



Catherine Hutton

Elisha

Study notes for groups and personal reflection

"A Long Time Faithful"

Elisha's story is rooted in that of his Master, Elijah. We first catch a glimpse of Elisha ploughing his father's field as Elijah journeys to claim his service for the Lord. We see him and know that his name is already known by God as one who will exact righteous judgement on Israel.

Elisha is known for being bald 2 Kings 2: 23 - 25; for being Elijah's servant 2 Kings 3: 11; for bringing the Shunammite's son back to life by lying on him and for healing Naaman of leprosy by making him bathe in the lowly Jordan river. There are many other stories for which he is remembered, all of which point to God's care for the faithful and for the poor.

In his stories, we are reminded that the faithful can suffer with the nation and that God's people shouldn't expect to be exempt from cultural or societal struggles.

In Elisha's life, we are reminded that much of it was lived as Elijah's servant - yet for this alone, he left the comfort of family and a good living to be obedient for whatever small thing God would have him do.

Elisha is faithful and honest. We see no sign of him having home or wife and family - yet he does not complain about this. He is harsh on those who disrespect the Lord and on those who would deceive him. But to those who honour God and whom society is treating harshly, he offers hope and a way out. He is a prophet who shows the faithful what a redemptive God looks like.

Enjoy your time with him

With Love, Catherine x

Session One The Call

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

How many ways do calls or opportunities come to you? List them and talk about their impact.

Phone, Email, advert, etc

Pray & Worship 10 Minutes

Sing a hymn or a song which celebrates the way God calls his people.

Pray

- 1. For an increase in your willingness to hear God.**
- 2. That God will bless your Group in your discussion today.**
- 3. For a greater reliance on God for all your needs.**
- 4. For the people in your community who don't yet know God.**
- 5. For a complete commitment to Jesus' call on our lives.**

Read the Word 50 minutes

1 Kings 19 New Living Translation

11 "Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

14 He replied again, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too." 15 Then the Lord told him, "Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. 16 Then anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet. 17 Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha! 18 Yet I will preserve 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal or kissed him!" 19 So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat ploughing a field. There were twelve teams of oxen in the field, and Elisha was ploughing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and then walked away.

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20 Elisha left the oxen standing there, ran after Elijah, and said to him, “First let me go and kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will go with you!” Elijah replied, “Go on back, but think about what I have done to you.”
21 So Elisha returned to his oxen and slaughtered them. He used the wood from the plough to build a fire to roast their flesh. He passed around the meat to the townspeople, and they all ate. Then he went with Elijah as his assistant.

Look at the context for Elisha’s calling in verses 11-18.

Is the calling any less real because ‘someone other than Elisha heard it from God’?

Elisha’s calling to God’s purposes is unique.

God told Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor during their conversation on Sinai (Horeb); Elisha himself receives a hair cloak thrown over him whilst out ploughing the fields with the 12th yoke of oxen.

Elijah know the importance of the day and of the meeting; for Elisha it was a sudden and abrupt intrusion into his routine. He had not planned even to be away from home, let alone leave the steady predictability of farm life for the dangers and discomfort of the prophet’s life.

Talk about how God calls people unexpectedly. Make a list of those whom He surprised and speak a little of their story ...

Maybe begin with

- | | | |
|-------------------|----|----|
| 1. <i>Abraham</i> | 2. | 3. |
| 4. | 5. | 6. |

The hair cloak is a symbol of Elijah’s claim on Elisha, covering him with his authority. It is not the anointing that God spoke of in the theophany on Sinai, but it is an act of claiming which Elisha clearly understood (20).

Look at how Elisha deals with the implications of the calling in verses 20-21.

Talk about how he honours his family and the people he is leaving behind.

Discuss the action of burning his plough and sharing the meat from the oxen. Why is this significant?

Elisha is active in his decision-making. The call of God is not something that he is somehow the ‘victim of’. Rather, he aligns himself with God’s call on his life, acknowledging the change of his life’s direction and he makes it possible for him to follow that call with whole-hearted obedience and faithfulness.

Elisha responds to God's call, given to him through Elijah, with a deliberate intention - much as we see in the Methodist Covenant Prayer; "I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal." P 290 Methodist Worship Book.

Discuss 'Elisha's call' moments in your own life and what preparations you made in order to be able to properly carry out that call.

Elisha will be known as Elijah's servant, and even today he is often confused with Elijah - most likely to do with the timing of their ministries and in English, the close-sounding names they bear. Davis draws our attention to Elisha's reputation in 2 Kings 3:11 where he is described; "Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah." Nevertheless, Elisha has a part to play in the bringing about of God's judgement as promised to Elijah.

To what extent does calling today come with an expectation of fame and 'being known' by people who matter?

Does being called to be a servant have any appeal to you?

