

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 46** and ask **Question #1: Where do you go when you need some peace and quiet?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG page 47**, to the author's reflection on growing up when "peace" was a slogan in the 60s and 70s, but make the point events during that time were often anything but peaceful.

SAY: "Today, we all long for authentic peace, and that only comes through the peace Jesus offers in John 14:27."

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 47: God's peace helps us rise above our circumstances.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to allow us to experience His peace, the peace "which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7).

SESSION 4 OUR PEACE



The Point

God's peace helps us rise above our circumstances.

The Bible Meets Life

Who doesn't long for peace? We'd love an absence of conflict in our lives, a time with no squabbling or obstacles. Even when we have those moments of "peace and

quiet," they are often short-lived. But God offers us a far greater and lasting peace, even while facing conflict with others or battling our circumstances. In Gideon's encounter with God, he discovered he could trust God to give the Israelites peace because of who God is.

The Passages

Judges 6:11-16,22-24

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 (Judg. 6:1-10).

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.”

Verse 11. The Book of Judges records the story of the Israelites after they conquered and settled the promised land. Though they were God’s chosen people, and He had promised them great blessings (Deut. 28:1-14), they were also given clear guidance on how to live (30:16-18). Sadly, once the Israelites were settled in the promised land, they began to worship false gods. As a result of their unfaithfulness, God punished them by allowing other nations to attack and steal their crops and animals. Then they would repent and cry out to God for relief, and God would send a leader (a “judge,” 2:18; or “deliverer,” 3:9) to lead them to victory over their enemies. The four part cycle:

1. The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord
2. God would punish the Israelites.
3. The Israelites would cry out to God for relief and repent.
4. God would send a judge, a leader, who would deliver the people and lead them to victory over their enemies.

This cycle went on for many generations.

1▶ Judges 6 introduces another repetition of this same four-part cycle with the words, “The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.” After Israel’s sinful disobedience, the second part of the cycle began: God punished them, in this case, by sending a people called the Midianites to make their lives miserable (more about the Midianites later). These invaders were so numerous that the text describes them as “a great swarm of locusts” (v. 5). The Israelites had no choice but to flee and ended up living “in the mountains, caves, and strongholds” (v. 2). This continued for seven years (v. 1) so

STUDY THE BIBLE

Judges 6:11-13

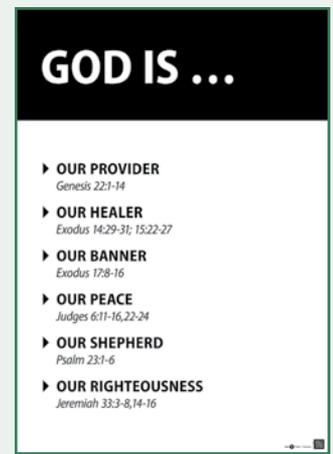


15 minutes

LEADER PACK: Display Pack

Item 1: “God Is ...” Overview

to highlight the names of God we have viewed so far.



SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 52.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 48-49** to the cyclical pattern found in the Book of Judges:

- *Sin and rebellion*
- *Punishment*
- *Repentance and deliverance*
- *Spiritual renewal*
- *Sin and punishment repeated*

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible**Commentary 1** on page 53

and this page to show how this repetitive cycle played out in Judges 6:

1. *"The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord."*
2. *God punished them.*
3. *"The Israelites cried out to the Lord."*
4. *The Lord sent a prophet (v.8), then the Lord called Gideon as the judge, Deliverer of His people.*

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Judges 6:11-13.

GUIDE: Refer members to

DIGGING DEEPER on **PSG page 49** to explain who the Midianites were.

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible**Commentary 2** on page 53

and this page to provide more background about the Midianites.

that "Israel became poverty-stricken" (v. 6). Then came step three in the cycle: "the Israelites cried out to the LORD" (v. 6).

