

## Facilitator Notes for "Knowing God by Name"

### Lesson 12 – Yahweh Shalom – The LORD Is Peace - Judges 6:1-24

PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.

## Questions

**Historical Background** – After the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness because of their disobedience, Moses died and leadership fell to Joshua, Israel's military leader and Moses' aide. Under Joshua, the younger generation of Israelites took possession of Canaan, the promised land, defeating their enemies as they went. When the land was conquered, Joshua divided it among the 12 tribes of Israel and the Israelites settled into the wonderful inheritance that God had promised to them through Abraham hundreds of years before. Joshua was a godly leader, obeying God completely and God blessed Israel with prosperity and "rest from all their enemies around them" (**Joshua 23:1**).

After the death of Joshua, Israel began to forget *Yahweh*, and they turned to the gods of the people around them by intermarrying with the Canaanites and practicing idolatry. What follows is one of the darkest periods in the history of God's chosen people. When the Israelites turned their back on *Yahweh*, forgetting all that he had done for them, God allowed their enemies to oppress them, making life extremely hard and difficult. After a while, the Israelites would call out to God, repenting of their sin, and God would then raise up a ruler – a "judge" – to deliver them from their enemy. Israel would then enjoy a time of peace until the cycle would repeat itself.

This pattern is so prevalent during the time of the "judges," that is referred to as the cycle of 1) *Sin* (the Israelites turn from God); 2) *Suffering* (a foreign enemy oppresses); 3) *Supplication* (the Israelites repent and cry out to God); 4) *Salvation* (God raises up a deliverer-judge); 5) *Silence* (the Israelites would enjoy a time of peace and blessing). *Gideon*, whom we will study in this lesson, was a *judge* that God raised up to deliver his people, during this period in Israel's history.

**Optional:** In **Joshua 23**, read Joshua's farewell address to his people before he died. What specific *commands* did he give the Israelites (**23:6-11**) and what specific *warnings* did he deliver (**23:12-16**)? Over the next few hundred years, Israel repeatedly ignored both Joshua's commands and warnings, thereby reaping the consequences.

Read Judges **6:1-10**.

1. Describe the oppression that the Israelites were under in **6:1-6**. What parts of the "sin cycle" mentioned above do these verses cover?

At this time in their history, the Israelites found themselves at the mercy of the invading Midianites. For seven years the camel-riding Midianites swept across the land, helping themselves to crops and animals. Israel was helpless to resist the invaders and literally took to the hills to save their lives. The destruction was so great that it could be described in terms of a plague of locusts that stripped the land bare. The Midianites left nothing and the Israelites were at the point of starvation.

We pick up the story at step 3 in the "sin cycle." The Israelites had already turned from God and God had allowed a 7 year oppression. Now the people cried out to God – and before God raises up a judge to deliver them, he sends a prophet (**16:8-10**) to tell the people why they are being oppressed and that they need to repent.

- ♥ Look back over your life. When have you seen something similar to the "sin cycle" play out in your life? What does this cycle teach you about 1) yourself and 2) about God? Are you still caught in this cycle or do you feel that, for the most part, it is broken in your life? How so?
  - ♥ When was a time that God let you reap the consequences of your disobedience, but then used the consequences to bring you back in relationship with himself? Were you grateful or resentful? Why?
2. What was the "evil" (**6:1**) that the Israelites did in God's sight (**6:8-10**)? What did God mean when he said, "But you have not listened to me." (**6:10**)?

The people forgot who they were and all God had done for them in the past. They forgot that they belonged to God because he had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and that they were living in Canaan only because he had given them this land. They acted out their disobedience by intermarrying with the Canaanites and adopting their idols and religious systems.

When God said, "You have not listened," he meant that they had **disobeyed** his commands.

- ♥ Look again at the words of God's prophet in **6:7-10**. How would you complete this sentence: "What God really wants from me is . . ." **God wants our love and devotion and loyalty. He wants us to worship only Him because he is the one and only true God. Later, God gave the command to "love the Lord you God with your whole heart, soul, strength and mind."** Are you able to give God what he wants? Why or why not?
- ♥ How do you usually call out to God for relief or help? What usually happens? Share a time when God graciously helped you after you cried out to him for help.
- ♥ How do you "listen" to God? How do you know what he expects and desires from you? How would you teach/help someone else to listen to and obey God? **Discuss with your small group whether everyone hears God the same way and how much we can help each other in hearing God.**
- ♥ We don't usually take up with the "gods of the Amorites" (**6:10**), but how do we, today, fall into idolatry? How would you define "idolatry?" What are some idols you struggle with in your own life?

**An idol in the Old Testament was anything that one might shape for use as an object of worship. Idols distort one's concept of God, who is spirit and who must be worshiped in harmony with his nature. Human beings who worship idols are led from dependence on God to reliance on something that expresses their own religious thoughts and motivations.**

**Idolatry today is still the worship of something created as opposed to the worship of the Creator Himself. In the New Testament period the term idolatry began to be used as an intellectual concept. Idolatry became not the actual bowing down before a statue but the replacement of God in the mind of the worshiper. Colossians 3:5 points in this direction: "So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires. Don't be greedy for the good things of this life, for that is idolatry." At this point the modern believer must understand the malicious nature of idolatry. While we may not make or bow down to a "statue", we must be constantly on guard that we let nothing come between us and God. As soon as anything does, that thing is an idol.**

**In addition to material objects such as houses, land, and cars, idols can be people, popular heroes, or those whom we love. Objects of worship can even include things like fame, reputation, hobbies, pride, and good deeds done in the name of God. Idolatry is basically anything we love more than God or anything we live for, rather than living to love and honor God, with joy and thanksgiving for all he has done for us. Idolatry is loving and living for God's good gifts instead of loving and living for God, the giver of good gifts.**

Read **Judges 6:11-18**.

3. From what you read in **6:11-18**, what are some observations you can make about Gideon? What kind of person is he? How would you describe his character? What are his strengths and his weaknesses?

**Gideon was hiding from the Midianites by threshing grain hidden in a winepress. Normally threshing floors were located in exposed areas so that the wind could easily blow away the chaff. We get the picture that Gideon is a bit timid and insecure. Gideon is addressed the angel of the Lord as "mighty warrior" more in anticipation of what he would become rather than what he was at the moment.**

**Gideon did not recognize the visitor and complained that the oppressions proved that God was not with Israel, when the messenger said "The Lord is with you." At this time, he did not see that the oppression was a result of Israel's disobedience.**

**When the messenger called him to deliver and save Israel, Gideon claimed weakness, saying he was from the weakest clan in his tribe and he was also the least among his family. After hearing God's promise, "I will be with you," Gideon wanted proof that this visitor was real and was speaking for God. He was courageous enough to speak out and asked the angel to stay until he could come back with an offering (gift).**

- ♥ When have you doubted God's goodness because of your circumstances (**6:13**)? What restored your faith that God would take care of you?

- ♥ When have you been tempted to blame God for your circumstances? Is God ever the cause of our difficult circumstances? **Usually our difficult circumstances are not from God but are the consequences of ours or another person's choices and actions.** Why or why not?
  - ♥ When are you most likely to forget all the good things God has done for you in the past? What does it usually take to return you to a place of gratitude? What can you do to help yourself remember?
4. What connection do you see between Gideon and **1 Corinthians 1:26-29**? Why do you think God chooses to work this way?

**1 Corinthians** says that God doesn't call us to follow Christ because we are wise in the world's eyes, or powerful, or wealthy. Instead, God deliberately chooses to use "weak" and "foolish" things and people to do his work. God uses people and circumstances that are "despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all" to do what he thinks is important. This way, no one can take credit for what is done except God alone – and it prevents pride and arrogance.

It's not surprising that God chooses weak, insecure and timid Gideon to deliver his people. Gideon's strength came from the fact that "God was with him" and because he chose to respond to God's call with trust and obedience. Gideon did eventually deliver his people and became a great leader. He did great as long as he remembered that his strength came from God. Later in his life, he became proud and arrogant and reaped the consequences of his attitude.

