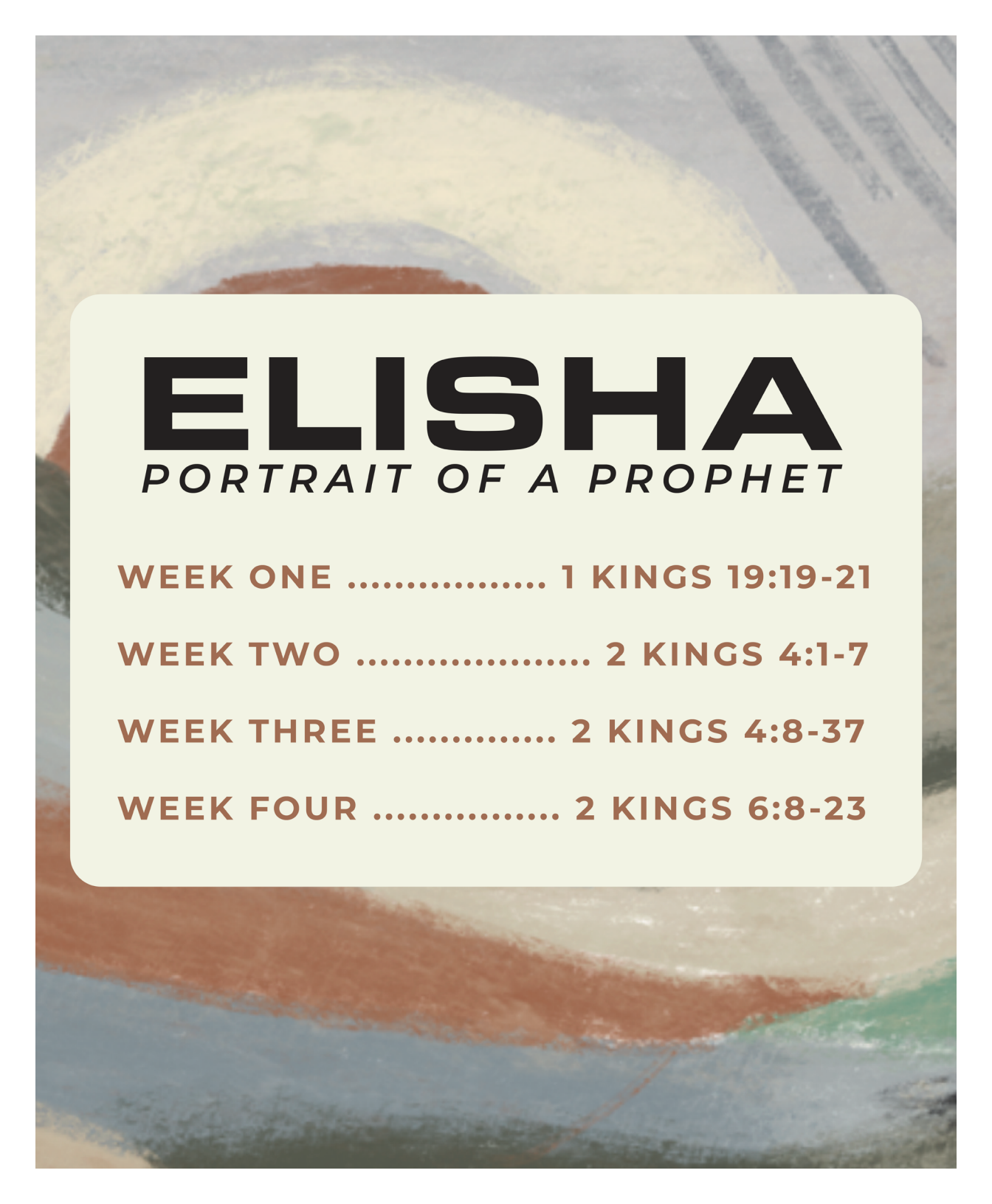


ELISHA

PORTRAIT OF A PROPHET





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WEEK ONE 1 KINGS 19:19-21

WEEK TWO 2 KINGS 4:1-7

WEEK THREE 2 KINGS 4:8-37

WEEK FOUR 2 KINGS 6:8-23

***Elisha: Portrait of a Prophet* follows the life and ministry of Elisha, a prophet called by God to continue Elijah's work.**

Through four Old Testament stories, we will see the God who calls ordinary people into costly obedience, provides for desperate need, meets us in grief with resurrection hope, and opens our eyes to His presence and mercy. Elisha's life reminds us that God's work is never wasted, God's provision is never too small, God's compassion reaches our deepest sorrow, and God's power forms people who trust, follow, and make Him known.

