

Can I Trust God?

Introduction

Do you ever find it hard to trust God? Do you ever feel like the odds are stacked against you?

Well, it's probably nothing compared to the odds that Elijah faced! Over these weeks, we're following his story and as we do so, hopefully we'll find encouragement to stick more closely to God and to trust him, no matter what.

But first some history...!

Historical Background

Here is a brief historical background...

After the Exodus from Egypt (Moses), the Israelites settled in 'The Promised Land' (Canaan). After many years, they demanded kings – Saul, then David.

After David's son Solomon died (approx 930BC), Israel split into two halves under separate kings. The northern kingdom ('Israel' –capital Samaria) & the southern kingdom ('Judah' –capital Jerusalem).

There was a succession of kings in each kingdom –some led the nation closer to God and some pulled them away from God into idol worship. Eventually, following repeated warnings, God allowed both kingdoms to be defeated and taken into exile.

During the time of the divided kingdom, God sent a series of prophets to encourage those who followed God & to warn those who promoted the worship of Baal (the Canaanite god of storms, fertility & prosperity), Asherah (his female consort) and others.

Growth Group Notes

April-June 2010



One of the worst kings in the northern kingdom was Ahab (c874-853BC). His foreign wife, Jezebel, was determined to make Baal-worship the state religion. Ahab built a temple to Baal in the capital Samaria. God's prophets were hunted down and killed, while the priests of Baal were supported by state funding -450 were imported.

Elijah was called by God to speak out against Ahab and Jezebel –to stand up for God, despite the risks. His name meant 'My God is the Lord'.

We're following the story of Elijah in 1 & 2 Kings in the Old Testament. This period of history is also told in 1 & 2 Chronicles –although it focuses on the southern kingdom.

Elijah is also mentioned a number of times elsewhere in the Bible, including in the New Testament.

Elijah is a good bloke, but perhaps a bit scary! What we learn during these studies about trusting God will hopefully be good, but it may also be a bit scary!

Toby

Can I Trust God?

1: Trusting when Threatened

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

For those who went to a service over Easter –here or elsewhere, share something that was good about it.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Each write on a bit of paper three things that are important to you. In the silence, hold them out in your open hands to God. Tell him that he is more important than them and also that you trust them with him.

WORD

I recommend a brief history study at this point! I've given a brief outline in the introduction to these notes, but you could look in a bit more detail... See if someone in the group has a chart in their Bible or find a reliable timeline so that you can see roughly where Elijah & Ahab fit into Bible history. Maps would also help.

Read 1 Kings 16:29-34

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use some of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Growth Group Notes

April-June 2010



- How do you think it would have felt to live in Israel during the time of Ahab?
- How do you think you would have reacted to the pressure to stop following God & to follow Baal? Being honest, how open would you have been about your faith?

Read 1 Kings 17:1-9

God communicates with Elijah three times in this passage.

Elijah must have been pretty confident of what God was saying to say what he did in v1 to the king. We don't know how God gave him the messages.

- How do you feel and respond when people say they've heard God say something to them?
- How do you feel about hearing God speaking to you? Share any examples of when you believe he has spoken to you.
- How confident do you feel about recognising God speaking to you – either in a general or specific way?
- To what extent did Elijah put trusting God before his own needs and safety?
- God provided for Elijah's needs in a pretty unlikely way. What parts do God's provision and Elijah's obedience play?
- What do you think Elijah was thinking when the brook dried up? (v7)

WHAT NEXT?

Spend some time in quiet. In the silence, each ask God to speak to you personally about something you've read or talked about during this session.

Now, in 2s/3s –share anything that you've been thinking about & pray for one another that you would have opportunities this week to put it into practice.

Pray for Christians facing persecution (info from Open Doors may help)

Can I Trust God?

2: Trusting When There's Nothing Left

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Discuss: Elijah was involved in politics. Has your view of the general election changed this time round? Explain.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

If you don't normally sing, try singing. If you normally sing, try something quiet –maybe 2 minutes of silent prayer!

WORD

Read 1 Kings 17:7-24

(works well reading in parts – Narrator, God, Elijah, Woman)

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Divide your group into two. One half look at the story from Elijah's perspective together & the other from the widow's perspective. Go through the story step by step. At each point, talk about:

- 1: What is the character thinking/feeling about the situation?
- 2: What is the character's opinion of God?

Growth Group Notes

April-June 2010



For example...

Elijah:

- Imagine being Elijah. The brook dries up. He's told to go to Zarephath (Baal worshippers & Jezebel's home territory). He's told a widow will supply food. The widow he meets has no food! What do you think he was thinking/feeling? What did he think of God?
- Go through the whole story in a similar way.

The Widow:

- Imagine being the widow. She's preparing for herself and her son to die. A prophet of another god turns up and asks for food. What do you think she was thinking/feeling? What do you think she makes of Elijah's God?
- Go through the whole story in a similar way

Together:

- Compare and discuss what you've found with the other group.
- How do you think each of their relationships with God develop?
- Who do you relate to most & why?
- Have you ever been in need and God has provided? How? If not, do you know of someone else who has?
- How do you feel about trusting God to supply your needs?

WHAT NEXT?

