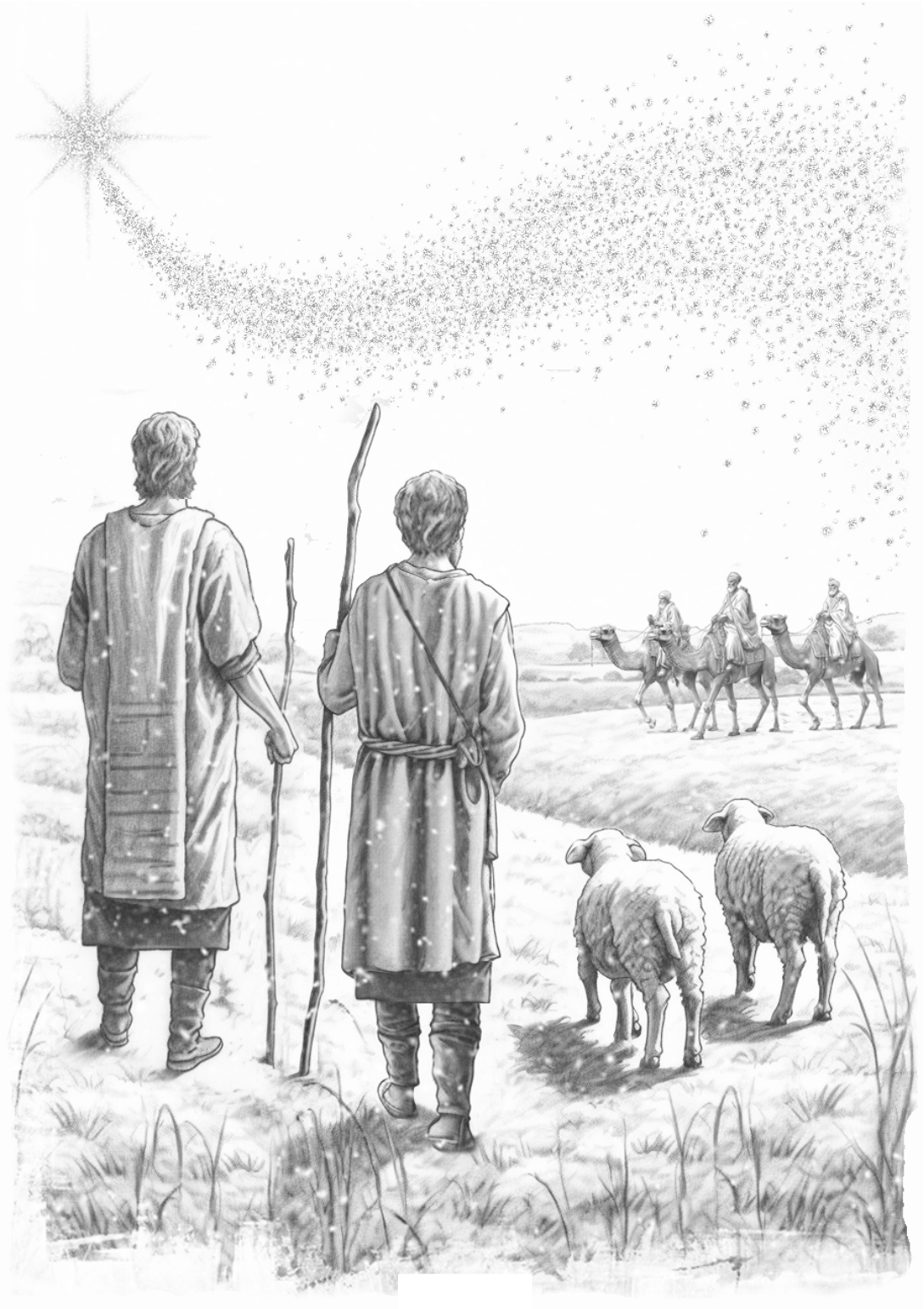




Peace

WEEK FOUR





Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men

Unwrapping: Luke 2:8-20

Not long ago, I had the pleasure of visiting a friend's home during the holiday season. As I stepped into her living room, my eyes were immediately drawn to their Christmas tree. It wasn't like any tree I'd ever seen before. Adorned from top to bottom with delicate birds of various colors and sizes, it stood as a testament to the beauty of nature. What captivated me most were the white doves interspersed throughout the branches. These doves, long regarded as symbols of peace, warmly reminded me of the night the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:14, KJV)

The account in Luke chapter 2 is a cherished part of the Christmas story. The shepherds, going about their nightly duties, had their routine interrupted in the most miraculous way. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, Its glory illuminating the darkness, filling them with awe and fear. But the angel's words were of comfort: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

The shepherds were humble, ordinary men, yet they were chosen to receive the most extraordinary news. That night, they became witnesses to the chorus of angels praising God, proclaiming peace on earth. Their experience serves as a reminder to us all: God's

messages of hope and peace can touch anyone, anywhere, even when they least expect it.