Davis closes his chapter on the calling of Elisha with a worthwhile question for consideration...

"If Yahweh calls us to pour water on the hands of Elijah and we do so, are we not doing his will? Does anything else matter?" P 277

Reflection & Refreshment 25 minutes

Over refreshments, talk to each other about what it means to give up all that is familiar in order to follow Jesus.

What things are we tempted to 'hold back'? Are these the things that have become 'idols' in life?

Which things are most difficult to let go of (people, work, possessions, ideas, reputation etc)

Pray for one another and talk about how, during the coming week, you will:

- 1. Support someone in their call to obedience*
- 2. Seek to move forward in the call that God has placed on your own life. Ask for help in working out what this could be if you are unsure...*

"I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back!"

Session Two The Baton is Passed

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

Has anyone participated in a relay race? What is your favourite relay to watch? Talk about the pitfalls and joys of sharing in a relay...

Pray & Worship 10 Minutes

Sing a hymn or a song which is about seeking God's blessing.

Pray

- 1. For your love of God to be evident to all.**
- 2. That God will bless your Group in your discussion today.**
- 3. For an understanding of what it means to see God.**
- 4. For God to lead us towards being a fruitful church.**
- 5. For God to set within us a deep desire to serve.**

Read the Word 50 minutes

2 Kings 2:1-18 (NIV)

When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2 Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. 3 The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, "Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?" "Yes, I know," Elisha replied, "so be quiet." 4 Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, Elisha; the Lord has sent me to Jericho." And he replied, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went to Jericho. 5 The company of the prophets at Jericho went up to Elisha and asked him, "Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?" "Yes, I know," he replied, "so be quiet." 6 Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." And he replied, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So the two of them walked on. 7 Fifty men from the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. 8 Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. 9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied. 10 "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not." 11 As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. 12 Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two. 13 Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.

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14 He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. “Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over. 15 The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, “The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha.” And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. 16 “Look,” they said, “we your servants have fifty able men. Let them go and look for your master. Perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has picked him up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley.” “No,” Elisha replied, “do not send them.” 17 But they persisted until he was too embarrassed to refuse. So he said, “Send them.” And they sent fifty men, who searched for three days but did not find him. 18 When they returned to Elisha, who was staying in Jericho, he said to them, “Didn’t I tell you not to go?”

There is a strong sense of Elisha’s dogged and determined character in this passage. Among the ‘prophetic communities’ there is a recognition that this is the day that Elijah will leave. Elisha is determined to be by Elijah’s side until the very moment of his departure. Elisha is not ignorant of the day’s importance and he gives gruff response to those other prophets who are telling him that Elijah will leave.

**Talk about the story. What are the details that stand out for you?
Note them here.**

Talk about the reasons you think Elisha might be committed to sticking close by Elijah?

Elijah was God’s man on earth when the people of Israel were ‘kissing Baal and killing prophets’ Davis p 28.

Talk about times of transition. What are the general fears when a new government is needed or a new ruler or president is required?

What are your concerns around the loss of a leader you trust?

Elisha had been Elijah’s servant. He would have been aware that he was also to be Elijah’s successor. We see a Moses-moment as Elijah strikes the water with his rolled up cloak in v8 and they walk across the river bed on dry land. Elisha is faithful to embrace what is coming and committed to remain with Elijah to the very end. It is a final conversation which is best read a death-bed leave taking which delivers the completion of Elisha’s anointing 1 Kings 19:16.

Look again at verses 9-10 above.

This can easily be misunderstood as Elisha seeking to be greater than Elijah. Ellison describes it on page 44;

When Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 Ki. 2:9) he was asking for the first-born's share (cf. Deut. 21:17), and not that he should be greater than his master.

He was in fact asking that he might be that for which he had been called and not merely one among those who called Elijah Master and Teacher.

The difficulty is that it is only within God's gift to grant the succession. This vision and the cloak falling to Elisha's feet has far more spiritual weight for Elisha than the day he was claimed in a most un-supernatural manner as he ploughed his father's field with a yoke of oxen. Elisha *does* see.

¹² Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!"

Elisha sees the relationship he has with Elijah and also Elijah's position as the spiritual defence of the land. Because he is able to see this, he has the spiritual eyes to inherit it. He will go on to exercise the miracles in the style of Elijah - beginning with the real proof of his anointing in verses 13-15. He has witnesses to this miracle. His right to the succession is established by God and witnessed by the company of prophets.

Talk about people whose ministry you have respected.

What was it about them that caught your notice and gained your respect?

How do you know whether someone is working under God's authorisation? What do you expect to see in their life and ministry.

Elisha's prophetic ministry will only be as good as his faithfulness to God and his obedience to the call of God on his life - even when that means making hard choices and not being popular with the people. Reading on to the end of Chapter 2 shows Elisha's ministry continuing that of Elijah's with the miraculous signs accompanying him and a sense of 'otherness' surrounding him.

