

EMMANUEL - GOD WITH US

Greetings in the wonderful name of Jesus.

Regardless of which path we each walk down; God is always with us and inevitably always at least, one step ahead of us. No matter what mountains you come up against, just know He has already climbed them. No matter what journey of uncertainty you encounter, God is faithfully walking ahead of you.

Sometimes, it can be easy to make the mistake of thinking that we are walking through this world alone, especially when life happens or when our current reality does not match up with what God has spoken over us. Please do not allow temporary realities to sway you from the knowledge that God is with you. He is leading and guiding you, ordering your footsteps, preparing the way for you and going ahead of you to make every crooked path straight. I encourage you to be attentive and listen for his voice, listen for his leading, consult Him in everything before you make your next move.

HE IS GOD WITH US

In **Matthew 1:18-24** Joseph is wrestling with the idea of what to do about Mary who is suddenly pregnant: (**Amplified Bible**)

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by [the power of] the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her [promised] husband, being a just and righteous man and not wanting to expose her publicly to shame, planned to send her away and divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a Son, and you shall name Him **Jesus (The Lord is salvation)**, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 All this happened in order to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet [Isaiah]: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and give birth to a Son, and they shall call His name **Emmanuel**"—which, when translated, means, "**God with us.**" 24 Then Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and he took Mary [to his home] as his wife.

Joseph receives a message from God about his first-born child, he is told that his son will **save his people** from their sins and Joseph is told what the very meaning of Jesus' name will be – The Lord is Salvation - God with us. This brings me to my first point for today which is:

1. *The Lord goes before you and will be with you*

Deuteronomy 31:8 (NIV) reads: **The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”**

I like how this passage of scripture makes it clear that it will be the Lord Himself and not some third party, not some messenger, not some substitute who is not God, working on God's behalf, which would have been absolutely fine, but here the scripture is clear, The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will; never leave you nor forsake you.

Deuteronomy 31:8 (NKJV)

8 And the Lord, **He is the One who goes before you.** He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.”

When we know that God will never leave us nor forsake us, I have to admit, it makes not worrying a whole lot easier. It makes it easier for me to not be anxious or dismayed.

Joshua 1:9 (NKJV) Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for **the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”**

We do not take it for granted that God is with us wherever we go. Before we embark on a long-distance trip, we make sure that we pray and thank God for His safe travelling mercies. I like to pray in particular a specific phrase that my wife knows very well: I like to pray Lord, help us to avoid all accidents and incidents on the road as we travel from point A to point B.

When I pray that prayer I am not concerned that if I prayed the prayer while I was in Gauteng, by the time we reach Oudtshoorn or George or Knysna or Plettenberg Bay or Gordons Bay that I may have moved too far out of the sphere of influence of God for Him to be able to still protect me and still protect my family and still protect the vehicle.

When you do the drive from Gauteng to Cape Town you are 100% guaranteed to lose signal, reception, the network will fail you. You will be listening to Spotify, thumping the Fred Hammond or Maverick City Music and then as you approach a mountainous area all of a sudden, the music stops, and we all look at each other in the car and we all say the same thing: **“No Network.”**

I have great news for you my brother and my sister, according to **Joshua 1:9 - the Lord your God is with you wherever you go ...** He doesn't lose power, He doesn't lose reception, His signal strength doesn't fade, as you approach the mountainous areas of life not only does His strength not wither and die, but He rises up as Jehovah El-Gibbor and he flattens those mountains and makes your crooked paths straight. When you look on your spiritual GPS you see one solid, blue line, straight as an arrow, with full and uninterrupted signal strength. Amen. I guarantee you that if there is a problem with the connection, its not on God's end. You may have to check your own local landline, for connectivity issues.

2. *The Lord goes before you and follows you so that he can be your rear guard*

Psalm 139:5 (NLT) You go **before me** and **follow me**. You place your hand of blessing on my head.

Isaiah 52:12 (NKJV) For you shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight; For the Lord will go **before you**,

Isaiah 58:8 (NKJV) Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; **The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.**

Exodus 14:19 “Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel.”

Aren’t you grateful that you serve an all-powerful, omnipresent God, who can not only be with you here in South Africa, and at the same time be with another brother in Christ in Malaysia, but even when He is with you, He can go ahead of you to prepare the way for you while at the same time He has literally got your back. That brings a whole new meaning to the expression: **I’ve got your back**. Hallelujah.

Now I know it’s difficult for some of us to make the transition from baby Jesus meek and mild, to Jehovah El-Gibbor, the Mighty God who fights for us, but you have to understand that God does fight for you, on your behalf, in order to give you the victory, Amen. The battle is the Lord’s, and the victory is yours. I am sure you have already guessed what point number 3 is:

3. **The Lord goes before you and fights for you**

In **Deuteronomy 1:30(a) (NIV)** it says - The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, ...

Exodus 14:14 (NKJV) The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.”

Exodus 14:14 (NIV) The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

Deuteronomy 20:4 (NIV) For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.”

Psalm 3:7 (NIV) Arise, Lord! Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked.

This is undoubtedly one of my favorite scriptures, in 2024 I pray the Lord would strike every principality, every dark power, every ruler of darkness, every spiritual host of wickedness in high places right in the jaw. That every plan of the enemy against me and my family would come to nought, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Now I know when I said strike them in the jaw, some of you were thinking about your in-laws, we will have a separate alter call for you guys afterwards, ok. 😊

4. *The Lord goes before you and makes preparations for your arrival* before you even get there

Isaiah 45:2 (NKJV) - 'I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze, and cut the bars of iron.'

The NIV says I will go before you and will *level the mountains* ...

