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Our Peace



Where do you go when you need some peace and quiet?

QUESTION 1

God's peace helps us rise above our circumstances.



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 is hard to imagine anyone who wouldn’t want peace, but the daily newsfeeds 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.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Judges 6:11-13 (CSB)

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."

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. The people of Israel, who had been set apart as a holy people unto God, 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).

The Book of Judges is marked by a cyclical pattern: sin and rebellion, followed by punishment, then followed by a season of repentance and deliverance. The deliverer was usually an anointed "judge"—a military leader provided by the sovereign hand of God. The judge would bring deliverance and spiritual renewal would come to the people for a short period of time. Then the cycle of sin and punishment would be repeated; each time it would become more severe (2:14-22). Ultimately, Israel lost the fruit of their land and labor.

At the beginning of Judges 6, the Israelites were again in the sinful phase of this cycle, so God disciplined them by allowing the Midianites to oppress them. The Israelites called out to God in their despair, and the Lord sent a prophet who reminded them of God's goodness (6:1-10).

Where do you see people questioning God's goodness and presence today?

QUESTION 2

God in His abundant mercy was prepared to send a deliverer. Without fanfare, we are told that the angel of the Lord sat under an oak tree as Gideon was beating out wheat in his winepress. A winepress—a vat buried in the ground—surely was an odd place to thresh wheat, but Gideon was hoping to hide the wheat from the Midianites. It seems even stranger, under those circumstances, that the angel called Gideon a “valiant warrior” (v. 12). After all, this “warrior” was at that moment in a wine vat hiding from the enemy. No doubt, God saw qualities in Gideon he himself was unaware he possessed.

Gideon was focused on Israel's difficult circumstances. He questioned the angel's message in verse 12: “The LORD is with you.” Gideon called into question the presence and power of God and asked why so many bad things were happening to Israel. His thinking was simple. If God was with them, the Midianites would not be pillaging their fields. The people of Israel would not be living like animals in caves. He was correct in thinking God's people should not be living in defeat, but he was wrong to conclude that their situation was due to the Lord's weakness.

Gideon's second question was similar to the first: “And where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about?” (v. 13). The Israelites frequently rehearsed the story of God's redemption and provision. They knew God had delivered Israel from bondage and miraculously saved them at the Red Sea. The story of God's miraculous provision during the wilderness wanderings was also well known.

Gideon actually questioned the integrity of God, suggesting that God had brought them out of Egypt only to abandon them and hand them over to the Midianites. When we focus on our circumstances, we can't properly see God's hand at work. The result is a lack of peace and contentment.

Judges 6:14-16 (CSB)

¹⁴The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!” ¹⁵He 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.”

How would you characterize Gideon's response to the angel?

QUESTION 3

How do we recognize when God is calling us to a task?

QUESTION 4

The Lord didn't directly answer Gideon's question or respond to his accusation that He had abandoned them. Instead, He gave Gideon a commission: "Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!" (v. 14).

But instead of responding in humble gratitude for the privilege God had given him, Gideon attempted a second strategic end run. This time he questioned his own ability. These responses sound much more pious and humble. "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" (v. 15). While his protest may sound humble, it was simply an excuse and an affront to God. Gideon focused on his perceived shortcomings, but God had created Gideon and had specifically chosen him for this task.

God's response to Gideon was firm but reassuring. "I will be with you" (v. 16). When God calls us to a task, He assures us of His presence and His power to enable us to accomplish our assigned mission. God accompanies us as we follow Him. This has been God's pattern and plan throughout time. The Great Commission is accompanied by the promise, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Gideon asked for a sign. He brought an offering and the angel touched it with the staff in his hand. As a result, fire sprang forth from the rock, consuming the offering (Judges 6:17-21). No doubt, the consuming fire leaping from a rock was a great clue for Gideon that he had received a message from God.



Judges 6:22-24 (CSB)

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.