Reflection & Refreshment 25 minutes

Over refreshments, have a look at the following:

It would be easy to overlook the behaviour of the company of prophets who watch and note Elisha's miracle of the parting of the Jordan in v15-18. These are the same who, in v5, had said to Elisha that this would be the day of Elijah's departure.

After being impressed by Elisha's activity, they are unwilling to listen to his wisdom and insist (17) on sending out a search party to seek Elijah.

Davis describes the church as;

being a good bit like the sons of the prophets. She doesn't value wisdom very highly. The sons of the prophets could see power all right in Elisha's jaunt through Jordan. That impressed them, But they weren't looking for wisdom. Wisdom is not one of God's flashier gifts. It is mundane, ordinary, quiet. God's power often makes waves, but God's wisdom is more sedate. Wisdom is available (James 1:5 - note that it is the wisdom that has the savvy to negotiate trial with endurance, vv 2-4), but we ignore it. P 34

Talk together of the value of wisdom as a Christian believer.

How does wisdom punctuate your relationships?

How can wisdom be a blessing to your church?

Pray together for wisdom for yourself, your group and your church leaders.

***“May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling all I do and say.”***

Kate Barclay Wilkinson STF 504

For your notes ...

Session Three Feeding the Hungry

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

**What are your favourite snacks? Where do you get them from?
Maybe you have brought some with you to share with the group!**

Hint, hint!

Pray & Worship 10 Minutes

Sing a hymn or a song which celebrates God's care for his people.

Pray

- 1. For your love of God to remain faithful in difficult times.**
- 2. That God will bless your Group in your discussion today.**
- 3. That you will look to God for your needs.**
- 4. For Christians who live in times of famine & oppression.**
- 5. For Godly leaders who will point the way to Jesus.**
- 6. For a greater love for those among whom we live and work.**

Read the Word 50 minutes

2 Kings 4:38-44 New Living Translation (NLT)

38 Elisha now returned to Gilgal, and there was a famine in the land. One day as the group of prophets was seated before him, he said to his servant, "Put a large pot on the fire, and make some stew for the rest of the group." 39 One of the young men went out into the field to gather herbs and came back with a pocketful of wild gourds. He shredded them and put them into the pot without realising they were poisonous. 40 Some of the stew was served to the men. But after they had eaten a bite or two they cried out, "Man of God, there's poison in this stew!" So they would not eat it. 41 Elisha said, "Bring me some flour." Then he threw it into the pot and said, "Now it's all right; go ahead and eat." And then it did not harm them.

42 One day a man from Baal-shalishah brought the man of God a sack of fresh grain and twenty loaves of barley bread made from the first grain of his harvest. Elisha said, "Give it to the people so they can eat."

43 "What?" his servant exclaimed. "Feed a hundred people with only this?" But Elisha repeated, "Give it to the people so they can eat, for this is what the Lord says: Everyone will eat, and there will even be some left over!"

44 And when they gave it to the people, there was plenty for all and some left over, just as the Lord had promised.

Choosing which of Elisha's activities to focus on has been hard; however the two events in the passage show something of how his ministry looked. We remember that he was to bring God's judgement to bear on those who had fallen into Baal-worship and he was Elijah's successor.

These verses give a snapshot into what the land looked like under the time of God's judgement. There was famine and this affected the lives of the faithful as well as those who were active in Baal-worship.

Look at the importance of food in these verses. They were both meals to remember.

God made the food that was spoilt good to eat again. Talk about the importance of this act.

The 'wild gourds' are *citrullus colcyntus* and looked like small melons which would have been unfamiliar to the young man as he foraged for additions to the stewpot. They are known for been a strong laxative.

How hard is it to trust again in something that you have previously found to be unpalatable? Share your - not necessarily food related - stories.

The miracle of the barley bread puts us in mind of both manna in the wilderness and the feeding of the 5000 by Jesus. There is obviously insufficient bread to feed 100 men in this time of famine. Wiseman (p 218) reminds us that the Levitical law requires that the first fruits offerings be brought to the priest. Lev 23:10

Talk about what was going on in the religion that the first-fruits be brought to Elisha instead of the priest. Where is God's blessing to be found?

The people of God were few in number and were persecuted. Ellison writes of this being symptomatic of a deeper problem in the land;

Whenever true religion is rejected by society as a whole, when it has to turn inward to little groups and to go underground, then the deadliest corruption begins at the roots of a nation's life. P 45

Do you agree? What reasons do you have?

Can you see this anywhere else in history? What about in your own country?

Elisha focusses his ministry on the faithful remnant. He turns his face away from the establishment as a symbol of God's judgement on the infidelity of the people of Israel. The people have broken covenant with God and there are consequences. At home, read through Deuteronomy 28 to get an idea of the scope of both the blessings from living under God's covenant and the curses from disobedience.