I have no idea what 2024 holds for you. God does know, and He is making preparations on your behalf, the King of Kings and creator of heaven and earth is going ahead of you, stepping into your 2024. That should give you a very high level of comfort and confidence. You may not know what tomorrow holds but you do know who holds your tomorrow, who has walked out the journey with you already. You know the One who has all you need. Why worry, why fret, when the King of Kings is going before you to make all of the preparations for your success?

In **Isaiah 42:16 (ESV)** the Lord promises,

And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them.

The world out there has no shortage of so-called rough places, pressures, and trials of every kind. But let not your heart be troubled, the Lord your God is with you, taking the lead.

(Dancing metaphor)

I will be honest with you, I am not much of a dancer, because to be a good dancer you have to firstly have dancing skills, secondly you must understand who is leading and who is following. When a couple dance together, there is always one who takes the lead and the other will follow. If both try to lead the dance will be a disaster. God is always taking the lead, 1 step ahead, even when life makes us feel we've been left behind. Just keep reminding yourself God is in the lead, He has gone ahead of me, He is orchestrating things behind the scenes, things I cannot see, things I am not even aware of, he is preparing good things for me, things that will prosper me and not harm me, things that will give me a hope and a future, this is who is in the lead and I am so thankful that God is in the lead and not me. There is a way that seems right to my flesh but in the end it will lead to death and destruction so I would rather submit my will and way to His will and His way. When He says move I move, when He says jump I say how high. He is in the lead. My obedience to His Word aligns my life with his preparations. God is preparing the way for me in 2024.

5. The Lord Surrounds Us

How many of you know and will agree with me that there is a distinct difference between God declaring that He is with you and any other brother or sister in Christ saying they are with you. First of all, He is the Creator of the Universe and everything in it, so there He has a slight advantage over brother Joe. 😊

Now if you come to me and tell me you need a little bit of support, a bit of muscle, someone to come back you up, then you need to know a few things. I can come along with you, and I will be with you. But if it's a sketchy situation then you must know that I will have some obvious limitations.

I won't actually be able to protect you from every single angle of attack. It's simply not possible. I will probably tell you that I have your back, but truth be told if I am walking next to you then I cannot fend off an attack if someone comes up behind us, because (spoiler alert) **I am not omnipresent**. I have many talents and abilities, but omnipresence is unfortunately not one of them.

With God however, it's a totally different situation. I am going to show you from scripture how God goes before you while simultaneously having your back and while at that very moment, surrounding you and protecting you on every side.

Psalm 3:3-4 (The Message Bible) But you, God, shield me on all sides; You ground my feet, you lift my head high; With all my might I shout up to God, His answers thunder from the holy mountain.

Psalm 3:6-7 (NIV)

I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.

Arise, Lord! Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked.

Psalm 34:7 “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.” God deals with our enemies on all sides, defeating them for us.

Psalm 125:2 “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, both now and forevermore.”

The end result is

6. We have Complete Protection knowing that God is with us

Psalm 91:3-4 Amplified Bible

For He will save you from the trap of the fowler, And from the deadly pestilence.

He will cover you and **completely protect you** with His pinions, And under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and a wall.

John 10:27-30 Amplified Bible

27 The sheep that are My own hear My voice and listen to Me; I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they will never, ever [by any means] perish; and no one will ever snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater and mightier than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are One [in essence and nature]."

No power in all creation is able to separate us from the security of God. He purposed to redeem us and has done so in Christ. Now the One who redeemed us will also keep us from falling. No matter where the problem is-in front of us, behind us, on our right or on our left-no one can take eternal life away from us.

7. As the Redeemed Our Obligation is to Follow Jesus

If the Lord is going before us, what is our responsibility? To follow him. If we are redeemed, we will be led and governed by God. We do not determine our life's direction; God does. We have not received Jesus Christ as Lord, only to drag him in the direction we want Him to go. This should never happen! Jesus says, "Deny yourselves, take up the cross, and **follow me**." Because He leads us, the redeemed have the responsibility to follow him; there is no room for negotiation.

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. **Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.**" – **John 8:12**

Numbers 9:15-23 demonstrates how the people of God must **completely obey the leading of their Lord**. Beginning with verse 15 we read, "On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up, the cloud covered it." The cloud is the symbol of the presence of God; today it represents the Holy Spirit in us. The passage continues, "From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire. Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped." Following the leading of the Spirit means strict, complete, and absolute obedience to God.

Verse 18 continues, "**At the Lord's command** the Israelites set out, and **at his command** they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, **the Israelites obeyed the Lord's order** and did not set out. Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the Lord's command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out." These people did not say, "Wait a minute. I am sleeping," or "I

have washed my clothes and just want a little more time." No! When the cloud lifted, they went. They recognized the absolute sovereignty of God; therefore, they rendered absolute submission and obedience to his commands.

The passage concludes, "Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. At the Lord's command they encamped, and at the Lord's command they set out. They obeyed the Lord's order, in accordance with his command through Moses."

My prayer for you today is that when God says move you move, when He says stay you stay, when He says ready yourself, you ready yourself, remember that He is in the lead therefore our responsibility is to simply and uncompromisingly follow Him. The primary way that we will know what God is saying to us at any given point of time is through us spending time in conversation with God in prayer and spending time mining His Word. His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, we cannot know where He is leading us apart from His Word. He will rarely give someone a word of knowledge or a word of wisdom to speak over your life that is just for you; and He will even more rarely speak to you in a loud and audible voice; but what He will do as often as you are prepared to set aside the time to open up the Bible and meditate upon His Word, that's how often He will speak to you through His Holy Word, leading you and guiding you along your spiritual walk with Christ.

God bless you.