

# God Is With You

**TEXT: Psalm 91:9-16; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14**

**Delivered at Central Baptist Church on December 30, 2018 by Pastor Kevin Thiessen**

## TITLE SLIDE

Do you have a “life verse”? I’m not sure if it’s as common today, but growing up it seemed quite common. It would be shared when someone was giving their testimony or often at summer camps. Then you started to see verses at sports games on placards, or lately as tattoos on athletes – especially Philippians 4:13. On the positive side, it’s always good to memorize Scripture, and it is good practice to meditate on God’s Word. Yet, on the other side, it can be dangerous when verses are cherry picked out of context of the whole narrative of Scripture.

Here’s a quick example I heard from my friend Alan Breen from John 10:10. As a youth worker, he used the second half of the verse to name his youth group “Max” because Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” They were going to be all about living life to the maximum. Yet his lead pastor Trevor Morrow advised him to use a whole verse instead and as Alan looked again he saw that he was missing the first part which said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”

**SLIDE 2** I’m sure many of you have the Bible App by YouVersion. Well, recently their team looked at the verse that was the most bookmarked, highlighted and shared over the course of 2018, and found that both in the U.S. and globally, one verse stood above the rest: Isaiah 41:10.<sup>1</sup>

In case you are not one of the people who highlighted and memorized the verse, it reads, “So do not fear, **for I am with you**; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

This surprised some people, as verses such as John 3:16, Philippians 4:13, and Jeremiah 29:11 are perennially the most popular, often due to the message of salvation, personal empowerment, and positive plans for the future and where we’re headed. As my Irish colleague Scott Evans commented, “It does say something about what 2018 has been like ... God saying, “Don’t worry, I’m with you right now ... in the middle of this mess. In the middle of Trump, Brexit, tear gas being shot at refugees, natural disasters, etc.”

In that same vein, this past month, pastors Barton and Steve brought us through the Christmas season digging into how the message and hope of Christmas speaks right into the nitty, gritty of life. This little revelation about what people are reading, highlighting and sharing again affirms how present-focused people are at this moment in time. People want to know if Christianity works right now – in the day to day, in the messiness of life, and they want assurance that God has not abandoned them.

We had verses 10-14 of 1 Corinthians 2 read for us today, but I want to also read for you verses 1-5 where Paul gives some more context. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 Paul says, “When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in *weakness* and *fear*, and with much *trembling*. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.”

One chapter earlier, Paul began his letter to the church in Corinth with these words, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

I wonder whether you have ever had this experience: you are talking to a friend about your faith and they are looking back at you with a blank stare. They have no idea what you are talking about. When you talk about a relationship with

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<sup>1</sup> [globenewswire.com/news-release/2018/12/04/1661767/0/en/YouVersion-Bible-App-announces-most-popular-Bible-verse-of-2018.html](https://globenewswire.com/news-release/2018/12/04/1661767/0/en/YouVersion-Bible-App-announces-most-popular-Bible-verse-of-2018.html)

God or about knowing Jesus, to them it is like you are speaking about an ‘imaginary friend’. It makes no sense to them at all.

Look with me at the text that was read for us in 1 Corinthians 2. In verse 14, Paul makes the point that you can only understand spiritual truths with the help of the Holy Spirit. The person ‘without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned’. When God is with us by his Holy Spirit he gives us understanding. As Paul says in verse 12, ‘that we may understand what God has freely given us’.

This Christmas season we have been reminded of one of Jesus’s names – Immanuel – ‘God with us’ (Immanuel - Matthew 1:23). This is just one of the names that expresses Jesus’s God-nature and character. Like God his Father, Jesus is always with us. Throughout the Old Testament we see God’s nature, as He was with the people of Israel during their exodus – not just in words but He gave them a cloud by day and a fire by night. He gave them His assurance of entering into the Promised Land and told their leader Joshua (Joshua 1:9) to “be strong and courageous ... for the Lord Your God is with you wherever you go.” There is nowhere we can go that He does not go with us – Jonah tried to run away but couldn’t escape, and King David wrote in Psalm 139:7-10 that there was nowhere he could go from God’s Spirit.

There is so much we can learn about God’s character and activity when we study his many names. This past year, one of the devotionals Cristy and I read through with our own children was given to us by Zach and Brit Mallett and it’s called *God’s Names* by Sally Michael. If this is an area you’d like to do some more study, then I gladly recommend this devotional to you.