Do you consider yourself to be living your life as part of a 'faithful remnant' of God's people?

There are constant reminders of God's faithfulness in these stricken times. That the pot of poisonous and unpalatable stew can be made wholesome again is not only good for the prophets who will eat it in Gilgal, but serves as a picture of how God can redeem a situation, no matter how trivial. As Davis says, Elisha's miracles (cleaned spring water, abundant oil to pay off debt, healed stew and multiplied barley loaves among others) are "Prophetic signs, a preview of what is yet to come." P75

How do you encourage each other to stay faithful in a time of wholesale national rejection of God?

How can you encourage church leaders to remain faithful to God in these times? What benefit is there in this?

The First-Fruits sacrifice of barley bread is obviously insufficient for the 100 people it must feed, but Elisha has every confidence that it will be enough. He has confidence because God has said it will be sufficient.

How much are you tempted to second-guess God because what you see in front of you seems vastly unlikely?

Tell your stories to each other about how God has surprised you.

There is no guarantee that God's people will never be in want - we are part of society and will suffer or rejoice as part of the whole, as indeed the people of Israel found. However, when God says that a thing will be enough we can trust him to see that it is.

Whether we are looking from this miracle of multiplication of the barley loaves to the provision of manna in the wilderness or to Jesus in the New Testament, we see that God's promise is trustworthy and that it will bring blessing in unexpected places. For Elisha it was in Baal Shalishah; for Jesus it would be among the hills of Galilee.

Reflection & Refreshment 25 minutes

Over refreshments, read and talk about the following:

If an invader wreaks havoc and decimates a nation, the church in that nation shares in its woes and sufferings. There is no safety button Christ's people can press, no form they can fill in to claim an exemption. We need to know this, lest we expect of God something he's never promised to give. This realisation might also nudge us to intercessory prayer for Jesus' flock in nations now ravaged by war and suffering. *P 73 Davis*

Spend some time identifying places and people who are 'remnant flocks of the faithful'. Then deliberately and with great love, bring them to God in prayer.

Identify some of the 'woes and sufferings' of your own nation. Pray for faithful hearts in difficult times.

Elisha gathered a group of prophets whom he was teaching. Pray for a deepened discipleship within your own life.

Commit to joining a small group for encouragement and help with developing your faith.

***When we walk with the Lord in the light of his Word,
what a glory he sheds on our way! JH Sammis 1887***

The Prophet Dies

a mini study

2 Kings 13:10-25

Elisha has been a blessing to the people who remained faithful to God. He has picked up Elijah's mantle and been the spiritual defence of Israel. That prophetic protection is coming to an end and the nation will be overrun.

This is noted by King Jehoahaz seeing Elisha in his weakened state before death and v.14 'wept over him; "My father! My father! The horses and chariots of Israel."' The king's visit is for advice and even though he can see how God works through Elisha, he is not willing to embrace God with his own heart. His words are empty and without faith. Instead of ecstatic jubilation at the news that he will defeat Aram, he settled for overthrow rather than complete defeat.

Elisha is angry that even with victory within his grasp, the king does not embrace it, even though he knows what God can do.

There are people who have tasted the goodness of God and still refused to receive him into their lives. Davis writes, "mercy does not melt them". P194

The sole important thing in Jehoahaz's reign is how he will respond to the Word of God. When he finally rejects it, and the nation with him, it is the point at which - after 3 victories over Aram - the people are on their own.

What are the important things in your life right now? How do you respond to God's Word as he speaks to your heart?

After Elisha's death, we note a further prophetic sign as a 'dead man' is thrown into Elisha's grave and is expelled from it alive. Verses 20-21.

Could it be that the man was not yet dead? Or could it be that Elisha had too much Life about him to be contained by death? Davis argues that when we read Matthew's resurrection account, the dead spring up from their graves and that we understand about our God of Resurrection power. Ellison, although expressing ambivalence about the man being dead concedes that *"It was a final message that death had not finished the work that Elijah and Elisha had done, for the God who had spoken and worked through them was still all-powerful to accomplish His purposes, even if there were but few that proclaimed the word of God in the next 40 years or so."* P54

Elisha teaches us that life is a long walk of obedience and faithfulness to a God who is trustworthy. Elisha is reckoned to be 85-90 years old when he dies, demonstrating God's judgement and mercy even in his dying days.

His call wasn't flashy, but his story was full of faith and the outworking of God's promise.

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**60 Years of Worship in the
Heart of Sprowston**



***Shine like Stars in the Universe
Philippians 2:15***

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catherine.hutton@methodist.org.uk

Celebrating the Diamond Anniversary Year of Sprowston Methodist Church 1958-2018