This Christmas, as we gather with loved ones to celebrate the birth of our Savior, let's remember the beautiful message delivered to the shepherds.

May we find moments of stillness, allowing our hearts to resonate with the angelic proclamation of peace. For in those quiet moments, we too might feel a touch of heavenly grace, a gentle reminder of God's love for us and His desire for peace in our lives.

In Philippians 4:6-7, what are the steps Paul suggests we take to experience the peace of God that transcends all understanding?

Did You Know?

In ancient Israel, shepherds were often viewed as lowly and socially insignificant. In fact, verse 8 tells us that they were living in the field. Yet, it was to these humble men that the angels first announced the birth of Jesus.

If shepherds were viewed as lowly and insignificant, why do you think God chose them to be the first to hear the news of Christ's birth?



Peace is Found in God's Presence

Unwrapping: Psalm 31 & 63

The Christmas season evokes visions of peace, from softly falling snow to the serene melodies of "Silent Night." Yet the reality can be far removed from these idealized images. Amid the whirlwind of holiday activities, finding peace can feel like searching for a quiet harbor in a raging storm. But, in the midst of the turmoil, the words of David guide us, serving as a beacon of hope for our restless souls.

Scholars suggest that David wrote Psalm 31 while in the forest of Hereth in Judah (1 Samuel 22:5), hiding from King Saul who was out to end his life. This context adds depth to the Psalm, as David was intimately acquainted with the same fears and struggles we face today. We all have a "King Saul" in our lives—those situations or challenges that pursue us relentlessly, threatening our peace and well-being. Just as King Saul was an ever-looming threat for David, our worries and fears can follow us into the holiday season.

Blaise Pascal once said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ." This wisdom rings especially true during the Christmas season. We may find ourselves longing for the perfect gift, the ideal family gathering, or even a picture-perfect holiday. Yet the true source of peace isn't in another gift or the company of loved ones; it's in time alone with



Steps to Peace with God

In Psalm 63, David provides a spiritual roadmap for those of us going through challenging times. He outlines six transformative steps to find that elusive inner peace when our hearts are heavy:

- ① **He Seeks God** (Verse 1): David's first instinct is to turn his face toward God.
- ② **He Shifts Perspective** (Verse 3): David looks at his circumstances through the lens of God's love.
- ③ **He Praises with Joy** (Verse 5): It's one thing to thank God, but David takes it a step further. He praises God with a joyous heart.
- ④ **He Meditates in Silence** (Verse 6): When sleep escapes him, he fills that quiet space by meditating on God's goodness.
- ⑤ **He Recognizes God's Faithfulness** (Verse 7): Even in trials, David remembers God's unwavering faithfulness.
- ⑥ **He Actively Pursues God** (Verse 8): David isn't passively waiting for peace; he's clinging to God as the ultimate source of comfort.



DAY TWENTY-FOUR

Peace Calms the Raging Sea

Unwrapping: Mark 4:35-41

The beauty of Christmas is more than decorations and ribbons, sleighbells and snow; it's the beauty of a Savior Who came into the world with the authority and power to bring about true, lasting peace. A peace that bridged the gap between God and mankind, a peace that passes understanding, a peace that calms the weary soul and quiets the heart.

In Mark 4, we see a vivid demonstration of this peace, when the disciples are caught off guard by a fierce storm on the Sea of Galilee. These men, seasoned fishermen, were familiar with the sea's unpredictable nature. Yet, this particular storm was so overwhelming that fear gripped their hearts. As waves threatened to engulf their vessel, they found Jesus, asleep in the stern. In desperation, they awakened Him, questioning His care for their safety.

I've never been out on a lake during a terrible storm, but like everyone else I've had a few storms of my own. Furious storms that shook me up. Waves that swept over my life. And, during some of those storms, it almost felt like Jesus was asleep in the boat.

But here's the thing about Jesus—even on the days when I was troubled and tense, He was always the calm in my storm. You see, it's not what you *feel* about Jesus during those moments of unrest, it's what you *know* about Him that really counts. And, what do we

Did You Know?

The Hebrew word for peace, "Shalom," is more than just the absence of conflict. It's about completeness and well-being. In the Bible, it refers to a deep sense of peace that comes from a relationship with God.

