

## God with Us

***The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14).***

"Emmanuel" – 'God with us'. Let's consider what the idea of God being 'with' us really means. What can we learn from the many instances of this phrase in the Old and New Testaments, and how should this truth manifest itself in our daily lives? The idea of God being 'with' us is one of the most common and yet one of the richest expressions in the Bible, running like a thread through the Old and the New Testaments. In Exodus, God promises to be 'with' Moses and then 'with' Joshua. God was also 'with' the kings and judges of Israel, as well as 'with' the great prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The theme of God being 'with us' also runs through the psalms and is found most notably in Psalm 23: "***Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me...***"

It is also quite striking how frequently the idea appears in the New Testament as well. In Matthew's Gospel, the name to be given to Jesus is 'Emmanuel,' which means '*God is with us*' (Matthew 1:23); and the risen Jesus ends the gospel by promising His disciples that He will be 'with them to the end of time' (Matthew 28:20). In Luke, the angel addressing Mary assures her that, '*the Lord is with you*' (Luke 1:28), just as Luke also tells us that the hand of the Lord was 'with' John the Baptist (Luke 1:66). Indeed, in John's Gospel we find Jesus Himself describing His Father as being 'with' Him: "***The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with Me***" (John 16:32).

Reference to God being 'with' Jesus can also be found in the Acts of the Apostles, when Peter describes to Cornelius and his family how Jesus "***went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him***" (Acts 10:38). Elsewhere in Acts, the Lord appears in a vision to Paul in Corinth to strengthen him: "***Do not be afraid, but speak out and do not be silent; for I am with you and no one will lay a hand on you to harm you***" (Acts 18:9-10). Indeed, Paul closed his letters to the Corinthians with the blessing: "***The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you***" (1 Corinthians 16:21), and more fully, "***the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you***" (2 Corinthians 13:12).

So what are we to make of all these references to God being 'with' various people? We find them from Moses right through to John the Baptist, Paul and Jesus Himself. I suggest that, if we examine some of the passages, we will probably find a pattern revealing itself, which can throw some light on this puzzle. The simplest instance is in the early conversation between God and Moses (Exodus 3:4-13) when God called to Moses from the burning bush and told him that He intended to deliver His people from Egyptian slavery by sending Moses to Pharaoh. Moses said to God, "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt?*" To which God replied simply, "***I will be with you***" (Exodus 3:12). And so it came to be.

In other words, God has a mission for Moses, but Moses simply doesn't feel up to it. But that isn't the point: God promised to be 'with him'. It will be God working through Moses who will bring about God's design (God's plan and purpose). After Moses died, he was succeeded by Joshua as leader of Israel, and the book of Joshua informs us that God repeated His promise to Joshua: "***As I was with Moses, so I shall be with you: I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous...***" (Joshua 1:5-6).

Later, in the calling of Gideon to save Israel (in the Book of Judges), we can sense the author's delight in spelling out the details of this argumentative conversation with God: The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said to him, "***The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior.***" Gideon answered him, "*But sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt'? But now the Lord has cast us off, and given us into the hands of Midian.*" Then the Lord turned to him and said, "*Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you.*" He responded, "*But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.*" The Lord said to him, "***But I will be with you. You shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them***" (Judges 6:12-16).

Perhaps the most powerful exposition of this pattern of divine commission and reassurance is to be found at the beginning of the book of Jeremiah, when the prophet complains piteously of his personal inadequacy, "*Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.*" But the Lord, "*Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. 'Don't be afraid of them for I am with you to deliver you', says the Lord*" (Jeremiah 1:6-8).

The most delicate presence of this pattern might be discerned in the annunciation of the angel Gabriel to the young girl, Mary, in Luke 1: 26-38. As we can now see, the angel's introductory greeting sets the scene for the whole drama: "And he came to her and said, '**Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you**.'" Mary is upset and unsure what is happening, but the angel explains what her divine commission will be, whereupon she objects that she is unsuited to the purpose. However, the angel reassures her of the divine power at work in her. And she finally consents, "*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*"

From such dialogues we can learn that God's being '**with**' us (His presence **in** us), is a dynamic, not a static, presence. It is a presence with a purpose, a 'power' through which God is using us for his purpose in spite of our personal inadequacy. It is a challenge and yet a comfort to know that we are not alone in what is being asked of us, however demanding it may be. "***Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me***" (Psalm 23: 4). Let me ask you something – "*has a shadow ever harmed you?*" How much more confident should we be because Jesus is with us in the valley of the shadow of death!

Furthermore, as we hear Jesus himself saying, "***I am not alone. He who sent me is with Me***" (John 16:32). This simple phrase is enough now 'in itself' to help us fill out the details: Jesus has been commissioned by His Father for a particular task, but He may feel inadequate for it, as the agony in the garden in the other gospels makes clear. Nonetheless, God will be **with Him** to support Him and will not forsake Him in spite of His feeling of neglect (Matthew 27:46).

From now on I suggest you keep an eye open in your reading of the Bible so that you might pick up the references to God being '**with**' you and truly appreciate its full significance. For God promises to be '**with**' you regardless of your inadequacies or deficiencies, so that He can bring about what He is asking you to do in your life. That's the main reason for His presence being with you!

Back to our opening scripture... (Exodus 33:14), The Lord replied, "*My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.*" **Rest** for our souls is one of the most important needs we have. And notice the way we get this **rest** is by God's presence going with us wherever we go! His **presence** being with us is vital, and it guarantees many blessings. Here are some verses to encourage us:

(Psalms 16:11) *You will show me the path of life; In Your **presence** is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

(Psalms 31:19-20) *Oh, how great is Your goodness, Which You have laid up for those who fear You, Which You have prepared for those who trust in You In the presence of the sons of men! You shall hide them in the secret place of Your **presence** From the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion From the strife of tongues.*

(Psalms 34:18-19) *The Lord is **near** to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all.*

(Psalms 46:1) *God is our refuge and strength, A very **present** help in trouble.*

(Psalms 100:2-5) *Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before His **presence** with singing. Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations.*

(Psalms 140:13) *Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; The upright shall dwell in Your **presence**.*

(Psalms 145:18-19) *The Lord is **near** to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them.*

(Jeremiah 23:23-24) *"Am I a God **near** at hand," says the Lord, "And not a God afar off."*

(Matthew 28:19-20) *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am **with you always**, even to the end of the age." Amen.*