

Christmas is the day that holds all time together." Alexander Smith

On the mountain, in the valley, in the crowded streets, or the empty desert, in our hope, and in our waiting, we are **never** alone. **God is with us.** On our shores, in our stores, on our walks and our conversations, **God is with us.** Imagine how the shepherds felt when they heard the name, Immanuel. "God with us." There's something incredibly comforting in the fact that God is with us. Throughout Scripture, he has reassured us that he will never leave us nor forsake us even in our darkest of moments. God does not abandon us to navigate life on our own.

Max Lucado, "Jesus humbled Himself. He went from commanding angels to Sleeping in the straw. From holding stars to clenching Mary's finger. The palm that held the Universe took the nail of a soldier. Why? Because that's what love does."

God is with us. These four little words can change lives. Jesus is not only **God with us but also God in us.** God comes to live in us through Jesus Christ when we are born again: "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The Spirit of God lives in us, and we are His dwelling place:

"For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: 'I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people'" ([2 Corinthians 6:16, NLT](#)).

That God... is among us.

John 1:14 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

Matthew 1:23 says "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She'll give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means, **God is with us.**"

This verse is one of the clearest in all the Bible regarding the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Incarnation simply means,

"the bodily manifestation of a supernatural being."

On that night when Jesus was born, God had come to earth. Somehow, the Word, became flesh! While Jesus himself had existed from all eternities

past, He took upon Himself a robe of flesh there in Bethlehem. The Creator was born to the creation. God placed His life in the hands of mortals. My what a scene that must have been!

My imagination can't fathom that reality. My faith is what forms it. My conviction is what confirms it

There in Bethlehem, God stepped out of eternity and onto the stage of human history. He came as tangible proof of the existence of God and of God's willingness to save mankind.

John 1:14 says that God "**dwelled**" among us. That word is rich in meaning. **It literally means that Jesus pitched His tent here** among mortals.

He lived among us, worked among us, prayed among us, suffered among us and died among us. God walked upon the earth and was unrecognized by many who came into close contact with Him. What a tragedy that men came in contact with the Savior and still failed to recognize Him. Not much has changed in 2022

Colossians 1:15-17

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation...
"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."*

St. Ignatius "On the Incarnation"

"For this reason, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, he was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without him who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now he entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in his love and self-revealing to us".

So Jesus comes in a body, as a man, as one of us, understandable, touchable, tangible, he came to his own. The Bible tells us in John 1:11. No more light over here and darkness over there, no more separation. John says the light that Jesus is gives light to every man, unlike the Genesis story where light and darkness were separated. In John the light shines **IN** the darkness.

And for those of you who are followers of Christ, it is so easy to believe that God is with us when things are good. When you're on the mountaintop it's easy to believe that God is with us. Whenever you get really good news, when you get a raise, when your baby sleeps through the night for the first time, when you get a parking spot in the mall and it's so close; God is so good He gave me this parking spot. It's easy to sense the presence of God when things are going good and when you're on the mountain. But it's sometimes more difficult to sense His presence when you're in the valley. When things aren't going the way you would want them to, when you get bad news. When you're hurting. Maybe when you feel a little bit alone. When you're worried, or when you're afraid, or when you're battling depression.

What's interesting to me is, much of your life can be going really well. In other words, you've got all these different pockets in your life where you're kind of on a mountaintop. And then there's this one area that just weighs everything else down.

So much in life is good but this one thing just really brings a serious weight to your life. And then there's the valley. The tragedy that comes in and just steals everything that you've been hoping for. And unfortunately, some of you are there right now. We may cover it up with gifts, eggnog, parties and lights but some are in a valley so deep that this appears to be the norm.

Some seasons and pockets of your life are really good. Your marriage is blessed, but you've got a kid making crazy and stupid decisions. And that hurts so much. Or you're really close to God and you sense God's presence, but at the same time you're afraid you're going to lose your job. Or you're really excited about the holidays, getting together with family, and yet you just got really bad medical news about yourself or family member. And so there's so many good things and yet there may be one or two things that just take you down in the valley.

