

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Names of God—Jehovah Shammah—The Lord is There

As was pointed out in the sermon on Sunday, the name Jehovah Shammah is only mentioned once in Scripture, in Ezekiel 48:38. But, the idea of God being present is the whole point of the story of Scripture. From cover to cover we see the triune God as the central figure of the story, and really of all human history.

A really good overview of this point is in the sermon by Stephen in Acts chapter 7. If you're unfamiliar with the Stephen and his message, I'd recommend reading it...nevertheless, here are the high points: Stephen points out the following...

- God appeared to Abraham...in Mesopotamia.
- God promised Abraham and his descendants the Promised Land...in Canaan.
- God heard the Israelites groaning in slavery...in Egypt.
- God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush...at Horeb
- God gave the Law to the Israelites through Moses...at Mt. Sinai

The point being, look at all the places God was throughout Israel's history. He can't/won't be localized (put in a box, literally or figuratively). Even when the Israelites were in exile in Assyria, and later in Babylon...God was there. Contextually, Stephen had been accused of speaking against the Law and against the Temple (similar accusations that were hurled at Jesus). If you know the story, the religious leaders didn't take too kindly to Stephen's recap of their history and his reminder to them that they don't have the corner on the market of God. So, they killed him. Even so, Stephen's point is an important/central/vital one. God is there...and "there" is everywhere, and namely with His people wherever they are.

Additionally, Jesus' final word before He ascended, recorded in Matthew were, *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20) Again, the whole point of God being WITH His people, even DWELLING with His people is scattered all throughout the Bible.

- *"I will never leave you nor forsake you...Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be WITH YOU wherever you go."* (Joshua 1:5b, 9)
- *"I will fear no evil, for YOU ARE WITH ME..."* (Psalm 23:4b)
- *"My dwelling place will be WITH THEM; I will be their God, and they will be my people."* (Ezekiel 37:27)
- *"The word became flesh and made His DWELLING AMONG US."* (John 1:14a)
- *"If anyone loves me, He will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make OUR HOME WITH him."* (John 14:23)
- *"Now THE DWELLING OF GOD IS WITH MEN, and He will LIVE WITH THEM"* (Revelation 21:3)

In most public schools in the United States, students learn U.S. History in 5th, 8th, and 11th grade. Students are “indoctrinated” into the history of their country in elementary school, again in middle school, and again in high school. Of all the topics that could be taught, why this one...repeatedly? The idea is that to cultivate a unified, ordered, and responsible citizenry people need to know their story, out of which they can discover their identity, understand norms, values, and ethics, and hopefully desire to contribute to the common good. This is the importance and value of STORY. Humans are naturally a “storied” species.

As Christians, we rehearse our story every week, in sermons, songs, Bible lessons, sacraments, and other rituals and rhythms. Why? Because stories shape people. Now here’s where the rub comes in. If our story (our history) is where we derive our identity, but we’re offered competing stories in which to find ourselves in, what happens? A rather similar tension develops to that which Jesus warned about when He stated, *“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”* (Matthew 6:24) Just as we cannot serve or be devoted to two masters, neither can we find our identity in two different stories...one will always eventually win out over the other. The main two competing stories that most of us wrestle with are the story of Jesus and His Kingdom, and what we can call the story of the American Dream. Both offer promises; both require allegiance/devotion; both have value systems in place. But which one is true? Which can deliver? Which best explains what we observe and experience?

What often, sadly, happens is some level of syncretism. Syncretism is defined as: the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles, practices or parties, as in philosophy or religion. People try to make the competing stories (often called worldviews) somehow peacefully co-exist or even complement each other somehow. Tony Campolo likens that to combining ice cream and manure...it doesn’t mess up the manure much, but it really messes up the ice cream.

As Christians we need to understand that loyalty and allegiance to Christ and His Kingdom is incompatible with loyalty and allegiance to anything or anyone else. While the story of Scripture clearly displays the God Who Is There, something else that is constantly “there” is the temptation of idolatry in its various forms. The main way we see God combat idolatry is by calling His people back to the correct story of who they truly are, to their identity as His covenant people.

- Q. Describe a time when you acutely felt/sensed the Presence of God.**
- Q. What practices, exercises, habits do you utilize to help you be aware of God’s Presence?**
- Q. What does “practicing the Presence of God” look like for you?**
- Q. Describe a time when you experienced fear, anxiety, or stress, but were comforted by the thought that God is with you (and by implication, for you)?**

- Q. It is popular in our culture for people to view their lives metaphorically like they're writing their own story. While it's true that each of us has an individual story, our stories only make sense, and truly come alive, when they are understood within the larger Story of reality, which is God's story. How has your story merged (or been swept up) into God's story?**
- Q. What is your level of involvement/partnership in God's story?**
- Q. Describe your understanding of your identity, and how they came about.**
- Q. How, or in what ways, do you feel/experience tension between the Story of Jesus and His Kingdom, and the story of world we live in? Where are the friction points?**
- Q. Psalm 34:8a states, "*Taste and see that the Lord is good...*" We could say that learning to enjoy God's Presence is an acquired taste. We could say that God is meant to (and He desires to) be experienced. How have you (or how are you) learning to acquire such a taste? How are you experiencing God?**
- Q. How has dwelling/abiding in God's Presence affected you, formed and shaped you?**
- Q. What helps you to become aware of His Presence? (i.e. nature, music, art, reading, silence, solitude, beauty, community, etc.)**