How does the account of Jesus calming the storm in Mark Chapter 4 reinforce the idea that peace can be found even in the midst of chaos?



Peace Takes Practice

Unwrapping: Philippians 4

The first year my kids moved out on their own, Christmas was different for us. I started preparing early. I worked hard to make everything perfect. I prepared my heart, prepared my house, and prepared my turkey. But everything wasn't perfect. It was average. My vision of a Norman Rockwell picture-perfect family gathered around the table, was simply the Schacht Six plus one eating turkey and stuffing like they did every other year. Nothing was out of the ordinary, nothing was extraordinary, it was quick and simple and over too soon.

And then the disappointment set in. I got down on myself, thinking, 'This Christmas is a disappointment. My table setting is dull. My kids are never going to want to come back for Christmas. My stuffing looks weird.' (It's true—it did.) Maybe it was the lack of sleep I had the night before, or maybe—more likely—it was the enemy turning my attention away from the things that are good.

In Philippians 4:8 (NIV), Paul writes, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

But how do we do that? If you're anything like me, this kind of thinking comes out of nowhere when I least expect it. It lurks around

the corner waiting for the ideal moment to bring me down. It holds on, and it's hard to let go.

The answer is found in the same chapter. In fact, Paul spells it out in the very next verse, when he tells us to put his words into practice. We need to practice the truth we find in God's Word. If we want a sense of peace and joy, we need to change the way we think, and what we're focusing on by practicing the gospel.

This Christmas, I'm changing my way of thinking. No, I'm not perfect, but I'm growing in grace, and that's a good place to be.



In Philippians 4:8, the Apostle Paul provides us with a guiding framework for our thoughts, urging us to dwell on things that resonate with the heart of God. Here are the eight virtues he mentions, each accompanied by a brief explanation:

- ★ **Whatever is True** – Thoughts that align with the unchanging truth found in God's Word.
- ★ **Whatever is Noble** – Thoughts that reflect a character honoring God.
- ★ **Whatever is Right** – Thoughts that are just and fair according to God's standards.
- ★ **Whatever is Pure** – Thoughts that are free from moral fault or guilt, as Jesus exemplified.
- ★ **Whatever is Lovely** – Thoughts that focus on the beauty in God's creation or character.

- ★ **Whatever is Admirable** – Thoughts that hold respect and often mirror God's virtues.
- ★ **Whatever is Excellent** – Thoughts that surpass the ordinary, echoing the high quality of God's works.
- ★ **Whatever is Praiseworthy** – Thoughts that are aligned with actions and attributes that glorify God.

In Philippians 4:11-13, Paul talks about his contentment. What was his secret to being content in every situation?



Peace is Found in a Gentle Hush

Unwrapping: 1 Kings 19:1-13

Over the years, the Christmas season has evolved into a grand spectacle, far more elaborate than ever before. From November 1st, its commercial presence is found everywhere. Grand feasts have replaced simple meals, gifts once personal and heartfelt, are now often pricey and extravagant as parents compete, and holiday decor has escalated from modest and meaningful to over-the-top and ostentatious. It's a stark contrast to the more subdued, intimate holidays of yesteryears, when the focus was less on grandeur and more on the simple joys and the true essence of the season.

Amid this shift, it's easy to lose sight of the profound moments of reflection, gratitude, and connection that the season invites. Families used to gather, not just around bountiful tables, but also around fireplaces, sharing stories, singing hymns, and rejoicing in the true gift of Christmas: the Savior's birth. These traditions, rich in meaning and warmth, grounded us and reminded us of the eternal love and hope brought into the world through Jesus.

In the midst of all the noise, I'm reminded how God's presence can be found in a soft and delicate whisper. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah, having demonstrated God's mighty power against the prophets of Baal, fled from Queen Jezebel's threats. Alone and exhausted, he sought solace on a mountain.

It's interesting to note that God didn't speak to Elijah in the gusting wind that tore mountains apart, or in the earthquake that followed, nor did he speak to him in the fire that consumed everything in its path. Elijah heard God in the gentle hush that followed.

The birth of Jesus was itself a quiet event on a silent night, yet its impact resounds louder than any fanfare. So, when the festive season's clamor becomes overwhelming, let's step back and listen. Listen for that still, small voice that whispers peace into our souls. God meets us in those moments of quiet, just as He met Elijah.

THE BLIND MEN AND THE LIGHT

Charles H. Spurgeon once shared a thought-provoking story. A group of blind men tried to comprehend the concept of light. They had never seen light, and yet they were surrounded by it. One touched a sun-warmed stone and declared, "I feel the light." Another felt the rays on his face and claimed, "I am in the light." Yet another stood in the shade, untouched by the sun's rays, and sighed, "I do not know the light."