WEEK ONE

NOTES

1 KINGS 19:19-21

¹⁹ So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.

²⁰ Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,” he said, “and then I will come with you.”

“Go back,” Elijah replied. “What have I done to you?”

²¹ So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.

The Art of War, is an ancient book attributed to a Chinese military strategist named Sun Tzu. Historians believe it was written around the 5th century BC. It is widely considered to be one of the most influential works on strategy, particularly military strategy, of all time. Today, it is still regarded as an important resource to those looking to grow their strategy skills.

One of the tenets of the book says: “a commander should cut off his army’s line of retreat to ensure soldiers fight with absolute focus.” A modern motto has developed from this concept: “Burn the ships.”

Often the concept of “burning the ships” is attributed to Hernán Cortés. When he landed in Mexico with his crew in 1519, he was set on conquering the Aztec people and consuming their gold. Facing a tough battle, Cortés anticipated that many of his men would want to retreat to the ships. To eliminate this option, Cortés ordered his men to make the ships unusable for escape. History is unclear on whether Cortés’ ships

were actually burnt or whether they were simply intentionally damaged beyond use.

NOTES

Regardless of the method, the concept is the same: eliminate all other options. Take the suggestion of Sun Tzu and help your warriors focus on the work at hand not what their other options may be.

If the only way out is to fight the battle in front of us, we are more motivated to win that battle.

We're not promoting what Cortés was doing, but we do want to recognize that this strategy may have actually started with Elisha. It is clear that Elisha had heard of Elijah. Elijah easily could have been the most well known person in all of Israel at the time.

When Elijah anointed Elisha, it is obvious that Elisha recognizes him. Knowing Elijah's role as a prophet, Elisha may have even understood what Elijah was doing by anointing him.

Elisha was a farmer, and it is safe to assume, based on the fact that he was plowing with 12 yoke of oxen, that he was reasonably wealthy. When Elijah approached him, Elisha's response was stunning.

He said yes to God's call through Elijah and asked to say goodbye to his family. In addition, he slaughtered the yoke of oxen he was driving and used the plowing equipment as kindling for the fire. Elisha was eliminating his fall-back plan.

He was all-in to be a prophet of God, to follow in the steps of Elijah, and to do whatever God would have him do without looking back.

Is this what is asked of us as followers of Jesus? Fair question. Jesus does ask for total devotion. He says in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus is clear that He is the only way to salvation, but is he asking farmers to burn their tractors and discs?

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Not necessarily. He may be asking some to give up their vocation, but that's not what he's asking of everyone. In this passage, Elijah didn't ask everyone to give up everything to follow him, but throughout his time as a prophet Elijah encourages everyone to change their ways and follow God.

There is a difference.

The reality is that God is asking some of us to make a drastic change while He is asking others of us to make minor adjustments. Either way, it is clear that God is not done with any of us.

QUESTIONS

Know

1. What stands out to you about the way Elijah calls Elisha and the way Elisha responds?
2. What did Elisha leave behind to follow Elijah? What did burning the plowing equipment communicate about the finality of his decision?
3. Elisha was called while doing ordinary work. What does this suggest about where and how God often meets and calls people?

Feel

4. What emotions might Elisha have experienced as he walked away from his family, livelihood, and familiar identity?
5. When you sense God asking you to change direction, what usually rises first in you: excitement, fear, resistance, grief, curiosity, or something else?

Do

6. Where might God be asking you to make a change rather than merely a minor adjustment?
7. What “plow,” backup plan, former identity, or source of security may be making it difficult for you to follow God wholeheartedly?
8. What is one concrete act of obedience you can take this week, even though you may not know where it will eventually lead?

WEEK TWO

NOTES

2 KINGS 4:1-7

¹ The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.”

² Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?”

“Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a small jar of olive oil.”

³ Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. ⁴ Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.”

⁵ She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. ⁶ When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.”

But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.

⁷ She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”

During the Great Depression, nearly 750,000 family farms were lost to foreclosure or bankruptcy. This caused the displacement of about 3 million people and left more than 500,000 people stranded in permanent homelessness.

This devastation was caused by multiple things converging at once. The global economy was struggling, which caused a collapse of the commodity

market. On top of that, a severe drought in the midwest caused crop failure multiple years in a row.

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This led to banks seizing farms in rural communities in droves. As banks seized properties, they held auctions to recoup their money. After watching a number of their neighbors lose everything and be sent off with nothing after decades of work, groups started to form to change things.

What was the solution? Farmers banded together and made a decision to take matters into their own hands. They would all attend the auctions and convince everyone in attendance not to bid more than a dollar on anything. At the end of sales, the total raised for the bank would be five or six dollars.

Then, everyone who had bought the ground or equipment would simply give it back to the original owner. These became known as penny auctions.

While the farmers' methods weren't always to be applauded, their commitment to keeping community together and fighting for each other was beautiful.

God allows us to face difficult circumstances because it allows Him to use other humans to ease our suffering. God is so good that He can make good happen out of any circumstance.

This story is obviously about a miracle that God did through Elisha, but it is also about a community that was willing to come around a widow who was struggling. The widow was willing to ask her neighbors for help.

The neighbors were certainly willing to help, just like our neighbors would be if we asked for help. Are we willing to be the ones receiving the help? When we need help, do we ask?

Often, the answer is no. We tend to choose to work harder, put our heads down, pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, grit our teeth, and try to do it on our own.

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In this story, God teaches us that He is for widows and orphans. He loves them, and He intends to use us to care for them. God is unchanging. This is who He has always been.

The use of oil to sustain the widow and her sons is not an accident. In the Bible, oil is often a representation of the Holy Spirit. In this story, the woman and her sons are sustained by the overwhelming presence of the Lord.

The reality in this story is that God is enough. His presence is all that we need. When things are at their darkest, we need more of the presence of God. God doesn't abandon us when we are at our worst. He doesn't leave when things get difficult.

He calls the community together, and He shows Himself in and through each one of them.

QUESTIONS

Know

1. What pressures was the widow facing, and what did she believe she had available to meet them?
2. Why do you think Elisha asked, “What do you have in your house?” before telling her what to do?
3. What role did the widow’s neighbors play in God’s provision? What does this reveal about the relationship between divine provision and community?

Feel

4. When you are overwhelmed, are you more likely to ask for help, withdraw, minimize your need, or try to solve everything yourself?
5. Where in your life do you currently feel that what you have is too small for what you are facing?

Do

6. What ability, opportunity, relationship, or resource might you be overlooking because it seems insignificant?
7. From whom could you borrow some “empty jars” this week by asking for support, wisdom, prayer, or practical help?
8. What faithful step can you take with what is already in your hands rather than waiting for everything you think you need?

WEEK THREE

NOTES

2 KINGS 4:8-37

⁸ One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. ⁹ She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. ¹⁰ Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

¹¹ One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. ¹² He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. ¹³ Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'"

She replied, "I have a home among my own people."

¹⁴ "What can be done for her?" Elisha asked.

Gehazi said, "She has no son, and her husband is old."

¹⁵ Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. ¹⁶ "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms."

"No, my lord!" she objected. "Please, man of God, don't mislead your servant!"

¹⁷ But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.

¹⁸ The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. ¹⁹ He said to his father, "My head! My head!"

His father told a servant, "Carry him to his mother."²⁰ After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died.²¹ She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out.

²² She called her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return."

²³ "Why go to him today?" he asked. "It's not the New Moon or the Sabbath."

"That's all right," she said.

²⁴ She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Lead on; don't slow down for me unless I tell you."²⁵ So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, "Look! There's the Shunammite!

²⁶ Run to meet her and ask her, 'Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?'"

"Everything is all right," she said.

²⁷ When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me why."

²⁸ "Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'?"

²⁹ Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. Don't greet anyone you meet, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy's face."

³⁰ But the child's mother said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So he got up and followed her.