- ♥ When have you ever felt like Gideon (**6:15**)? What assurances did *Yahweh* give Gideon (**6:12, 14, 16**)? **I'm with you and I'm sending you.** When God asks you to do a difficult thing, would this be enough assurance for you? Why or why not?
- ♥ What has been the most difficult act of obedience you have ever had to do? Why was it so difficult? What happened as a result of your obedience? Was it worth it? Why or why not?
- ♥ Why did Gideon want a "sign" from God (**6:17**)? **He wanted to make sure the visitor was real and that he was really speaking for God.** Have you ever asked for a "sign" from God? What happened? When would it be wrong to ask God for a "sign" to prove he was really speaking to you? **If we need a "sign" or confirmation that God is speaking to us, God is usually gracious in giving us that confirmation. However, we should not ask for a "sign" if God has already given us a direct command or warning in scripture. In this case, he has already made his will clear and we don't need confirmation. For example, we don't even need a "sign" to make sure we are not to lie, cheat or steal, etc.**

Read Judges **6:19-24**

5. What "sign" was given Gideon to prove that *Yahweh* was leading him? How did Gideon react and why (**Exodus 33:19-20**) ?

The "sign" that God gave Gideon was that of a fire spontaneously consuming the offering of food that Gideon prepared and brought to the visitor and then the visitor disappearing. It was at this point that Gideon realized he had been talking with God himself. Gideon was afraid that he would die for having seen God because of what God told Moses on Mt. Sinai. At that time, Moses asked to "see" God and God said that Moses could see "God's goodness," but that no human could look directly at God and live. This led to the belief that if anyone "saw" God, they would die. God addresses Gideon's fear and tells him he is not going to die. (Gideon did not look directly at God's glory and power, but saw him in the body of the visitor.) It is also very common for humans to react with fear and awe when they encounter God in a very real way because they become acutely aware of God's holiness and perfection and human's sinfulness. When humans encounter God, they have an automatic response of not being able to bear the Presence and glory of God.

- ♥ In what ways has God reassured you that you were doing what was right? What are some things we can do when we are not sure whether God is leading us to go in a certain way? From your experience, what seems to be some of God's "usual ways" of leading and guiding us?

Perhaps no other area of the spiritual life elicits more interest and attention than that of hearing God's voice. Many have said, "If God would just sit down with me and tell me what to do, I'd do

it." In *Hearing God*, Dallas Willard tells of three lights we can consult in determining what God wants us to do: **circumstances**, **impressions** of the Spirit (hearing God in your heart), and passages from the **Bible**. "When these three things point in the same direction . . . we can be sure the direction they point is the one God intends for us."

- ♥ For you, what is the hardest thing about obedience or doing God's will? 1) Figuring out what it is; 2) Choosing from the many options God may give you; 3) Taking risks; 4) Explaining your actions to others; 5) Taking action once you know what it is you are to do. What in this story encourages you?
- 6. In the Bible, God often revealed a new name for himself when a person was in a time of crisis. Keeping in mind that *shalom* carries the meaning of *wholeness, security, well-being* and *harmony*, why did Gideon, at this time, need to know that Yahweh was *peace*?

Israel was in a time of chaotic struggle because of their disobedience and as a result, God's Presence was not with them. They were hardly living and they certainly were not experiencing God's peace – his wholeness, security or well-being. God called Gideon to be the one who lead his people in resistance against their oppressors. More than anything, Gideon needed to know that God was with him – **and God's presence always brings his peace**. By building an altar to *Yahweh Shalom*, Gideon was declaring his faith that God would be with them and that they, again, would experience God's peace – wholeness, security, well-being and harmony with God and with each other.

- ♥ What ideas or images come to you mind when you consider the concept of *peace*? Does your own personal experience of peace seem to have its source in God or in favorable circumstances? How so?
- ♥ Why, when times are dark, do we long for peace? How does peace help us face adversity? How important is the experience of peace to you? To what lengths will you go to find it?

