

Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:9 NLT

The majority of time when the Bible speaks of God it is by the simple use of His name. There are some exceptions to this rule and they include, “God of Israel, God of heaven, the God of all the earth, the God of patience, the God of all grace. But one of the most appealing titles given to Him is found in our text today and that is simply The God of peace.

I’m sure it may depend on what is going on in your head and heart or life at this time or where you live around the world but God is still the God of peace no matter what it may feel like in your heart.

So what about these men in the Bible that referred to God as the God of peace? Did they just live lives of ease with no struggles? Did they live in some kind of make believe world? Not so much.

The Apostle Paul that wrote the words of our text also wrote these words:

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair.⁹ We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.¹⁰ Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

¹¹ Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies.¹² So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you.

¹³ But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the psalmist had when he said, “I believed in God, so I spoke.” 2 Corinthians 4:8-13 NLT

Let’s look at the promise of peace we find in God’s word:

1. Let’s look at the Presence that calms us

And now may God, who gives us His peace, be with you all. Romans 15:33 NLT

Philosophers wrestle with the idea of God and theologians with the attributes of God and scientists the works of God but for you and I nothing will satisfy us short of the presence of God. When you and I find the ability to realize the presence of God we will find peace beyond what we can imagine.

It was Jesus who uttered these words, “*And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*”

Is God really real to you? Is He an actual living, loving, guiding, understanding and upholding presence in your life? Have you ever come face to face with Christ and had your sins forgiven? That's a very important question but let me go a step further and ask if you practice the presence of God. The famous old saint, Brother Lawrence worked in the monastery kitchen among the pots and pans but he coined the phrase "practicing the presence of God."

Do you know what it means to sit down with God and speak with Him?
Do you know what Enoch in the Old Testament knew? It says he "walked with God."
Do you know what the Apostle Paul spoke of when he was riding on a doomed ship but said, "There stood by me this night the angel (Christ) of God?"

His peace doesn't mean coziness it means confidence. It doesn't mean ease; it does mean adequacy. It doesn't mean a dainty comfortableness; it does mean a divine companionship. It does not mean uninterrupted health, wealth and prosperity; it does mean an unfailing inner strength, renewal and resilience.

You need to get it into your head today that God is not some high and solemn deity sitting in some detached way and gazing down upon you and your life and applauding your suffering.

He knows where you are today. He knows how to bring calmness to your heart and soul. All you have to do is turn towards Him. All you have to do is ask and stay in His presence.

Years ago a freshman enrolled at Wheaton College and several weeks after starting school he was asked what he missed most about being away from home. "At our house it is the custom for the whole family to stand around the table after breakfast and engage in family prayer. For years, he said, I have stood next to my father, and again and again I have found that when Dad reached an important point in prayer he would squeeze my hand tighter and tighter. Now that I'm away from home, I think that of all the things I miss, the one that I feel the greatest is the pressure of my father's hand every morning."

He was fortunate to have this memory but college took him to a place where his earthly father's hand could not reach him. Our human relationships are often limited and can even leave us cold but I have good news for you today. There is a Father whose ear is never heavy and whose hand is not shortened. His name is the God of peace because when we think we can't go on He lets us know that He is there.

There is an important question that we all have to consider in our Christian walk. How far are we prepared to go with God in allowing Him to make something clean, lovely and Christ like out of us?

2. Let's look at the Purifier that cleanses us

(Jenn Ballenger)

Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.²⁴ God will make this happen, for He who calls you is faithful. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 NLT

I wonder if you have ever had something so messy that it almost seemed impossible to clean up? I have! (tell the Andrew and flour incident)

Sometimes when it comes to our lives, we try to work and work to make it clean. But on our own, it is impossible—like the flour that kept reappearing, we keep making the same choices and falling into the same patterns of living. Instead, the God of peace calls us to something different!

There is an important question that we all have to consider in our Christian walk. How far are we prepared to go with God in allowing Him to make something clean, lovely and Christ like out of us?

Do you really long to be free from sin? Would you like to have a self that is fundamentally organized and unified around the mind of Christ? How does it happen?

The story is told of a group of women that met for Bible study. While studying in the book of Malachi, chapter three, they came across verse three which says: “He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.” This verse puzzled the women and they wondered how this statement applied to the character and nature of God. One of the women offered to find out more about the process of refining silver, and to get back to the group at their next Bible study. The following week, the woman called up a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him while at work. She didn’t mention anything about the reason for her interest, beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver. As she watched the silversmith work, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire, where the flames were the hottest as to burn away all the impurities. The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot, then she thought again about the verse, that “He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver.” She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the entire time the silver was being refined. The man answered yes, that not only did he have to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on it the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left even a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed. The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, “But how do you know when the silver is fully refined?” He smiled at her and answered, “Oh, that’s easy – when I see my image in it.”

The only way we can be purified and made like Christ is when we acknowledge that we are sinful people, repent of our sins (ask for forgiveness and turn from our sinful ways), and surrender all that we are to God. THEN the God of peace will take up residence in our hearts and minds, helping us to become the people we were created to be—a holy and blameless people living in right relationship with God and others. The good news this morning is that we are not alone. We don’t have to do this on our own.

God will make this happen, for He who calls you is faithful.

There is one more aspect of the God of peace that we need to understand and embrace as truth.