Usually, step four in the cycle soon followed but not this time. Rather than sending another judge to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites, "the LORD sent a prophet" (v. 8). His message was direct, bold, and full of God's authority. He reminded the Israelites that "the LORD" (Yahweh, God's personal name that stressed His covenant authority over the people of Israel) had delivered them from their Egyptian bondage. He had enabled them to drive out the peoples that were in the promised land and given the land to Israel (vv. 8-9). God had reminded them that He was Yahweh and that He was the only One they were to worship and obey, but they refused (v. 10). That is why God had allowed the Midianites to come and oppress the Israelites for seven years. ◀

2 ▶ Genesis 25:1-2 notes that Midian was among several sons born to Abraham and his concubine wife Keturah. Before Abraham died he sent all his other concubine wives and their sons away to the east so that only Isaac, the child of God's promise, remained to inherit all of Abraham's wealth (Gen. 25:5-6). Though the descendants of Midian were primarily located east of the Jordan River to the south of Edom, their camels enabled them to range from Gaza in the south (Judg. 6:4) to the Valley of Jezreel in the north (v. 33). The use of camels which moved quickly and could go without water for three to four days, gave the Midianites a military advantage over the Israelites.

Unlike some oppressors, the Midianites were not interested in exterminating the Israelites but rather in simply living off everything they had. The Midianites would appear (accompanied by their allies the Amalekites and Qedemites) after the Israelites had planted their crops. They would set up base camps and completely raid the land, taking both crops and animals. ◀

After the prophet delivered his word from God, another messenger, identified as **the angel of the LORD**, came to talk specifically to a man named Gideon (v. 11). The angel of the LORD appears elsewhere in Scripture: He spoke to Hagar in the wilderness (Gen. 16:7-13); He called from heaven to stop Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac (22:11-12); and He appeared to Moses from inside the burning bush (Ex. 3). Because he is identified as "the angel" (Judg. 6:11-12, 20-22) and because He was visible to Gideon (v. 12), 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 as well (Gen. 16:13; Ex. 3:4). ◀

The writer provided specific geographical data in verses 11 and 24. He noted that 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 (Josh. 17:2). While the exact location of the town is uncertain, scholars believe that this Ophrah was located in the northwestern part of Manasseh's territory on the western side of the Jordan River (another town of the same name was located in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin). This divine messenger came to speak to Joash's son **Gideon**. The name *Gideon* means "one who hacks or cuts up things," which seems prophetic in light of his actions in Judges 6:25-27.

When the angel of the LORD came to Ophrah, Gideon was down in a **winepress**; but he was not crushing grapes to make wine. Rather he **was threshing wheat**. The purpose of threshing wheat was to separate the grain from the stalks. Normally, the shafts of cut wheat were scattered over a flat, rocky surface on a high spot. Either oxen were driven over the grain or a person would beat the grain with some type of implement in order to knock the grain loose from the stalks. Once the grain had been knocked loose, the laborer would use a large wooden fork to toss the material into the air so that the wind could blow away the lighter, unwanted material and the heavier grain would fall back on the rocky surface. However, because Gideon was afraid of being seen by **the Midianites** (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.

3 ▶ Verse 12. Perhaps the angel of the LORD did not allow himself to be visible when he first sat under the tree and then at some point changed his appearance so that Gideon could see him. Or, maybe he was visible throughout his earthly visit, but Gideon was too busy working to notice him until he spoke. His greeting to Gideon—"The LORD is with you, **valiant warrior**"—may have various meanings. Apparently, from Gideon's response ("Please, my lord," v. 13), he understood the words as a simple greeting from a traveler. He thought this person was pronouncing a blessing: "the LORD be [or is] with you." 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

GUIDE: Refer group members to the introduction of Gideon on **PSG pages 49-50**. Note these points from the **PSG**:

- *The irony of Gideon being called a "valiant warrior" when he was in hiding.*
- *Gideon questioned the angel's salutation: "the LORD is with you."*
- *Gideon expressed doubt by asking, "where are all His wonders that our fathers told us about?"*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** on this page and page 56 to provide an explanation to verses 12-13.

DISCUSS: Question #2

(PSG, p. 50): What causes us to sometimes doubt God's presence with us?

(Alternate: Where do people often hide when they feel threatened?)

TRANSITION: "In the next verses we will see the directive God gave to Gideon and Gideon's response."

STUDY THE BIBLE

Judges 6:14-16



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Judges 6:14-16.

