

Flourishing - Ps. 52

Today we begin our late spring/summer sermon series on Shalom in the Psalms. The Biblical meaning of shalom has many layers which are rich for our own lives. So let's start with our understandings of the meaning of the term. What do you think of when you hear the word shalom?

Shalom is more than personal happiness and what feels good to us – that can be very different for different people and very different than God's idea.

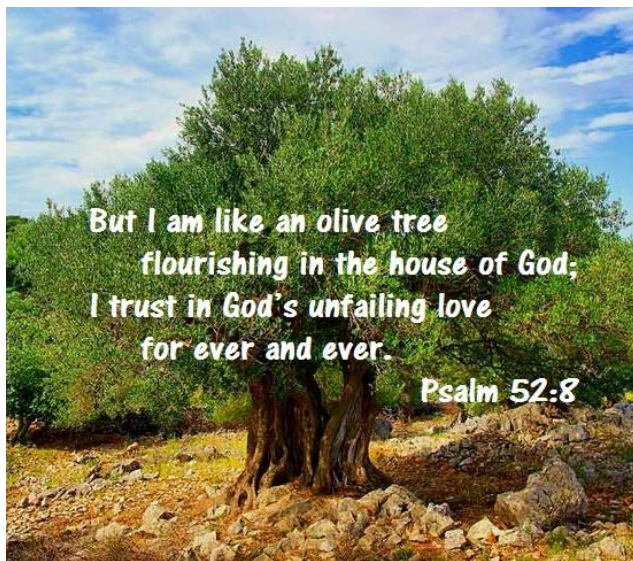
A young woman is visiting her parents. While helping her mother fix dinner, she opens the refrigerator. On the inside of the door, she sees a spicy picture of a lovely, slender, perfectly built young woman.

"What's this about, Mom?" she asks.

"Oh, I put that up there to remind me not to overeat," the mother answers.

"Is it working?" her daughter asks.

"Yes and no," her mom replies. "I've lost 15 pounds, but your dad has gained 20." GCFN 5 24 19



God's idea of shalom is seen in our text in Ps. 52: 8-9: **NIV:** *But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever.⁹ For what you have done I will always praise you in the presence of your faithful people. And I will hope in your name, for your name is good.*

Notice the key words: flourishing, trust in God's unfailing love, hope and praise in the presence of God's people. This is a description of well-being. In my dissertation I learned from the Thais that their idea of well-being includes harmony and the "social cosmetic values of caring, and consideration, politeness, kindness and helpfulness" (MLCodman Wilson, Northwestern University 1992, p. 148). It also includes self-esteem, success, and the security of a comfortable life." (p.150). These

values are embedded in the Biblical concept of flourishing as well. Flourishing means "to grow vigorously, to succeed, thrive, prosper and to be at the peak of development and influence." (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary).

We flourish when we regularly tank up with God's spiritual resources. As Tony Evans says:

"When you leave church on Sundays, you go to your car and go on your way. By driving, you will deplete the reserve of gas in the tank. You're not a bad person when your car uses gas. You just need to fill up... Many times when people leave church, they are spiritually full because of the time they spent singing praises to God and hearing His Word. However, within two hours of being "filled," their spiritual tank will begin to dissipate... Life has a way of draining out the reality of the Holy Spirit in you. Just like a person who drives a car has to continue to make trips to the gas station to fill up and make the car run smoothly, Christians must continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Book of Illustrations, Tony Evans, Moody, 2009, p.151).

This idea of flourishing is also crucial in communicating the gospel, friends. "The idea that the good news is about rescue from punishment, which is, it seems to me, biblical and true, has less resonance in our culture now. It's harder to get people to really latch onto that as good news. They get stuck on the bad news part. But if you say that not only are we rescued by Christ from everlasting separation from God, but we are brought into what Jesus called life and abundant life—that we are brought into human flourishing—I think our neighbors are looking for that. They're asking, "How can I have more of a genuinely flourishing life than the life that I have?" That's a powerful connection with our neighbors. It's an unfortunate truth that when it comes to culture, Christians are known for what we're against... There are some things people *should* stop doing, but people will

never stop doing something until you give them something else to do.” And to be!(From CT interview with Andy Crouch: Teaching People to Flourish.)