**SLIDE 3** In some Christian traditions, when they receive Communion, the minister says, ‘The Lord be with you,’ to which the congregation replies, ‘And also with you.’ Friends, these are momentous words. That the God who created the universe should be *with you* is not something to be taken lightly. **This is an extraordinary and wonderful promise. To experience God with you by his Spirit is life changing.**

As we dig into our Scripture today, we’re going to review exactly how God is with us.

## **Psalm 91:9-16**

### **1. With you in difficult times**

First David declares to us that God is with us in the difficult times, ‘in trouble’ (v.15). For many of us, when trouble comes it can feel that God has left us, that he has abandoned us. In these times listen to God’s promises over and above your feelings and emotions.

This psalm is all about God’s protection and encourages us not to be afraid. Why? “Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place – the Most High, who is my refuge – no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.” (v.9)

This might appear to be the recipe for a trouble-free life. However, the psalmist goes on: “Because you hold fast to me in love, I will deliver you; I will protect you, because you know my name. When you call to me, *I will answer; I will be with you in trouble; I will rescue you and honor you.*” (vv.14–15)

It is clear from this that those who love the Lord don’t *avoid trouble*. God does not promise a trouble-free life. Rather, he promises that he will rescue you and protect you and answer your prayers. More than that God promises, ‘*I will be with you*’ in trouble. This is what makes all the difference. Even in the darkest times, he is with you. You are never alone.

**SLIDE 4 & 5** Around 56 years ago Don and Carol Richardson began an unforgettable journey answering the call of God to go and move deep into the jungles of Papua New Guinea as missionaries. Their missionary work was primarily focused on a tribal group called the Sawi. This work was captured in Don's well-known book *Peace Child*. For those who've read the book, you may remember the subtitle of the book "Imagine sharing the gospel with cannibals who admire Judas's betrayal more than Jesus' sacrifice." Early on, Don learned the language while Carol treated the sick, all with the purpose of being able to tell the Sawi about Jesus. But, the Sawi did not respond – they were headhunters – they were cannibals – and they lived in a constant state of tribal war. The Richardsons began to lose hope that the Gospel would ever take root. Finally, Don explained to the Sawi that if they kept on fighting their family would no longer be able to stay. (*Pausing the story – you have to wonder if the Richardsons were wondering if God abandoned them? What was the point of answering God's call to come to this dangerous and remote region if there was no breakthrough?*) But the Sawi were desperate to keep the Richardsons around, so they finally agreed to make peace with each other. In order for that to happen each Sawi village gave an infant, a baby boy, to their enemies to raise, and this child became known as the Peace Child. As *Pioneers International* Director, and Don's son Steve Richardson commented, "It was through this unexpected exchange, buried deep in the Sawi culture, that gave the perfect opportunity to share the Gospel with the Sawi. Don explained to the Sawi that God sent his very own Peace Child, Jesus, to make peace with us."<sup>2</sup>

Don was a long-time friend and missionary partner of Central Baptist, and last week God brought him home. We praise God that Don's final difficulties didn't last long, that Carol and the boys were able to be with him before he passed. We praise God for what *He* accomplished through this godly man. And we pray that the Richardson family would be comforted with God's peace.

The Richardson's story and the YouVersion report about Isaiah 41:10 connects with the message I was preparing for this morning. A few years ago, *Pioneers* released a mini-documentary called *Never the Same* about the revival that has happened in the Sawi people over 50 years since the Richardson's first landed in Papua New Guinea. Some of you have seen this, and others of you have read *Peace Child*. If so, you are aware that God has multiplied many times over those who have come to trust and believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

God did not abandon the Richardsons in the deep jungle of Papua New Guinea – no, he was with the Richardsons – and he provided an unexpected breakthrough at a moment when they were ready to give up. For each one of us, there are moments in life, for some of you it may be happening right now in this very moment, when we're ready to pack it in. The suffering continues, the challenges do not go away, the breakthrough has not happened – and the light at the end of the tunnel is nowhere in sight.

*Just like the Richardsons would have had no breakthrough without God's intervention*, Paul also often felt inadequate for the call God gave him. As we have read today, Paul shared in his letters that God's power was made perfect in his weakness.