SAY: "God gave the following assignment to Gideon, along with these words of promise:"

- *Go in your own strength.*
- *Deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian.*
- *I am sending you.*
- *I will be with you.*

were prominent members of this region. Gideon's father, Joash (v. 11), had constructed a sizable altar to the (false) Canaanite deity Baal (vv. 25-26), and Gideon had at least ten servants (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. At first, Gideon heard the words only as a normal greeting and so responded with his question. He and his people had been waiting for seven years for God to reveal His powerful presence and to deliver them from their enemies the Midianites. Gideon and his people knew God had delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and from the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. Gideon wanted to know why his generation was not seeing the same kinds of **wonders**. Instead of feeling God was with them, they felt He had **abandoned** them.

Give Gideon credit; at least he was asking the right question. God *had* promised to bless His people. But when Gideon looked at his circumstances, he did not feel very blessed. "Why?" was the right question, but God had already given the answer through the prophet He had sent (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

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."

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 (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 (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!"**

4 ▶ 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. Gideon's response sounds much like the words of Moses (Ex. 3:11). 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. 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 (2 Cor. 9:8; Phil. 4:13; 1 Pet. 4:10). ◀

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 (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 (48:1-20). When the promised land was divided, Joshua assigned the tribe of Manasseh one section of land on the eastern side of the Jordan River (Josh. 13:29-31) and another section on the western side (17:1-18). Gideon was a descendant of Manasseh and lived in the western section of their tribe's allotment. ◀

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 gave him two promises. First, God promised that His presence would go with Gideon into battle—**"I will be with you."** Second, God promised that the battle would be easily won—**"You will strike Midian down as if it were one man."**

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** to explain Gideon's response:

- *I'm not able to do this.*
- *My family is weak.*
- *I am too young.*

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 51**, and read the following quote:

"When we question our suitability for any task God assigns to us, we are actually questioning God's choice of us and His ability to empower us for the assigned task. God never calls us to a task He does not give us the strength to do."

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 51): **How do we recognize when God is calling us to a task?**

DISCUSS: Question #4
(PSG, p. 52): **When have you questioned your suitability for a God-given task?**

(Alternate: Why do personal shortcomings cause us to doubt that God can use us?)

TRANSITION: "In the next verses we will see Gideon's reaction when he realized he has been speaking to an angel of the Lord."

STUDY THE BIBLE

Judges 6:22-24



10 minutes

READ: Read Judges 6:22-24.

SAY: "Gideon is famous for asking for signs (see verses 17-21 and 36-40). He got the surprise of his life when the angel vanished from his sight."

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary 5 on page 59 to provide an explanation to the phrase "I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face."

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 22-25** (Leader's Guide pages 28-31) to the article "The Angel of the Lord" for a more in depth explanation.

When God sent the prophet Samuel to the family of Jesse 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). Passing over Jesse's other sons, God chose the most unlikely one to be king, a young shepherd boy named David. In a similar manner, God chose Gideon to deliver his people from the Midianites.

Judges 6:22-24

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.

KEY WORDS: **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.

Verse 22. Gideon was beginning to realize that peace comes to us as we look to God. Gideon 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 (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. The words translated as "young goat" indicate that this was not just any goat but one of the best of the flock specifically selected for the offering (v. 19; see Gen. 27:9). The bread was made from "a half bushel of flour" and the broth was brought in a pot (Judg. 6:19). The size and quality of the meal clearly indicates that this was more than generous hospitality; this effort was meant as an offering to God. When Gideon returned, he was instructed to put the meat and bread on a stone and to empty the pot

of broth over them (v. 20). As the angel of the LORD placed the tip of his staff on the stone, flames erupted. The flames immediately consumed everything that had been placed on the rock, and the angel of the LORD vanished (v. 21). The fact that the entire offering was consumed confirmed that Gideon had indeed found favor with the Lord.¹

5 ▶ At this point Gideon clearly knew that his visitor was not merely an angel but that he 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. ◀

6 ▶ **Verse 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** greeted him with the best words possible: **“Peace to you. Don’t be afraid, for you will not die.”** Gideon would not die. Even better, he would live under the protection of God’s gracious power. Gideon responded in the same way Moses had after God enabled the Israelites to defeat the Amalekites (Ex. 17:15). 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. The altar would remind the people that **The LORD Is Peace** (*Jehovah-Shalom* or *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 that Jesus “is our peace” (Eph. 2:14). 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. ◀

1. Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 263.