I believe it’s persuasive when Christians can be known as people who are flourishing in community, in the Biblical values of shalom, in the well-being and peace that everyone is searching for. As Ps. 52 says: *they trust in God’s unfailing love forever and ever. They praise God for all God has done and hope in God’s good name.* We flourish as we have a heart of trust and praise in the Lord – through good and hard times – because we are confident in God’s sovereignty and unfailing love. Plus we praise the Lord in community – *in the presence of his saints.* It is not possible to flourish in our Christian lives, beloved, outside of community. The Bible says



God is enthroned on the praises of His people. So being in a committed community is vital to flourishing. It is how we can get fed from His Word and from the words and prayers and support of others as well. Together we build up each other and hold each other to the fruit-bearing only God can make possible. And God has given us a very special community at New Hope to make this happen.

The olive tree

The visual image of this a green olive tree. What does that symbolism mean?:

“The olive was and still is one of the best loved trees in Palestine. It is an evergreen tree that can live for hundreds of years and still bear fruit. Its fruit has long been used for food, the olive oil has been used in cooking, in lamps, in soaps and in ointments for many centuries. Israel as a nation was intended to be as a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form.(Jer. 11:16) - versatile and always available and ready to serve. The individual members of the people of God should want to be like that too and to trust in God’s unfailing love forever and ever. We should be able to say, expressing our heart’s desire: I will praise You forever for what you have done. By contrast with the harm done by the tongue of evil men, the tongue of the righteous brings encouragement and hope to others. The Psalmist declares *In your name I will hope.* The word for hope is often translated wait. The name of God reflects the character of God as He is revealed through His word so to hope in God’s name or to wait on God’s name speaks of sincere trust in God Himself.” African Bible Commentary, Psalms. Cyril Okorochoa.

The symbolism of the olive tree epitomizes flourishing. The tree bears fruit throughout its long life. (a great verse for those of us who are in our golden years!). Plus that fruit is really valuable to others. And it’s oil is used in cooking, in soaps, in ointments, in lamps. I even have a bottle of special anointing oil from Israel – made of “sanctified olive oil”! It’s what Sam uses on our monthly healing prayer service. That’s a picture of versatility, to be sure. Notice also the fruit and oil of the olive tree is “always available and ready to serve.” That’s a Christ-like goal for individuals and community.

Definitions of shalom

But there’s so much more to shalom. So in my research I reached out to members of our community as I sought to understand shalom more deeply.

Here’s the definition Sam sent to me: “The webbing together of God humans and all creation in justice, fulfillment and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We call it peace but it means far more than mere peace of mind or cease fire btw enemies. In the Bible shalom means universal flourishing. wholeness and delight- a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be,” Alvin Plantinga, Christian philosopher.

From Bing came this article on shalom and wholeness:

"In Jesus Christ SHALOM (peace) and SHALEM (health, or wholeness) come together. We need no longer contrast inner peace and outer peace, peace with God and peace with others. These are not to be in a relationship of contrast, but they are part of a larger wholeness. In Jesus Christ we find that peace-making and health-making, community making and person making, flow from the same deep fountain in God—the ultimate source of peace and health and our salvation. 'By His stripes we are healed' " (*The Mennonite* 95:43:689, Nov. 25, 1980).

Susan Perlman from Jews for Jesus says:

“Peace, lasting peace, transcends the situations and flaws of our own personal lives because it doesn’t come from us. It comes from God. We are not in a position to attain peace ourselves. Yet, God promises all the qualities of shalom – wholeness, completeness, soundness, health, safety – to those who will look to Him. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “*You will keep in perfect peace (shalom) the one whose mind is steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal*” ([Isaiah 26:3–4](#)). Trusting in God means recognizing Him and giving Him His rightful place in our lives. We must also accept the agent of peace He has provided. Isaiah wrote of the Messiah who was to come:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.” ([Isaiah 9:6–7](#))

How did the Messiah bring peace? Isaiah explains further in the 53rd chapter: “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” ([Isaiah 53:4–5](#))

We say we need peace, but are we willing to accept the One who paid the price for us? We commend to you Jesus as the Prince of Peace. Contact us or chat with us to find out more.” I love that last sentence. Jews for Jesus is a wonderful, bold group of Jews who have become Christians because they have believed in Jesus as Messiah. They then weave their Jewish background and Old Testament teaching into the fabric of a daily walk with Christ. And they are unstoppable in their evangelistic efforts to introduce others to their Messiah!

