a visible presence, suddenly Gideon heard a voice assuring him that he would not die. Instead of announcing Gideon's sentence of death, **the LORD** told him **"Peace to you. Don't be afraid, for you will not die."** Gideon would not die; he would live under the protection of God's gracious power. In response, Gideon erected an altar but not for a sacrifice. Instead, this altar would serve as a lasting memorial to God's call for Gideon to serve as Israel's deliverer from the Midianites. Even more importantly, the altar would remind the people that **The LORD Is Peace** (*Yahweh Shalom*).

"The LORD Is Peace" is the name Gideon gave to the altar. Gideon himself had experienced God's peace as the Lord accepted his offering and spoke the blessing, "Peace to you." With this assurance Gideon could confidently begin to carry out the Lord's commission to lead Israel against its enemies. (Gideon would later seek further assurances from God before the battle with the Midianites. See Judg. 6:36-40.) When they defeated their enemies and obeyed the Lord, Israel could then also experience the Lord's peace.

Many years later Isaiah the prophet would announce to God's people that one day a unique child would be born who would be known as the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul explained to new Jewish and Gentile believers that through Jesus' sacrificial death He "is our peace" (Eph. 2:14). Jesus had removed centuries of hostility that had existed between these two groups. (See v. 14.) Furthermore, Jesus died for both Jewish and Gentile believers so that He might "reconcile both to God ... through the cross" (v. 16). While Gideon was focused on peace from his enemies the Midianites, we know as Christians that despite the attacks of our enemy Satan, we can always rise above our circumstances by living in God's peace.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 44 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following activities:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Receive Jesus as your Prince of Peace.** If you have never experienced God’s peace, admit your sin, turn from it, and turn to Jesus by faith. Then you will live in peace with God.
- ▶ **Enjoy true shalom in your relationship with God.** If you have received Christ as Savior but are not experiencing wholeness, you may be stuck in a cycle of sin. Ask God to show you any areas of spiritual neglect and disobedience. Confess them, turn from them, and turn back to Him.
- ▶ **Live at peace with others.** Jesus our Peace has broken down all dividing walls. Is there a broken relationship in your life that needs to be made whole? Go to that person in the power of Christ and seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 44 of the PSG:

The world rightly lifts up peace as a virtue. But the peace that comes from *Jehovah Shalom*, God Our Peace, is a peace that truly passes all human understanding.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking God for being our Source of peace. Ask Him for the strength to share that message of peace with others this week.



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THE STRENGTH IN SILENCE

BY CHRIS SURRATT

We are afraid of silence, especially as small group leaders. If there is silence in the room, then that means no one is talking. And if no one is talking, then we are surely failing as facilitators. But I believe we are missing out on an effective tool if we completely eliminate silence from a group meeting. There is something powerful about creating intentional space in a group meeting. In fact, there are examples throughout the Bible where silence and solitude are commended:

- ▶ “After the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was a voice, a soft whisper” (1 Kings 19:12).
- ▶ “A time to tear and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:7).
- ▶ “My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger” (Jas. 1:19)
- ▶ “I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from him” (Ps. 62:1).

So how do we plan for and best utilize the power of silence in our small groups? Here are three ways to take advantage of silence in your group.

1. Use silence to encourage group members to speak.

It seems like an oxymoron to use silence as a tool for participation, but it works. An effective facilitator should only be talking 30 percent of the time. Remember that you have read the questions ahead of time. It will take everyone else a few moments to process the material before they are ready to answer. It's uncomfortable to let a question sit there for a few beats, but if you can let the awkwardness go, that silence will eventually be broken by someone. You can miss a great conversation by speaking too quickly.

2. Use silence to allow a moment to sink in.

There will be moments during a Bible study where the group needs a few seconds to take in what was just read or said. Effective speakers use pauses in their speeches to make important points resonate. It's the same thing with a group discussion. Next time a powerful verse is read or someone makes a thought-provoking comment, pause a second or two before moving on. Those two seconds of silence will make the moment stickier.

3. Use silence to meditate on Scripture.

Before launching right into prayer time at the end of the discussion, take a few moments to allow the group to meditate on the Scripture from the Bible study. Ask someone read a key verse or two aloud and then be silent as you allow God's Word to prepare your hearts for prayer. This time doesn't have to be long—maybe two to three minutes—but fight the temptation to break in too soon. Meditation can help lead to application.

Chris Surratt is a ministry consultant and coach with more than 23 years of experience serving the local church. Chris served on the Executive Teams at Cross Point Church in Nashville, Tenn., and Seacoast Church in Charleston, S.C., prior to becoming the Discipleship and Small Groups Specialist for LifeWay Christian Resources. He is the author of *Small Groups for the Rest of Us: How to Design Your Small Groups System to Reach the Fringes*.

This article originally appeared on the Groups Ministry blog. You can find similar articles on leading your Bible study group at lifeway.com/groupministry.