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on **page 58 (PSG, p. 52)** to explain the phrase *The LORD is Peace*.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 6** to provide more information about *The LORD Is Peace*.

GUIDE: Refer members to **PSG pages 53-54:** to the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, and its meaning:

- A blessing or greeting
- Wholeness or completeness
- Wholehearted devotion

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 54** to explain that Jesus is our peace.

DISCUSS: Question #5 (PSG, p. 54): **How can our actions and attitudes demonstrate that we follow the God who is our peace?**

(Alternate: *Where do you need peace in your life right now?*)

DO: Encourage members to share responses to the activity **“Shalom—Peace—Wholeness”** on **PSG page 54**.

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:**
God's peace helps us rise above our circumstances.

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 55)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Encourage group members to experience peace with God and the peace of God in this week leading up to Easter. Jesus' death and resurrection makes it possible for us to have peace with God.

PRAY: "Father, thank You for sending Your Son Jesus so that we can have peace with You. Give us Your peace as we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus this week."

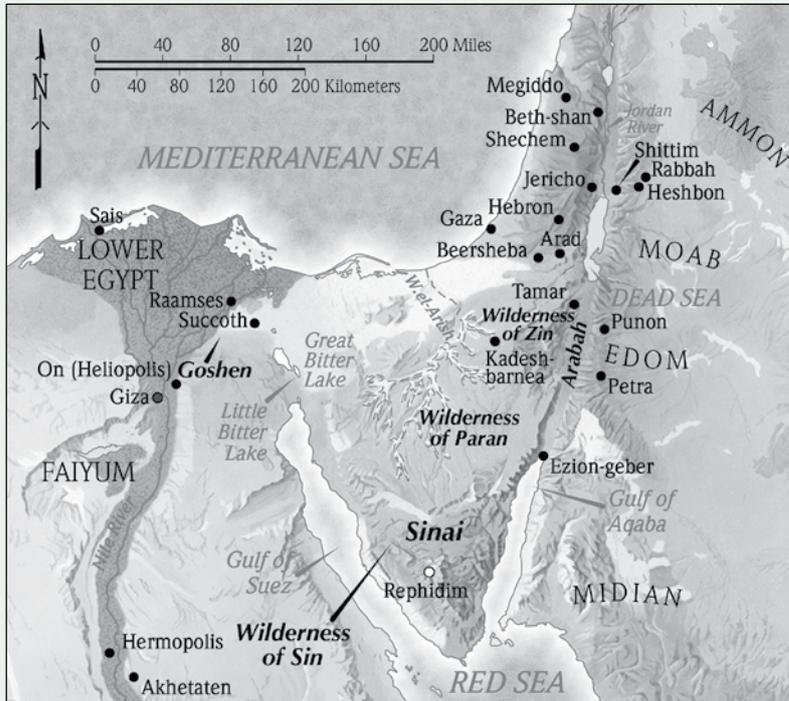
LIVE IT OUT

You can rise above your circumstances because of God's peace. How will you live out that truth this week?

- ▶ **Receive Jesus as your Prince of Peace.** If you have never experienced God's Peace, admit your sin, willingly turn from it, and turn to Jesus. You can simply verbalize your desire by asking Jesus to come into your heart and allow you to 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, it may be that you are stuck in a cycle of sin and disobedience. 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—the One who gives you peace—and seek forgiveness and reconciliation.



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



HOLMAN BIBLE ATLAS

Map showing Midian.

Midian was one of the sons of Keturah (Abraham's wife after Sarah died).

The Midianites, who traveled by camels with small herds of livestock, had a reputation for being fierce raiders, sweeping in from the desert to augment their economy with captured livestock and agricultural produce.

Gideon knew this enemy and was terrified of the Midianites. Yet God gave victory; Gideon prevailed and this Midianite defeat would be legendary in Israel for centuries to come.

The excerpt above is from the article "The Midianites in the Time of the Judges" (Winter 2016-2017), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

When we trust Christ as Lord and Savior, he reconciles us to God and brings us into a relationship with Him. The Prince of Peace gives us peace through His salvation.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.



Free additional ideas for your group are available at

BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra