

DISCUSSION GUIDE :: WEEK 3

MISSING PIECES
WHERE IS TRUST?
2 KINGS 6:24-7:20
03/26/2017



MAIN POINT

We learn to trust God through patience, experience, and knowledge of God's nature.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Who is one person, aside from your immediate family, that you would say you trust the most?

How is trust built over the course of a relationship? What are some things that can undermine trust in a relationship?

Trust in relationships is developed over time. A person is there when you need them the most. They give good advice and keep what you share with them confidential. They are dependable. All these characteristics build trust. Trust in God is foundational to what it means to be a Christian. Becoming a Christian is often referred to as "trusting in Christ." We are able to trust in God because He has promised that He will never leave us, and we learn to do so with patience and experience.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Our passage falls in the middle of a military dispute between Israel and the Arameans. The Arameans led two campaigns against the king of Israel. In the first raid (2 Kings 6:8-23), the Lord enabled Elisha to tell the king of Israel the precise movements of the Aramean armies so that Israel might escape entrapment. The Aramean armies attempted to kill the prophet, but the Lord's horses and chariots of fire encircled Elisha and his servant. The Lord answered Elisha's prayer and struck them blind. After God restored their sight, Elisha released them for home so they might warn their king. This is where our passage picks up.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 KINGS 6:24-32.

What must it have been like to live in such deplorable conditions?

Can you think of a situation in your life that can compare to what God's people lived in at this time? That is, has there ever been a time in your life in which you were at a loss for how things might improve?

The siege conditions in Samaria were clearly severe. The eating of a donkey's head is one thing, and cannibalism is

another. Yet the woman's complaint was not that she had been reduced to eating the corpse of her own child, but was about the injustice she felt when her neighbor refused to honor her agreement to share their "meal" equally. Things were so bad that the woman was void of compassion as a mother; only survival mattered, and any act of injustice that prevented that mattered as well.

It's often shocking to see stress and desperate situations erode principles we think cannot be changed, but as fallen and fallible people, even those traits that we think are unchangeable can, indeed, change. Trust is one of those traits. We think we can lean on God in any circumstance, but difficult times try our trust. This is what happened to the king and other citizens, but not Elisha.

How did Elisha initially respond to the king's substantive threat?

Elisha is presented as remarkably calm and trusting in this passage (v. 32). He is content to wait, and waiting is a key component to learning to trust God. He did not feel compelled to take matters into his own hands, which is often easier than waiting. Rather, Elisha was willing to wait and see God work in a way that he could not.

Are you the kind of person who likes to make things happen and get things done? How has being this way been problematic for your faith in God? How has it been a good thing?

Are you more of a procrastinator, content to put things off in the name of "trusting God"? How is procrastination different than waiting on God?

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 KINGS 6:33-7:2.

What prophecy does Elisha have for the officer of the king who had come to take his life? How did the officer respond?

Why might one respond incredulously to Elisha's prophecy? Why might one believe it?

As ridiculous as Elisha's prophecy might have seemed in its immediate context, Elisha's word was not all that absurd. Elisha had seen God work time and again in similar fashion, and was familiar with even more stories of God's faithfulness to His people. Familiarity with God's faithfulness both in times past and today go a long way to grow our trust.

What stories of God's faithfulness have encouraged you over the years? Consider sharing one of those stories, as someone in your group likely needs to hear of God's faithfulness to grow in their trust.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 KINGS 7:3-20.

When the king's messenger approached the prophet, Elisha prophesied that within a day they would be delivered. The messenger ridiculed the prophet's words and later paid for it with his life. That night the Lord created the rumbling noise of an approaching army, and the Arameans left their camp, thinking that mercenary troops had come to Samaria's aid. On the next day, lepers discovered the abandoned camp with its provisions. The whole city rushed through the gateway, trampling to death the officer who had mocked the prophet's message.

What was at the root of the messenger's doubt? Think about a time when you doubted God. What was at the root of your lack of trust?

What was at the heart of Elisha's trust?

At the heat of the messenger's lack of trust was doubt in God's character as sovereign and powerful, capable of doing

whatever He pleased. Elisha had no such doubt, and neither should we.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Two things often keep us from trusting God: fear and a desire to know. We fear that God won't come through in a way we'd like, and we prefer to know ahead of time that trusting God will get us our preferred outcome. But what we've seen in Elisha's story is that fear and a desire to know are no substitute for trust in God. Patience and experience, in combination with an increased understanding of God's character as the One who is truly trustworthy, grow our trust in God.