When you look at scripture, it's interesting that valleys represent several things. You see in the valleys there are often battles that took place. Some of you right now may be in a battle in the middle of a valley.

Valleys were seasons of desperation. Valleys were seasons of loneliness. And it's interesting that valleys were also **a time of growth.**

You may enjoy God in some ways on the mountain, but you experience Him in different ways when you're in the valley. In fact, if you're taking

notes, I like to say it this way. **We may enjoy God on the mountaintops, but we get to know Him intimately in the valleys.**

We may know Him, enjoy Him, when times are really good. But we get to know Him in a different way when we're in the valleys.

If you've ever read through Psalm 84, chances are you read right past these verses. If you stopped at them you may not have understood them.

Psalm 84:5. And we're going to see where God is in the valleys.

"Blessed are those whose strength is in you. Blessed are those who find their strength in God. Whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion."

NLT puts it this way: What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord, who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. ⁶ When they walk through the Valley of Weeping,^[b] it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings. ⁷ They will continue to grow stronger, and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem.^[c] NLT

I love that. We're on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. What does that mean? We may be in the valley, but we're going to what was known as the City of Refuge. Or we were going to the place that they call the place of peace.

There is a pathway to peace!

What is the Valley of Baka? The Valley of Baka was most likely related to a tree. Very similar spelling. And this tree would ooze out sap. If you walked by this tree people said the tree was called a weeper.

It looked like the tree was crying. And that's why the Valley of Baka is translated in different ways in scripture. It's called the Valley of Tears. It's called the Valley of Weeping. It's called the Valley of Loss.

One commentary said this, it said, "To get to the City of Refuge, "you had to travel through the Valley of Tears."

I like that imagery. Sometimes to get to where you really appreciate the presence and the power of God, you have to push through a little bit of the pain to get to the presence of the goodness of God. I put it in my notes this way. For so many, the valley is the pathway to the place of peace. We've pushed through the valley. We're on a pilgrimage. This is the way the Psalm has said it.

And this is why the Psalm says this in verse 5. He says, **"Blessed are those whose strength is found in you God."**

Many of us has said, "I've had enough, I can't do anymore, "I'm overwhelmed, I'm exhausted, "I just don't have enough." And the truth is if you don't know God intimately, then what you have, is all you have.

But for those who are Christ followers, we believe that we have a strength that goes beyond just what we have. That we have access to a heavenly strength and that's why the Psalm has said, "Blessed are those whose strength "is found in you."

We believe that when we get to the end of our strength that there is a heavenly strength. There is a divine strength. There is a strength from our God that is available to those who know Him

It is our God who when you hit the end of your strength, His strength is made perfect in your weakness. His strength scripture said, is made absolutely perfect. "Blessed are those whose strength "is found in God." If you're in the middle of a valley right now, you have access to the very real, ever present power of a good God who is available and ready to come and assist you in your time of need.

"Blessed are those whose strength is found in God." The text doesn't say blessed are those who make it on their own.

It doesn't say blessed are those who pull themselves up by the bootstraps.

It doesn't say blessed are those who are really determined.

It doesn't say blessed are those who visualize or repeat words of affirmation

One of the big problems in our world today is we almost idolize a spirit of independence. I don't need anybody, I want to be free. I want to be

financially independent. I want to be completely good on my own. I don't trust people. I don't want people to be there for me. I don't need God, I don't need anybody. We were not created to be independent. We were created by our God to depend on Him and to depend on others.

Let me show you the first part. He said this. What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord, "who have set their minds." Everybody say my mind is set. Say it again, my mind is set.

"Blessed are those who have their "minds set toward God."

What you think about matters. Paul talked about this a lot in the New Testament. To the Colossian believers he said this. He said, "Set your mind on things above, "not on things below."