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³¹ Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy's face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, "The boy has not awakened."

³² When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. ³³ He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord. ³⁴ Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on him, the boy's body grew warm. ³⁵ Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

³⁶ Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite." And he did. When she came, he said, "Take your son." ³⁷ She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.

How many times a week do you use a microwave? If you are of a certain age, you might remember when you or your family first got one. Have you ever wondered how the microwave came to be? It was a beautiful accident.

Percy Spencer was a self-taught physicist and electrical engineer. He worked for a company called Raytheon that was an important partner with the U.S. Department of Defense during WWII. They worked to develop better radar technology as part of the Allied defenses.

This meant creating magnetrons to be used in the radar technology. Percy's expertise led to an increase in the production of the magnetrons which, in turn, led to more radar equipment being available. Legend has it that, while testing a radar set, a candy bar that was in Percy's pocket melted. The curiosity that led him to learn about so many topics led him to investigate this reaction. He tested what happened to other foods that were exposed to the waves produced

by the magnetron, and the result was what became known as a microwave.

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Percy Spencer didn't set out to invent a microwave - a way to quickly heat food - or a new term that generations of kids have come to hate: leftovers.

However, this happy little accident led to Raytheon applying for a patent in 1945 for a microwave cooking oven. The microwave oven became commercially available in 1947, but the six foot tall contraption weighed 750 pounds and cost nearly \$5,000.

In this passage of Scripture, there are a couple of "accidental miracles," or miracles no one really asked for. First, Elisha promises the Shunammite woman a son. Neither the woman, nor her husband asked Elisha for a son, but Elisha wanted to honor their generosity by blessing them. The woman who hadn't been able to conceive was blessed with a child.

A miracle unasked for.

Secondly, Elisha resurrects the Shunammite woman's son. The woman didn't ask for Elisha to resurrect her son. The reality is, she probably never wanted to have the need for a miracle like that, but when she realized she needed another miracle, she knew where to go. She went to find Elisha. She was confident in God and confident in Elisha.

How confident was Elisha? With many things, even with the miraculous birth of this woman's son, Elisha appears confident that he knows just what to do. When it came to restoring this child to life, Elisha was kind of just trying stuff.

He prayed to God. That's always a good place to start, but it doesn't appear that God gave him a clear path to the boy's restoration. So Elisha just starts doing stuff that might work. He had learned from Elijah that maybe laying on top of a dead child would do the job. So he tried that...a couple times.

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And it worked!

What can be learned from this story?

Don't get paralyzed in prayer. God wants us to pray, no doubt. He also wants us to take action. Try stuff. Do something. See if God honors it. If not, try something else. Keep praying and keep trying stuff.

There are times where God will tell you clearly to wait, to be patient, or to be still. When He does, obey, but when you aren't clear what to do, try something.

Being paralyzed into no action doesn't honor your calling.

QUESTIONS

Know

1. What do the woman's generosity and hospitality reveal about her character before she ever receives anything from Elisha?
2. How does the story move from unexpected promise, to devastating loss, to restoration? What does that progression teach us about faith and following Jesus?
3. What do you notice about the woman's persistence in seeking Elisha and Elisha's persistence in praying for the child?

Feel

4. How do you tend to respond when something you believed God had given you appears to be delayed, lost, or threatened?
5. The woman tells Elisha, "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'?" Where have disappointment or unanswered prayer made you hesitant to hope again?

Do

6. What burden are you tempted to carry privately that may need to be brought honestly before God or shared with someone trustworthy?
7. Where might God be asking you to remain persistent rather than becoming passive, resigned, or paralyzed?
8. What would it look like this week to trust that God is present and active even when you cannot yet understand what He is doing?

WEEK FOUR

NOTES

2 KINGS 6:8-23

⁸ Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, “I will set up my camp in such and such a place.”

⁹ The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: “Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there.” ¹⁰ So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places.

¹¹ This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, “Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?”

¹² “None of us, my lord the king,” said one of his officers, “but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.”

¹³ “Go, find out where he is,” the king ordered, “so I can send men and capture him.” The report came back: “He is in Dothan.” ¹⁴ Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?” the servant asked.

¹⁶ “Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and

chariots of fire all around Elisha.