## **SLIDE 6**

**It is often only when we feel weak and at the point of giving up that we are willing to rely completely on God.**

**Paul was utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit to speak through him. The Richardsons were utterly dependent on God to breakthrough to a hardened people group.** Does this not sound familiar to our lives? Does this not sound familiar to our city? Whether you are ready to give up because of ongoing suffering, the lack of breakthrough, or however personally inadequate you feel, God has given all those who believe in Him an inexhaustible resource to strengthen us, to steel our resolve, to give us what we need for this moment and to be fully adequate on our behalf.

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<sup>2</sup> *Never the Same*, *Pioneers USA*. [www.vimeo.com/51281742](http://www.vimeo.com/51281742)

## SLIDE 7

### 2. With you through His Holy Spirit

Through the Holy Spirit, God is with you in the most extraordinary way – he is actually *in* you. It would be impossible for God to be with you any more fully than he is through his Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 2:15-16 Paul explains some of the extraordinary benefits of God being with you in this way. I appreciate how Eugene Peterson paraphrases these verses in *The Message* saying, “Spirit can be known only by spirit – God’s Spirit and our spirits in open communion. Spiritually alive, we have access to everything God’s Spirit is doing, and can’t be judged by unspiritual critics. Isaiah’s question, “Is there anyone around who knows God’s Spirit, anyone who knows what he is doing?” has been answered: Christ knows, and we have Christ’s Spirit.” (vv.15–16, MSG).

Just like David in Psalm 91, Paul in verse 9 emphasizes that what God is offering is for “those who love him”. (v.9)

As was mentioned earlier – in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul prefaces the work of the Holy Spirit first by talking about how God’s power is made perfect in his human weakness, and how wisdom comes not from this age – but rather a “secret and hidden wisdom of God”.

The Corinthians could have been forgiven for thinking that Paul was totally opposed to wisdom, given that he has just declared so relentlessly that God has judged wisdom (1:18–21), outsmarted wisdom (1:22–25), and called only a few of the wise to be members of Christ’s body in Corinth (1:26–31), and given that Paul’s manner of preaching in Corinth was emphatically not according to wisdom (2:1–5). So, in one sense, the words, “*We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature*”, come as somewhat of a surprise.

**SLIDE 8** Yet Paul is now referencing God’s wisdom – a secret wisdom that is amazing. John Chrysostom put it this way, “God’s wisdom is so great that it makes human wisdom appear foolish.”<sup>3</sup> Verse 9 states, ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for *those who love him*.’ The Holy Spirit reveals God’s wisdom to us, and in his book, *True Spirituality*<sup>4</sup>, Vaughan Roberts notes that there are four ways in which the Holy Spirit reveals God’s wisdom.

### 1 Corinthians 2:10-14

#### **SLIDE 9** The Holy Spirit *knows*

- First, the Holy Spirit knows what no human being could otherwise know – the mind and thoughts of God. Verses 10-11 show us that the ‘Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who *knows* the thoughts of another human being except that person’s own spirit within? In the same way no one *knows* the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God’.

#### **SLIDE 10** The Holy Spirit *reveals*

- Second, the Holy Spirit does not keep his knowledge of the wisdom of God to himself, but he *reveals* it to those in whom he dwells. Look with me at verse 12, ‘We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.’ You have received the Spirit who is from God. He is with you. He enables you to understand the secret wisdom of God, though of course we could

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<sup>3</sup> Bray, G. L. (Ed.). (1999). [1–2 Corinthians](#) (p. 21). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>4</sup> Vaughan Roberts, *True Spirituality*, (IVP, 2011).

never fathom the depths of God. As Paul says later in this letter to the Corinthians, in this life ‘we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror’, not yet ‘face to face’ (13:12).

**SLIDE 11** The Holy Spirit *inspires*

- Third, Paul was *inspired by the Spirit* to pass on the wisdom of the gospel to others. See verse 13, ‘This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words’ (2:13). The Spirit similarly teaches you what to say so that you too can express ‘spiritual truths in spiritual words’, generally through the Spirit-inspired words of the apostles recorded in the New Testament. You can share words in line with Scripture that point people to Jesus.

Believe it or not there have been many moments in life where I didn’t have the words to know what to say. In fact, some of the best moments in my life came not out of my eloquence or excellence but through my mistakes and inadequacy. Today’s Scripture only reinforces my own experience that when I am weak and dependent on God more excellent breakthroughs often happen.

**SLIDE 12** The Holy Spirit *illuminates*

- Fourthly, without the Holy Spirit you simply cannot understand spiritual truths: ‘The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned’ (v.14). When God is with you by his Spirit you can actually understand the mind of the Lord. Indeed, you ‘have the mind of Christ’ (v.16).