Your current situation may be in the valley. But your mind can still be set upon God. Your heart might be racing, but your mind is set. Your soul may be aching, but your mind is set. Your emotions may be racing, but your mind is fixed toward God. There may be too much to do, and there may be pressure with the in-laws and you may be wondering how you're going to pay for Christmas and on and on and on and on and on. There may be real tragedies in the valley, but my mind is set on the goodness of God. He is with me. He is for me. Greater is the one who is in me than the one who is in this world. My God is going before me to prepare a way for me. His spirit gives me strength when I am weak. I need Him every moment of every day. His word is a lamp unto my feet. It is a light unto my path. When I cannot make it, His power is very very real. I may be in the valley, but my mind is set on the kingdom of God. I'm on a pilgrimage, I'm going to the place of peace. You may be in the valley, but your mind is fixed. Verse 6 says this, I love this phrase. "As they pass through the Valley of Baka, "they make it a place of springs. "As they pass through the Valley of Baka."

In other words, we may be in the valley right now, but the valley is not our destination. What are we doing? I'm just passing through. I may be in the valley right now, but this is not my home. I'm journeying to the place of peace. I'm just passing through. My God will get me through this. I'm just passing through.

David said something similar in Psalm 23. He said, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For thou art with me." I may be in the valley but I'm just passing through. I may be in a difficult time, but God's going to get me through. I may be in a dark place right now, but we're just passing through the Valley of Baka. What you have to realize is so often God may show you that the way is *through* the valley, not out of the valley. The road to the path of peace is often through the valley. Just passing through. I'm just passing through.

I love this next phrase. "As they passed through the Valley of Baka "they make it a place of springs.". The King James version says "They make it a well. **"They make it a place of springs."**

In other words, whenever you're in a dry place, what do you do? You dig a well.

When you're dry and when you're hurting you make room for the presence of God. You make room for the provision of God. You make a well. It's almost as if God would say something like this. "You show me your faith, "and I'll show you my faithfulness." If you dig it, I will fill it. If you prepare for me, I will show up. You show me your faith, and I'll show you my faithfulness.

You show me that you believe, and I will show you my presence. If you seek me, you will find me. If you make room for me, I will reveal myself to you. If you haven't sensed the presence of God in a long time, It's time to make a well. It's time to dig a ditch. It's time to say God, I'm going to stop and wait for your presence. I'm going to prepare for your provision and for your presence.

Because if you dig it, He will fill it.

Here's what I hope you'll understand. God never ever promised that you would never go through the valley. He promised you would never have to go through the valley alone. God with us. "And the virgin will be with child "and His name will be Immanuel. "Which means God with us."

I love the way the Psalmist phrases this portion of scripture. He says this. As we journey through the Valley of Baka. We're going to the place of

peace. Then he says "They go from strength to strength." I love this phrase. "They go from strength to strength. "Blessed are those who experience the strength of God. "Blessed are those whose strength is found in you."

Then they go from a little bit of strength to a little more strength. To even more of God's strength to even more of His strength. And then a little more of His strength until each appears before God in Zion. They will go from strength to strength, from strength to strength. Not our strength, but His strength.

He is a good God. And we're going to the place of peace. So right now you feel weak. Who is God? In the middle of your weakness, my God is your strength. When you're in the darkness, who is God? Our God is your light in the darkness. When you're in a season of trouble, who is our God? He is your joy in the trouble. When you're in the middle of pain, who is our God? He is your comforter in the middle of your pain. That's who our God is. We pass through the valley. Even though we're in the valley, we do not fear, why? Because He is with us. The same God that is good on the mountaintops is good to us in the valley. We get to know Him in the valley. If you're in the valley right now you're just passing through. You won't be there forever. Our God will lead you out. He is good, He is with you, He is present and He will take you from strength to strength. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why? Because you oh God are with us. Who are you? You are Immanuel. God with us.