Just as these men were surrounded by light, yet couldn't fully perceive it, many are surrounded by the true essence of Christmas but are caught up in the grandeur and spectacle. Yet, for those who pause, step away from the noise, and earnestly seek, they will find themselves enveloped in the pure, quiet light of Christ's birth—a light that brings peace to the soul.

Did You Know?

In 1 Kings 19, the "gentle whisper" Elijah hears is also translated as "a still small voice" in other versions of the Bible. This phrase is often cited in literature and speeches to describe a subtle yet profound inner conviction.

How does God display His nurturing and caring nature toward Elijah in 1 Kings 19, and what does this tell us about finding peace in God during times of fear or exhaustion?



Peace UPlifts the Weary

Unwrapping: 2 Kings 4:8-37

What is Christmas? It's not something we celebrate one month a year, and tuck away in the closet for the other eleven. It's not something we dust off and put on the shelf to admire. It doesn't end at the manger, nor does it end at the cross.

In 2 Kings Chapter 4, we read a story about a wealthy woman from Shunem who showed profound kindness to the prophet Elisha. In return for her kindness, she was blessed with a son, a gift akin to the joy of Christmas morning. Yet, this joy was suddenly and tragically interrupted when her son unexpectedly passed away. Amid the anguish, her faith remained unshaken. When asked about her son, she could only reply, "It is well." And through Elisha's intervention, her son was miraculously restored to life.

Reading that story, I'm reminded of the heartbreaking story of Horatio Spafford. His life, marked by success and abundance, took a tragic turn with the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, when he lost a significant portion of his wealth. This was a precursor to an even more profound sorrow. While his family was traveling to Europe, a tragic accident claimed the lives of his four daughters, leaving behind only his wife. It's hard to grasp the depth of faith and trust in God it took for him to pen the now-famous hymn, "It Is Well with My Soul."

Both of these stories, though separated by centuries, share a singular thread: an unyielding faith that anchors the soul during life's fiercest storms.

That's the kind of faith that I crave. A faith in the One I can rest on when the weight of the world is too much to bear. The One who was born in a manger, to bring peace and salvation to all.

So, what is Christmas? It's the profound echo of God's boundless love, resonating in our hearts throughout the year. A kind of love that uplifts the weary and embraces the lost. Just as the Shunammite Woman held onto unwavering faith in her deepest sorrow, Christmas reminds us of the hope and unparalleled peace offered by Christ.

How does the story of the Shunammite woman encourage us to go straight to God as our ultimate Source in times of trouble?



Peace is Knowing God is With Us

Unwrapping: Matthew 1:18-25 & Daniel 3

You don't see it all that often anymore, but back in the day Christmas carolling was a staple of our annual holiday tradition. Clothed in our mittens and wrapped in our scarves, our church joyfully sang to neighboring homes. Some songs were serious, other were silly, but one song had a way warming my heart: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

The many names of God, like Jehovah, Redeemer, Messiah, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords all serve to remind us of His divine attributes. Yet, it's 'Immanuel' that stands out during the Christmas season, carrying with it an intimate promise: God with us. This name embodies the warm embrace of God's love, touching our lives in the most personal way.

When the angel relayed to Joseph in Matthew 1:23 that Mary's child would be named Immanuel, it wasn't just a title—it was an assurance. Even in the darkest seasons of life, we find peace knowing we are not alone. God is with us, offering solace through our storms.

It's in the quiet valleys of life, during our most trying times, that we become acutely aware of God's comforting presence. It's these moments of seeking peace that we lean heavily into Him, drawing from His infinite reservoir of comfort and strength.

Throughout Scripture, God's presence brings peace. The thief on the cross, in his final hours, found peace in Christ's promise:

"Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43, NIV). The phrase "with me" is a beacon of hope and peace, assuring us of God's ever-present nature. He stood with David, guided Moses, and comforted Joseph. When Esther faced uncertainty, God was her anchor.

As we prepare for Christmas, let's cherish and embrace the peace that comes with knowing He is with us. His promise of eternal presence is the heart and soul of Christmas, and so amid the chilly air and glowing candles we sing with all our might, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."