What situation in your life right now is requiring an active choice of faith rather than fear?

How can you remind yourself this week of the character of God that inspires faith?

What is one way you can display faith rather than fear?

PRAY

Pray that God would remind you and your group this week of His unchanging character. Pray that you would choose faith and trust, rather than fear and a desire to know.

COMMENTARY

2 KINGS 6:24-7:20

6:24–25 After an unspecified amount of time has passed, Ben-Hadad mounts yet another attack on Israel. This time the Syrians besiege Samaria itself rather than simply raiding chosen towns as in 2 Kgs 6:8–10. The siege is so effective that Samaria's inhabitants are reduced to paying high prices for nonsavory items like a donkey's head or a few beans. It seems unlikely that the city can hold out much longer.

6:26–33 Just how desperate Samaria's citizens have gotten becomes apparent when two mothers approach Israel's king with a problem. Their dilemma is quite like the one brought to Solomon in 1 Kgs 3:16–28, for it involves two mothers, two sons, one of which has died and one of which is still living, and the future of the living child. In a cruel twist of the Solomon story, though, the mothers have agreed to eat their children; but one woman has broken the pact. The dead boy's mother wants the king to make the other woman keep her word. Syria's siege has led to the worst sort of atrocities.

The king blames Elisha for the siege, perhaps reasoning that Syria still wants to eliminate the prophet. Ironically, the king seems to forget how Elisha protected Israel from the Syrians in those instances. He is now acting toward Elisha the way Ahab acted toward Elijah (cf. 1 Kgs 18:1–15). He considers his chief asset a liability, his best friend an enemy, and swears to have the prophet killed.

Meanwhile, Elisha sits in his home, speaking with the city's leaders. Gray thinks the leaders' presence in Elisha's home indicates their opposition to the king, but Hobbs probably is right to infer rather that these men held Elisha in high regard. Elisha instructs the visitors to lock the door to bar the king's assassin, but the man arrives too quickly. Once in Elisha's presence, however, the messenger does nothing. The author concludes this portion of the episode by noting the king now believes that the Lord has caused their problems, so there is no need to allow the Lord's prophet to live. Why not simply kill Elisha or turn him over to the Syrians and hope the enemy will leave?

7:1–2 Elisha makes two predictions about the lifting of the siege. First, he promises that food will be cheap and plentiful by the next day. This prediction seems incredible in light of their situation and suffering. Second, when the king's messenger doubts Elisha's word (reassuring that even an immediate rainfall would not solve their problems that fast; cf. Gen 7:11; 8:2), the prophet predicts that the man will see the plentiful food yet will not eat any of it. Eyes of faith reassured Elisha's servant in 2 Kgs 6:16–17, while here doubt will close the messenger's eyes in death before he can be rescued from hunger.

7:3-11 Four lepers with nothing to lose become the first to enjoy the fulfillment of Elisha's prophecy. As lepers they had to live outside the city (Lev 13:46), but they stayed near the gate to beg for food. Ironically, just as the once-leprous Naaman led Syria to many victories over Israel, so now these lepers will lead Israel's looting of Syria's army. These men reason that the Syrians will kill them if the siege is effective, so they decide to cast themselves on the enemy's mercy. They will be no worse off no matter what happens.

When the lepers reach the edge of the Syrian camp, they discover the enemy has gone. God caused them to hear yet another unseen army (cf. 2 Kgs 6:17), which led them to retreat without taking their possessions. Not believing their good fortune, the lepers eat their fill, plunder the camp like a great four-man leprous army, and generally enjoy themselves. Eventually they feel they must share the good news or invite punishment, however, so they go back and report. This whole scene provides a delightful counterpart to the grim episode in 2 Kgs 6:24-33.

7:12-16 The king finds it hard to believe this quartet of lepers. He reasons that the Syrians are attempting to lure the Israelites out of the city so they can kill them, "a tactic similar to that employed by his ancestors at Ai (Josh 8:3-28)." One of the officers suggests they send a few horses and men out as decoys to see if the Syrians have indeed left. Like the lepers, he comments that if the men stay in the city they will die anyway, so they may as well test the king's theory. When they do, the lepers' word proves true. The city plunders the enemy camp, and food does become cheap, just as Elisha predicted it would.

7:17-20 Elisha's second promise also comes to pass. The officer who doubted the prophet's word in 7:2 is crushed to death by the hungry mob that pours out of the city gate. His death stands as a testimony of the truthfulness of God's word through the prophet. It also reminds the book's readers to believe God's word, hope in God's provision, and count on God's deliverance.