Try using some information from an organisation such as Christian Aid to pray for people elsewhere who are in serious physical need.

Pray also for leaders of our country pre/post election.

Pray for one another that God would increase your trust in him.

NB: If you haven't organised a church social recently, try planning one!

Can I Trust God?

3: Trusting God When You Feel Alone

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Brainstorm: What do you think are the biggest threats to Christian witness in the UK today? Think of as many answers as possible, then vote on which you think is the biggest. What should our response be?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Two of the biggest things we have to give to God are our time and our money. Take some time in quiet to reflect on how you spend your time and money. Place a symbol of each (wallet, purse, watch or drawing etc) in the middle as an offering to God. You might like to pray a prayer together or sing/play a song such as 'I will offer up my life'

WORD

Read 1 Kings 18:1-2 & 16-46

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Ahab, the king, accuses Elijah of being a trouble-maker (the Hebrew word is stronger!). What do you think of Elijah's response? What would you have advised him to say?

Growth Group Notes

April-June 2010



- In verses 20-21, the people are non-committal. In verse 24 they are enthusiastic. What do you make of their responses? Do you sympathise with them or despair of them?
- Why do you think Baal-worship was popular with the people? What things do people put first today instead of God? How do people 'sacrifice' to these things?
- In verse 36, Elijah makes it clear that he is doing all this because he believes God is telling him so. How can he be so sure?
- Why do you think God used Elijah in this way?
- In verse 40, do you think Elijah got a bit carried away –or was he still doing what God wanted?
- Have there been times when you've felt challenged to stand up for your faith in the face of opposition? Share how you got on.

If you have time (or as an extra at the end of the series)...

Read 1 Kings 18:1-16

- How do Obadiah and Elijah compare as people? Who do you relate to most?
- Obadiah tried to serve Ahab and God. He kept his service to God largely hidden. Do you think he was right or wrong to do this? Should he have been more like Elijah? How was each effective?

WHAT NEXT?

Share (maybe in 2s/3s):

In today's reading, God intervened in a dramatic way when people prayed. Where would you like to see God intervene in a dramatic way in your life/our nation/the world?

Pray for these things. You could light a fire or large candle (or BBQ?!) as a reminder of God sending fire.

Can I Trust God?

4: Trusting God When You're Feeling Low

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Share any funny stories you have of learning to do something (swim, ride a bike, language etc)

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Sing or read a song, psalm or poem that only focuses on who God is, rather than on 'I', 'me' or 'us'.

WORD

Read 1 Kings 19:1-21

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- How would you describe Elijah's spiritual, physical and emotional condition by verse 4?
- Straight after a great spiritual 'high', Elijah is depressed (v4). Why do you think he was so down? Are you surprised by it?
- How does what we see of Elijah's character in today's reading fit with what we've seen in previous weeks?

Growth Group Notes

April-June 2010



- Even in his despair, Elijah goes on talking and responding to God. How does this compare to your own experience?
- Share (if you want to) about times when you've felt down/stressed/burnt out. At such times, how do you generally feel towards God?
- What do you think of how God deals with Elijah?
- God has previously answered Elijah in dramatic ways. Why do you think God speaks to Elijah in the way he does in v12-13?
- What would you expect God to say to Elijah? How does this compare to verses 9 & 13?
- Elijah's claim (v14) that 'he is the only one left' (v15-21) isn't true. How easy is it to believe lies when you're depressed? What do you think of God's response to Elijah?
- How do you think Elisha's actions affected Elijah?
- What encouragement do you take from this story?

WHAT NEXT?

Pray for one another in any difficult situations that you are facing at the moment.

Pray for others known to you who are feeling down.

Can I Trust God?

5: Trusting God When You Have to Let Go

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Share: A time when you've had to stop a job, significant role or stage in your life. How did it feel?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Try writing a few lines of a poem based on what you've learnt from the story of God and Elijah over the last few weeks. Share them in turn, then finish with a short prayer of thanks to God.

WORD

We've now fast forwarded a few chapters to just before the end of Elijah's life...

Read 2 Kings 2:1-18 (would work well read in 3 parts: Narrator, Elijah, Elisha, and everyone else as the prophets)

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Go through the story following first Elijah, then Elisha.

- What would each be thinking and feeling at each stage?

Growth Group Notes

April-June 2010



- Why did they say the things they did?
- Have you ever had to stop something and hand over to someone else? How did you feel? Why?
- Try to think of an important responsibility in your life now (job, family care etc). If you suddenly had to hand that over to someone else (e.g. due to illness), how would you feel? Who would you trust?
- What areas of your life would it be hardest to hand over to someone else?
- What would it mean in practice to trust God with these areas of your life? How do you feel about this?
- Take a few moments to think. Who in your life is...
 - ...a 'mentor' or teacher –like Elijah to Elisha?
 - ...a fellow learner (like the company of prophets)?
 - ...someone who you are influencing or training (like Elisha)?
 - How could you strengthen these relationships?
- What have been the most significant things you have learnt from following the story of Elijah over the last few weeks?

WHAT NEXT?

In turn, share (all together or in 3s) briefly: What spiritual insight, influence or gift would you particularly like God to give you?

Allow the others in the group to pray for you that you would receive it.