*Shalom* – *peace* – is the deepest desire and need of the human heart, and it represents the greatest measure of contentment and satisfaction in life. *Shalom* is the opposite of *restlessness* and to experience it means that we are at rest – physically, emotionally and spiritually. *Shalom* comes from living in harmony with God which results in harmony with ourselves and others. *Shalom* does not mean an absence of storms or conflicts, for it is not dependent on circumstances. *Shalom* comes from practicing the presence of God and it can be ours at all times in all situations.

- 7. Note from the verses listed below what you learn about the *source of peace* – *where it comes from and how we experience it*. Also note anything else that you learn about *shalom* – God's peace.

**Isaiah 26:3 -**

Peace comes from trusting God and **fixing our thoughts on him**. Fear and anxiety cannot exist if we **practice God's presence**. God's presence always brings his peace – and we keep our thoughts on Him, we will also have his peace.

- ♥ What does it mean to keep your mind and/or thoughts "steadfast" or "fixed" on God? How have you done that? Why does this bring "perfect peace"? Is it possible to control your thoughts? How so?

**John 14:27; 16:33- (you may have a lesson with a typo of 16:22)**

Jesus doesn't just give us peace – he gives us "**his**" peace. Peace is a gift from God and God's peace can't even be compared to the peace the world might offer – because the world's peace is dependent on being in good circumstances.

The peace that Jesus gives is with us even when we are in "trouble" or hard times. Jesus and his peace is with us not matter what trials or suffering we may experience.

- ♥ How is Jesus' peace different from the world's peace? On a scale of 1 (smooth sailing) to 10 (furious storm), what is your peace quotient? Do circumstances affect your peace? Why or why not?
  - ♥ If peace is Jesus' gift, is there something we have to do to receive it or is it automatic? How so?
- As we have already seen, we experience Jesus' peace when we practice his Presence (stay connected) and keep our thoughts on Him and his promises to us.

### **Philippians 4:6-7 -**

These verses are a promise from God. If we pray, with thankfulness and tell God what we need, instead of worrying or being anxious – God promises that his peace will guard our hearts and minds. His peace is a "guard" that won't let fear or anxiety come into our hearts or minds.

- ♥ What is your responsibility in these verses? What is God's? How is God's peace beyond human understanding? From **what** does peace *guard* the heart and mind? How does this work?

### **Hebrews 12:7, 11 -**

We will go through trials and suffering in this world – and God the Father will use these hardships "train" (discipline) us just as an earthly parent trains and corrects their children to that they become mature, healthy adults. Our time of suffering is never fun and is usually painful – but God promises it won't last forever and if we endure and cooperate with what God is doing in our lives, he promises a harvest of PEACE and right living when it is over.

- ♥ How has God *trained* or *disciplined* you in the past? Did his discipline lead to peace? Why or why not?

## ♥ Heart Therapy

Using the *meditative method* of *Lectio Divina* described on the next page,  
read and pray over **Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)**.

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.)*

### **What is God saying to you through these verses?**

*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.*

**2 Thessalonians 3:16**

BELOW IS THE SUPPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURE FOR THIS LESSON THAT CAN BE PRINTED OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME

## NIV

**1Corinthians 1:26-29** Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. **27** But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. **28** He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, **29** so that no one may boast before him.

**Exodus 33:19-20** And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. **20** But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.”

**Isaiah 26:3** You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

**John 14:27** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

**John 16:33** “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

**Philippians 4:6-7** Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**Hebrews 12:7, 11** Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? **11** No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

## NLT

**1Corinthians 1:26-29** Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world’s eyes, or powerful, or wealthy when God called you. **27** Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. **28** God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, **29** so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

**Exodus 33:19-20** The LORD replied, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will call out my name, ‘the LORD,’ to you. I will show kindness to anyone I choose, and I will show mercy to anyone I choose. **20** But you may not look directly at my face, for no one may see me and live.”

**Isaiah 26:3** You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you!

**John 14:27** “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn’t like the peace the world gives. So don’t be troubled or afraid.

**John 16:33** I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

**Philippians 4:6-7** Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. **7** If you do this, you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

**Hebrews 12:7, 11** As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined?

**11** No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.