The miraculous birth of Jesus is recounted both in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. As the story unfolds, several names and titles are bestowed upon Him, each illuminating a distinct facet of His divine nature and mission. Here are those titles from the Christmas narratives in these Gospels:

- ★ **Savior** - "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:11)
- ★ **Messiah the Lord** - "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:11)
- ★ **Immanuel (means "God with us")** - "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel." (Matthew 1:23)
- ★ **Son of the Most High** - "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." (Luke 1:32)

- ★ Son of David - "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:20)
- ★ Christ the Lord - "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:11)
- ★ King of the Jews - "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." (Matthew 2:2)

How does the promise in 1 Peter 5:10 assure us that God is with us, especially during times of suffering, and what specific actions does God take to restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us?

Did You Know?

Throughout the Bible, Jesus is referred to by over 200 names and titles. Each of these designations offers unique insights into His character, role, and mission, revealing the multifaceted nature of Christ's relationship with humanity. From "Lamb of God" in John to "Bright Morning Star" in Revelation, the myriad titles span both the Old and New Testaments, underscoring the profound significance of Jesus in the biblical narrative.

And SURELY
I AM with you
always
TO THE very end
OF the age
MATTHEW 28:20

Questions and Answers

Day 22

In Philippians 4:6-7, what are the steps Paul suggests we take to experience the peace of God that transcends all understanding? How do these steps align with David's approach in Psalm 31?

1. Do not be anxious about anything.
2. In every situation, pray and make petitions to God.
3. Present your requests with thanksgiving.

Paul assures us that if we follow these steps, the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds.

In Psalm 31. David is in a state of distress but turns to God as his refuge and fortress (Psalm 31:2-4). Like Paul, David relinquishes his anxieties and places his trust in God. He seeks God's guidance and deliverance, acknowledging God as his rock and fortress. In doing so, David finds peace in the presence of God, even amid life-threatening circumstances.

If shepherds were viewed as lowly and insignificant, why do you think God chose them to be the first to hear the news of Christ's birth?

God's choice to reveal the birth of Jesus to shepherds demonstrates His desire to extend grace and redemption to all. It's a warm reminder that in God's eyes, every person has value and is deserving

of His love. It's also a lesson for us to recognize and honor the worth of every individual, as God does.

Day 23

Can you identify a 'Saul' in your life—a person or situation that seems to be relentlessly pursuing you? What is the importance of finding your own 'forest of Hereth' as a place of refuge and connection with God?

Answers to this question will vary among individuals.

Day 24

Can you recall a 'storm' in your life where it felt like everything was out of control? How did God calm your storm?

Answers to this question will vary among individuals.

How does the account of Jesus calming the storm in Mark Chapter 4 reinforce the idea that peace can be found even in the midst of chaos?

His ability to bring immediate calm to the chaos with just a few words, "Quiet! Be still," demonstrates that true peace comes from Him. It reassures us that no matter how turbulent our circumstances may be, His peace is accessible and powerful enough to bring stillness to our storms.

Day 25

In Philippians 4:11-13, Paul talks about his contentment. What was his secret to being content in every situation?

His secret was his reliance on Christ's strength. He said, "I can do all things through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13, NIV).

Day 26

How does God display His nurturing and caring nature toward Elijah in 1 Kings 19, and what does this tell us about finding peace in God during times of fear or exhaustion?

God shows His nurturing side by providing Elijah with food, water, and rest when he's emotionally and physically drained. More than that, God speaks to him in a "gentle whisper," meeting him in his vulnerable state with kindness and understanding. This shows us that in times of fear or exhaustion, God is attuned to our needs and will provide us both with practical care and a peace that calms our anxious hearts.

Day 27

How does the story of the Shunammite woman encourage us to go straight to God as our ultimate Source in times of trouble?"

The Shunammite woman, facing the loss of her son, turns immediately to Elisha, who symbolizes God's power and presence. Her actions serve as a vivid reminder that in our deepest troubles, our first response should be to seek God. Going straight to God connects us

to the only Source that can provide true peace, restoration, and miracles.

What does Proverbs 18:10 say, and in what way was this exemplified in the story of the Shunammite woman?

Proverbs 18:10 says, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."

The verse implies an urgent and wholehearted turning to the Lord for protection and safety in times of trouble.

In the story of the Shunammite woman, we see this urgency as she hurries to see the prophet, Elisha. She doesn't slow down to engage in conversation with her husband or Gehazi. She says to her servant, "Do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you."

Day 28

How does the promise in 1 Peter 5:10 assure us that God is with us, especially during times of suffering, and what specific actions does God take to restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us?

The promise in 1 Peter 5:10 assures us that God is with us by explicitly stating that after we have endured suffering, God Himself will step in to "restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish" us. This shows that God is not a distant observer but an active participant in our lives, especially in our hardships. He is committed to being right there with us, pulling us through, and setting things right.