



Lesson 12 ~ *Yahweh Shalom* – The LORD is Peace

Judges 6:1-24

♥ Heart Talk

When you meet with your small group, share something about your continued experience of **being silent for 5 minutes before God** OR share something about the **Heart Therapy Exercises from Lesson 10 or 11**. In what area of your life are you seeing God's healing? How have you reached out to help someone else who is fighting a battle? How have you used the *Daily Prayer* given in **Lesson 11**?

Introduction

Shalom is a Hebrew word that is translated *peace* in English, but the Hebrew word means much more than *stillness* or *tranquility*. *Shalom* also includes the idea *wholeness, completeness, perfection, safety and wellness*. *Shalom* is a common term of greeting or farewell in modern Israel. When *shalom* is said, it is not simply saying *Hello* or *Have a good day*. *Shalom* expresses the hope that the person may be well in every sense of the word – fulfilled, satisfied, healthy and in harmony with themselves, God and others.

Yahweh Shalom – The LORD is Peace is found only once in the Bible, but the truth that God *is* peace is found throughout the Old and New Testaments. God is the *God of peace*, Jesus is the *Prince of Peace* and *peace* is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Scripture tells us real peace can only be found in God, for peace is much more than a feeling or state of being. Peace, *shalom*, is a deep desire and need of the human heart and true peace is a Person, the Lord himself – *Yahweh Shalom*.

♥ Heart Preparation

Jesus' Encouraging Words to You . . .

*My face is shining upon you, beaming out Peace that transcends understanding. You are surrounded by a sea of problems, but you are face to Face with Me, your Peace. As long as you focus on Me, you are safe. If you gaze too long at the myriad of problems around you, you will sink under the weight of your burdens. When you start to sink, simply call out, "Help me, Jesus!" and I will lift you up. The closer you live to Me, the safer you are. Circumstances around you are undulating, and there are treacherous looking waves in the distance. Fix your eyes on Me, the One who never changes. By the time those waves reach you, they will have shrunk to proportions of My design. I am always beside you, helping you face **today's** waves.*

Jesus Calling (January 16) by Sarah Young

*Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you. (Psalm 116:7). Continue to try and practice the discipline of **sitting quietly before God, in silence, for 5 minutes** in order to prepare your heart to receive from God. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to focus on God by saying a *breath prayer* – a prayer that can be repeated to God in one breath, like: *I belong to You – You are with me – I'm depending on You – I want to know You – I love You, Lord, etc. Listen* for what God will say to you as you focus on him.*

A Prayer to Help Prepare Your Heart

*I'm finding myself in the midst of You, beyond the music, beyond the noise
All that I need is to be with you and in the quiet, hear Your voice
Word of God speak, would You pour down like rain
Washing my eyes to see Your majesty
To be still and know that You're in this place
Please let me stay and rest in Your holiness
Word of God speak . . .*

By MercyMe

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?

♥ 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**)?

♥ 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 . . ." 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?

♥ 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?

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?

- ♥ 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? 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?

- ♥ When have you ever felt like Gideon (**6:15**)? What assurances did *Yahweh* give Gideon (**6:12, 14, 16**)? 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**)? 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?

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**) ?

- ♥ 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?
 - ♥ 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 your 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*?

- ♥ 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 -

- ♥ 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 -

- ♥ 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?

Philippians 4:6-7 -

- ♥ 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 -

- ♥ 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

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a Latin term which means "diving reading." It is a method of reading the Bible that involves *listening with the heart*. It's an ancient practice that dates back to early church.

In *lectio divina*, we use a few verses or phrases from the Bible and read it over and over, very slowly, reflecting on each word and phrase, all the while paying attention to the impact the words have on our hearts. In this way we are "praying the Scriptures." It is very different from *studying* Scripture, in which we come to the text to try to understand its meaning. In *lectio divina*, the Bible passage "*studies us*."

How to Practice Lectio Divina

1. **Select a passage from the Bible** – not more than a few lines or verses.
2. **Sit in a comfortable position** and be still for a minute or more, taking time to quiet your body and mind. Relax and breathe deeply in order to focus.
3. **Ask God** to speak to you from his Word. Be aware that you are about to listen to the *living* Word of God (**Hebrews 4:12**).
4. **First reading.** Read the passage through, one time, slowly. Pause between each clause or phrase. After you finish this first reading, be silent for a minute or two.
5. **Second reading.** Read the text slowly once again, pausing between phrases. But this time pause even longer and be aware if any of the words or phrases catch your attention, or seem to stand out in some way. Make a mental note of those. After you finish the second reading, write down those special words or phrases.
6. **Third reading.** Reread the passage up to the word or phrase that touched you in some way. When you reach that word or phrase, stop and repeat it a few times.
7. **Pondering.** Reflect for a while on the phrase that moved you. Repeat it a few more times. Let the words interact with your thoughts, your memories or any other Bible passages that come to mind. Let it touch your heart, desires and fears. Begin to wonder, *What might God want to say to me specifically?* Let the words summon you into a gentle interior dialogue with God.
8. **Prayer.** Turn the question into a prayer, asking God, "What is the word you have for me in this passage, God? Is there anything you want to say to me today? *Listen*. Write down anything you sense God might be saying to you.
9. **Rest.** Be still and silent for a while. Enjoy being in the presence of God. In this step you move from *doing* to *being*. Simply *be* for a while.
10. **Response.** Ask yourself and God, *What am I being called to do as a result of the word I have been given?* Perhaps you are feeling challenged to love God more, or to accept some aspect of who you are, or to serve someone you know, or to begin changing some aspect of your character. Whatever it is, write it out. "*Today God is calling me to . . .*"

Thank God for the word and the calling you have been given.

Adapted from *The Good and Beautiful God* by James Bryan Smith