In the Old Testament, "the angel of the LORD" often referred to the presence of God Himself. So when the angel of the Lord disappeared right after causing Gideon's offering to be miraculously consumed by fire (vv. 17-21), Gideon realized he had been in the presence of the Lord. His response was one of holy fear.

In that moment, Gideon realized he was in God's favor. Trouble was all around because of the Midianites, but God was with him—and that was all the assurance and peace he needed. In grateful response, Gideon built an altar and named it "The LORD Is Peace"—Jehovah-Shalom.

The Hebrew word *shalom* is usually translated in English as "peace." Shalom is one of the most significant terms in the Old Testament. The fundamental idea conveyed by the word *shalom* is wholeness in one's relationship with God. It defines a harmony in the relationship based on completing a transaction. In our relationship with God it means a sense of contentment, freedom from guilt, and satisfaction with life itself. Of course, this does require that we must have a pure heart before God and live in obedience to His Word and His plan.

We might wonder how we, with our human failings, can ever be at peace with a holy God. We can only answer that question by understanding the full significance of the name Jehovah-Shalom. The prophet Isaiah wrote that a child would be born who would be called Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). The Prince of Peace died to reconcile sinful man to holy God. Jesus is our Peace; He tore down the wall that separates us from God and from others (Ephesians 2:14). Jesus is Jehovah-Shalom!

How can our actions and attitudes demonstrate that we follow the God who is our peace?

QUESTION 5

"God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

C.S. LEWIS, *MERE CHRISTIANITY*

GOD OUR PEACE



A friend has recently experienced several painful and significant life events in a short amount of time. He now questions God's ability and willingness to respond to his prayers.

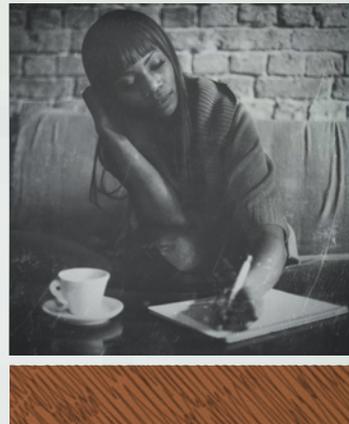
Based on today's study, what truth from God's Word would you share with him about the Lord?

Based on today's study, what truth would you share with him about peace?

LIVE IT OUT

We can have God's peace no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in. How will you live out that truth this week?

- » **Dig deeper.** Read more of Gideon's story in Judges 6–7. Make a list of all the strange things God called Gideon to do, as well as all the times He encouraged Gideon. Reflect on what this means for God's work in your life.
- » **Evaluate your heart for areas of disobedience.** 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.
- » **Get an accountability partner.** If you don't already have one, find a trustworthy friend who is growing spiritually and commit to keep each other accountable in your walks with Christ. Make it your goal to help each other remain focused on Jesus.



Fear and doubt will come. When they do, we can rest assured that abiding peace is available to us. **Gideon's story reminds us: God Himself is our Peace.**

My thoughts



SEVEN BENEFITS OF KNOWING GOD

BY ROB TIMS

There is a mild to moderate aversion in some Christian circles toward talking about the benefits of knowing God. This aversion is a reaction to our tendency to approach God as consumers. “What can you do for me, God? I’ll consider Christianity based on your answer.” But I think we can go too far and ignore the fact that to know God is to have some pretty amazing things. Psalm 16 mentions seven in particular (all verses from the CSB).

First, to know God is to have protection. Verse 1: “Protect me, God, for I take refuge in you.” David appears to have been in crisis, a common occurrence based on all the Psalms he wrote. Yet in these crises, David knew God had his back. To know God is to have His protection.

Second, to know God is to have provision. Verse 2: “I said to the LORD, ‘You are my Lord; I have nothing good besides you.’” God knows all of our needs. Yet what kind of God would know our needs and not give them to us? Fortunately, to know God is to have His good and perfect provision.

Third, to know God is to be drawn to those who are righteous.