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¹⁸ As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, “Strike this army with blindness.” So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

¹⁹ Elisha told them, “This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for.” And he led them to Samaria.

²⁰ After they entered the city, Elisha said, “Lord, open the eyes of these men so they can see.” Then the Lord opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria.

²¹ When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, “Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?”

²² “Do not kill them,” he answered. “Would you kill those you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master.”

²³ So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel’s territory.

Have you ever heard of the Subtropolis? This sounds like a made up thing, like the name of a town in a super hero movie, but it is an actual place. What do you think happens in Subtropolis?

No one knows. It’s actually top secret.

That’s not entirely true, but there are a number of U.S. government agencies that house facilities within Subtropolis. Located in Kansas City, Missouri, this facility was developed by the original owner of the Kansas City Chiefs, Lamar Hunt. It’s a 14 million square foot business complex located completely underground in what used to be a limestone quarry.

Russell Stover Candies and Pillsbury were some of the first tenants. The Ford Motor Company, who has

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a large pick-up manufacturing plant in Kansas City, once leased 25 acres of the facility.

It is a great place to store archives because the temperature remains 65-70 degrees year round. The US Postal Service keeps all of its collectible stamp operations there. The National Archives and Records Administration keeps a facility there as well. Maybe the next National Treasure movie will be based in the Subtropolis.

If you have been to Kansas City on Interstate 35, you have driven right by it, but you probably have never seen it. Does it seem possible to hide 14 million square feet of anything? Well, it is hidden directly below the Worlds of Fun amusement park.

It doesn't make sense, but Subtropolis exists as an ideal place to keep important things out of the public eye.

The saying "more than meets the eye" simply means there is more going on than you can clearly see. This saying can be true of any number of situations. Sometimes in family relationships there is "more going on than than meets the eye". Sometimes within a community there is more going on than you can see just by driving through town on the main roads.

Paul tells us in his second letter to the church in Corinth, "We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18)

He is trying to help us understand there is so much more going on than we can ever see or comprehend. That reality couldn't be more clear than it is in our passage for today.

Can you imagine this passage as a scene in a sitcom? For the young people out there, a "sitcom" is a situational comedy. It was a TV format popular in the 80's and 90's that produced 22 minutes of content with a live studio audience or a laugh track.

I can just see Elisha sitting on a couch eating a breakfast burrito watching the morning news as his friend looks out the front door and sees that they are surrounded by their enemies.

Elisha is so used to seeing the army of God with him that he didn't realize that his servant couldn't see what he saw. While Elisha could see the army surrounding the house, he could also see the army of God surrounding them.

He was at peace because he knew God had him. Is there a place in your life where this is true for you too? Where are you confident that God has you no matter how the odds appear?

How tuned in are you to what God is doing around you?

We generally underestimate how much support God is giving us on any given day. We tend to believe we are living life fairly independently. The reality is, God is sustaining us, keeping us, and protecting us all the time. We just rarely see it.

This passage teaches us that God is for us, and God is fighting for us. We don't have to fight all the battles by ourselves because God is with us.

Are you at peace when you feel surrounded, or are you anxious? Why?

Have you asked God to show you who He has sent to be with you?

Do you think you are worthy of God fighting for you?

What would it take for you to feel as confident as Elisha is about how God is for you and with you?

QUESTIONS

Know

1. Why was Elisha's servant afraid, and what could Elisha see that the servant could not?
2. Elisha prayed first for his servant's eyes to be opened and then for the enemy's eyes to be closed. What does this teach us about spiritual perception?
3. Why is the king's decision to feed the Aramean soldiers rather than kill them so significant? What result did this unexpected mercy produce?

Feel

4. When circumstances appear threatening, what visible realities tend to dominate your attention?
5. How might your response to fear change if you truly believed that God's presence and activity were greater than what you could presently see?

Do

6. Where do you need to pray, "Lord, open my eyes," rather than immediately trying to control or escape the situation?
7. Is there a person you have begun to view primarily as an opponent? What might it look like to respond with wisdom, mercy, or unexpected kindness?
8. What practice could help you remember God's unseen presence this week—prayer, Scripture, conversation, journaling, worship, or something else?