One story this past year highlighted the work of the Holy Spirit in a profound way.

This past year, my number one highlight was being a part of my friend Adam Matthew’s baptism. This past year Adam had an incredible spiritual breakthrough. Adam is one of these guys who grew up in the church, who went to a Christian school, who knew all the Sunday School answers, but over time it became clear to him that he did not really *know* the Lord, or the extent of His sacrifice and grace.

In his testimony, Adam talked about being on autopilot and how his faith had very little impact on his day to day life. He shared that Christianity was a convenience when it suited him, but that his decisions were Adam-led not God-led.

Adam has been a friend of mine for almost my entire time at Central, we’ve been in community group together, we were roommates when he joined one of our short-term teams down to Chile, and we have had countless conversations about Christianity and the stuff that Adam wrestled with and struggled with.

At times, it appeared that there was growth, or breakthrough, but in reality, coming into this year, Adam’s faith was hanging by a thread and he held a lot of resentment towards God for the struggles and trials he and his family had gone through.

But on March 11<sup>th</sup>, with a group of men from church talking theology at a local pub, the Holy Spirit broke through. The Sunday School answers weren’t going to cut it, and one line stuck with Adam. “It’s for God’s glory.” At that statement, it was like the room lit up – Adam’s vision cleared – and his resentments and challenges in faith were gone. He had a sudden hunger to trust and know God – and I can personally vouch for this because my cell phone blew up with his text messages. Adam’s anger and skepticism faded away and were replaced with a desire to know and glorify the Lord.

I asked Adam if I could again bring this up, because this for me summarizes what today’s message is all about. Adam didn’t come to faith from my wise words, or eloquent unpacking of the Gospel. Though I walked with Adam and Ruth through some difficult seasons, my presence did not help dissipate the anger and hurt that Adam felt, it didn’t take away the struggles and issues they were facing. Adam’s coming to faith and being baptized was a highlight for me because once again it affirmed for me how the Holy Spirit works. Even when God uses us, He gets all the glory ... He was the only one who could save Adam. He’s the only one who can save each one of us.

Adam and I have been friends for 8 years now ... and for some of us, that's far too long to not see a breakthrough. Throughout our friendship there have been many times when I've been on my knees in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to intervene, and to give me the words to say. But at the end of the day, Adam had a breakthrough only because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Friends, there is only one Saviour. Only God can save.

We need to be careful that we do not assume this role in the lives of others. For some of us, we see difficulties and the lack of breakthrough as the absence of God. So, we work harder, we try to say things differently, and yet too easily it can become all about us. Rather, like Don Richardson, we need to be patient and wait on God to breakthrough. Like Paul, we do not need to be concerned with how wise or persuasive we are, but rely on the power of the Holy Spirit at work in people's lives.

Friends, a lot has been accomplished in and through Central Baptist Church this past year, and in 2019 we will continue to seek to live out our vision – to renew our community through the gospel. We will continue to seek this renewal in our personal lives, in our city, and in the areas around the world where God allows us to have some influence. But...

- **SLIDE 13** Let us not be overconfident when our programs and initiatives are successful.
- **SLIDE 14** Let us not be dismayed when the numbers are not as high as we wish they were.
- **SLIDE 15** Let us not be proud when we are recognized for the good impact we are making.
- **SLIDE 16** Let us not wilt when we see the increased challenges that come with living in a post-Christian nation.
- **SLIDE 17** Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith – and let us be strengthened and empowered by the Holy Spirit to abide in the love of the Father and to live in obedience to Him. Let us rest and abide in God the Father and his faithfulness to fulfill all that he has promised.

In closing I want to play a video from a few years ago with Francis Chan and David Platt. As we close 2018 and ready ourselves for another new year – their dialogue serve as another reminder of where our focus needs to be as we seek to glorify God with our lives.

Play - Francis Chan and David Platt video (Idolatry and Mission)

### **Prayer:**

God, forgive us when we make the good things you have given us our idols of worship. Fix our eyes on your son Jesus. Holy Spirit enable us to abide in the love, provision, and assurance of God the Father. Thank you, God, for being Jehovah-Shammah, the God Who is There. Thank you for never leaving us – anywhere, anytime, for any reason. You are good and You are faithful. Help me, help us, to trust and love and obey you.

### **Benediction (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12):**

***“To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”***