Verse 3: "As for the holy people who are in the land, they are the noble ones. All my delight is in them." Our relationship with God is not a solitary one. To know Him is to know His people, who are in the same relationship with Him as we are. And we are not only to know God's people, but also we are to desire to grow with them.

Fourth, to know God is to be troubled by sin.

Verse 4: "The sorrows of those who take another god for themselves will multiply; I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood, and I will not speak their names with my lips." Sin and the danger associated with it is ever-present. We

are under a constant barrage of temptation to worship other gods. That God protects us, provides for us, and gives us a desire for His righteousness does not lead us to be ignorant or absent from the brokenness of our world. To know God is to be aware of sin.

To know God is to be joyfully content in all circumstances.

Fifth, to know God is to be joyfully content.

Verses 5-6: "LORD, you are my portion and my cup of blessing; you hold my future. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance." David's life was full of strife, but also full of God. To know God is to be joyfully content in all circumstances because He is enough. Like Paul, David knew the secret of contentment; namely, knowing God.

Sixth, to know God is to be faithfully guided.

Verses 7-8: "I will bless the LORD who counsels me—even at night when my thoughts trouble me. I always let the LORD guide me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken." I'm coming up on 10 years of living in the Nashville area. Therefore, I rarely use my phone for directions. Familiarity with my surroundings has bred a spirit of independence when it comes to getting where I need to be. Life, however, will never be so familiar. I'm in constant need of guidance and counsel, and I have it because I know God.

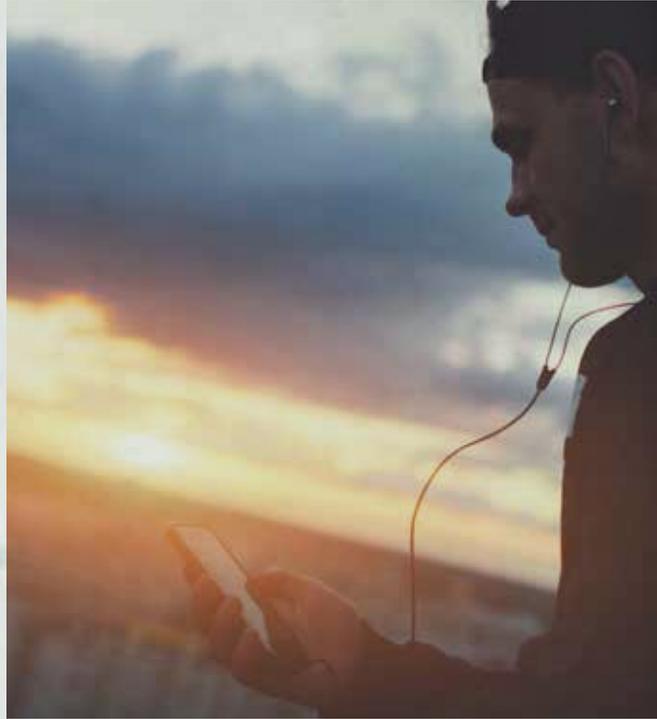


Seventh, to know God is to claim Jesus' future as my own.

Verses 9-11: "Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices; my body also rests securely. For you will not abandon me to Sheol; you will not allow your faithful one to see decay. You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures." Though he likely didn't understand how or why he could enjoy God eternally, David certainly anticipated doing just that. On this side of Jesus, we know exactly how this eternal benefit of knowing God will come (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 15). Our knowledge of God does not end with our last breaths; at death, our knowledge of Him only just begins.

"Because he is at
my right hand, I
will not be shaken."

I understand the fears associated with talking about the benefits of knowing God, but I also understand the dangers of not talking about them at all. We do ourselves and the lost world a great disservice if we neglect the good news of what it means to know God.



Rob Tims serves on a team at LifeWay Christian Resources that develops customized Bible studies for groups. He is the author of the book *Southern Fried Faith: Confusing Christ and Culture in the Bible Belt*.