As a Gentile, Caucasian Christian Timothy Keller says: “*Shalom* is one of the key words and images for salvation in the Bible. The Hebrew word refers most commonly to a person being uninjured and safe, whole and sound. In the New Testament, *shalom* is revealed as the reconciliation of all things to God through the work of Christ: “God was pleased . . . through [Christ] to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through [Christ’s] blood, shed on the cross” ([Colossians 1:19–20](#)). *Shalom* experienced is multidimensional, complete well-being — physical, psychological, social, and spiritual; it flows from all of one’s relationships being put right — with God, with(in) oneself, and with others.

Shalom as peace...means the end of hostilities and war ([Deuteronomy 20:12](#); [Judges 21:13](#)). It also refers to socially just relationships between individuals and classes. Jeremiah insists that unless there is an end to oppression, greed, and violence in social relationships, there can be no *shalom*, however much the false prophets say the word ([Jeremiah 6:1–9,14](#); compare [Jeremiah 8:11](#)).

Shalom consists of... peace within. Those who trust in the Lord have inner security; therefore, they can sleep well ([Psalm 4:8](#)). God gives “perfect peace” (or *shalom-shalom*) — i.e., profound psychological and emotional peace – to those who steadfastly set their minds on him ([Isaiah 26:3](#)). The result of righteousness before God is “peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever” ([Isaiah 32:17](#)).

Keller continues: “Jesus brings this peace of God which can garrison our hearts against anxiety, difficulties, and sorrows ([Philippians 4:4–7](#)). It is possible to have a peace so deep that we can be content in any circumstance, even

in times of great difficulty (Philippians 4:12–13). The peace of Christ is so closely related to joy (John 15:11; Romans 15:13) that we might say that joy is God’s peace and reconciliation lived out. The God of peace sanctifies us, growing us into Christlike character and maturity (1 Thessalonians 5:23; compare Galatians 5:22).

[Then] our peace with and from God gives us the resources to maintain unity and love with others through continual forgiveness and patience (Colossians 3:13–15). Christ is our peace, and by his death on the cross he removes even the high racial and cultural barriers that divide us” (Ephesians 2:11–22.)” (Drawn from the article *Shalom* by Timothy Keller in the Biblical Theology Study Bible.)

Lastly, Merian got me a book from Buswell by Walter Brueggemann. Brueggemann is an American Protestant Old Testament scholar and theologian who is widely considered one of the most influential Old Testament scholars of the last several decades. The title of this book is *Living Toward a Vision*. That title will be the overarching theme I want to use for this entire series:

Brueggemann agrees with the descriptions of shalom as “a vision of wholeness...in which persons are bound not only to God but to one another in a caring, sharing, rejoicing community with none to make them afraid” (pp. 16-17). But he adds, Yet, as people are living toward that vision according to Ezekiel 34, shalom “is well-being that exists in the very midst of threats – from sword and drought, and from wild animals...It is not idyllic pie in the sky but salvation...in the very places where people always have to cope with anxiety, struggle for survival and deal with temptation.” (p. 16). That’s why we are According to *to depart from evil and do good. Seek shalom and pursue it.*” Ps. 34:14.

Unpacking this multilayered concept is why we will spend all this summer and fall on understanding and applying its meaning because I believe this layered idea of shalom resonates with our own goals, individually and corporately, to move toward God’s vision of well-being in our personal lives, in our relationships with others, in community and with God. Shalom will not just come down on us through prayer and social activism. Living toward the vision is an active life of faith.

The resource book that started me on this journey is *Shalom in Psalms – a Devotional from the Jewish heart of the Christian faith* by three Messianic Jewish scholars. Since then I’ve been able to track down other books by biblical scholars on the meaning of shalom as well. I think this will put us all on the trajectory of adventure together.

Delight, love that “empowers others to live fully” (p. 138), peace, security in God, flourishing, wholeness, joyful wonder in God as Creator and Savior, justice and fulfillment in inclusive community – the many layers of shalom we will unpack. All this is possible as we live toward this vision. This is a journey to take together, starting today. Let’s do it!

Let’s pray. Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 5/26/19

I chose the song *On Eagle’s Wings* as our song of response because it depicts this trusting, peace-filled walk with God in the midst of trouble:

“You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord, who abide in his shadow for life,
Say to the Lord, “My refuge, my Rock in whom I trust.”

Refrain: And he will raise you upon eagle’s wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun and hold you in the palm of his hand.

The snare of the fowler will never capture you and famine will bring you no fear.

Under his wings your refuge, his faithfulness your shield.

Refrain.

(Words and music: Michael Joncas)