3. Let's look at the Perfector who commissions us

I want us to look at some verses in Hebrews 13:

Now may the God of peace—who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and ratified an eternal covenant with His blood—²¹ may He equip you with all you need for doing His will. May He produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to Him. All glory to Him forever and ever! Amen. Hebrews 13:20-21 NLT

²¹ *may He equip you with all you need for doing His will.* In other translations it reads,

“ . . . make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight.”

We may revel in the salvation that God provides. We may never tire of worshipping God or reading His word but there is more to our discipleship than that. According to these benedictory words in the book of Hebrews we are commissioned to be servants of God and charged to carry out His will on this earth.

Here's the way this works. You can't allow yourself to be sucked into a pseudo Christianity that makes you feel secure in your own works of church attendance and a prayer now and then.

The closer we live to God the more He will find ways to use us on this planet. The closer we live to God the more inadequate we will feel about what we have to offer Him but that is exactly where He wants us to live.

*He will that I should holy be
That holiness I long to feel
That full, divine conformity
To all my Master's blessed will.*

Only as you and I come into such vital accord with God's purpose can we be useful to Him in a full measure.

You see most of us will look at what we have to offer and quickly decide that what we have is not all that important to God. What we have is frail and awkward at best. Can anything good ever come from us that would be worthy of God using? There is nothing better than having your life transformed and being made new and then sharing your story. God will use you in ways you can't even imagine if you will truly live for Him. I have

always drawn great strength and personal challenge from the men and women who have been willing to go and tell the story of God.

You would be better off to put down the remote that brings pure filth into your heart and home and pick up a book and read about what God has done through men and women that planted with tears and reaped a harvest of joy.

David Brainerd: "Oh, that I could dedicate my all to God. This is all the return I can make Him."

Jim and Elizabeth Elliot: "His journal entry for October 28, 1949, expresses his belief that missions work was more important than his life. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

William Carey: "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."

Adoniram Judson: "The prospects are as bright as the promises of God."

C.T. Studd: "I cannot tell you what joy it gave me to bring the first soul to the Lord Jesus Christ. I have tasted almost all the pleasures that this world can give. He also penned these words: "Some wish to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

Robert Moffat: "Writing to his parents from London shortly before sailing for Africa, he said: "Oh, that I had a thousand lives and a thousand bodies! All of them should be devoted to no other employment but to preach Christ ... I have not repented in becoming a missionary, and, should I die in the march and never enter the field of battle, all would be well.'"

While the Moffats were on their first furlough in England, David Livingstone asked Mr. Moffat whether he thought that he, perhaps, might also be used in the missionary work in Africa. Mr. Moffat replied, "Yes, particularly if you will not go to an old station but will push on into unoccupied fields." And then he added, "In the north I have seen in the morning sun, the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary has ever been."

David Livingstone: When trying to find a way to the west coast of Africa, Livingstone wrote: "Cannot the love of Christ carry the missionary where the slave-trade carries the trader? I shall open up a path to the interior or perish."

Robert Morrison: What we do may also be unknown to us. We may never know what good seed God planted through our lives.

This reminds me of missionary Robert Morrison in the late 1800s traveled from England to China to be a missionary there. Well once the Chinese found out he was a missionary, they kicked him out. Robert went to Macao a Portuguese colony, stayed there a little while, and then returned to China only to be deported again, so he found a job as an

accountant with the East India Company there and periodically would travel to China, only to be expelled each time. Morrison worked hard all day for the East India Company, which hated missionaries, and at night he translated the Bible into Chinese. Eventually he finished translating the Bible and later died in Macao. For days after his death, there was no agreement on where to bury his body. The Chinese did not want a Christian buried in their cemetery, and the Roman Catholics were not about to have a Protestant buried in their cemetery. Finally, someone negotiated with the Roman Catholic Archbishop, who sold one cemetery plot so they could bury Robert Morrison. He was rejected all his life and rejected in his death.

But in 1982 then president of Asbury College, Dennis Kinlaw, was in China and noted how many Chinese had copies of the Bible. He asked how they got them, and was told that a relative was a Christian, or neighbors or parents were, and they led another to Christ. And the salvation of those children and adults came from reading the Bible that Robert Morrison gave his life to translate. It remained unknown to Robert, but was known to God and not a work that was wasted but used gloriously. Kinlaw was overcome with emotion as he stood at Morrison's grave in an obscure land.

Don't you ever get tired of the mundane and the same old stuff in your life week after week? Open up your eyes and open up your heart and let God lead you to a place where tears will fall as you serve Him by serving others.

Let your heart be filled by the God of peace.

1. In the harvest field now ripened, There's a work for all to do;
Hark! the voice of God is calling, To the harvest calling you.
2. Little is much when God is in it! Labor not for wealth or fame;
There's a crown, and you can win it, If you go in Jesus' name.
3. In the mad rush of the broad way, In the hurry and the strife,
Tell of Jesus' love and mercy, Give to them the Word of Life.
4. Does the place you're called to labor Seem so small and little known?
It is great if God is in it, And He'll not forget His own.
5. Are you laid aside from service, Body worn from toil and care?
You can still be in the battle, In the sacred place of prayer.
6. When the conflict here is ended And our race on earth is run,
He will say, if we are faithful, "Welcome home, My child—well done!"