

2026-09-23 Small Group Guide

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Based on 1 Kings 17: Faith, Sovereignty, and the Grace of God

Overview

This session explores the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, focusing on what it means to trust God when circumstances seem unfair, how false theology shapes our expectations of God, and how genuine faith responds to hardship. The passage challenges us to examine our assumptions about how God works and to root our beliefs in Scripture rather than emotion or personal preference.

Key Takeaways

Faith requires action before results. The widow had to give before she could receive. Planting precedes harvest, whether we are talking about finances, witness, or service.

God is sovereign, not a formula. He does not exist to fulfill our expectations. He blesses us not because we have earned it, but because of who He is.

We live in a fallen world with a real enemy. Not every hardship is punishment for sin, and not every blessing is a reward for good behavior. Jesus made this clear in John 9.

Grace is sufficient in the middle of pain. Like Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, we can learn to shift our focus from the pain itself to the God who sustains us through it.

Elijah was a man just like us. His access to God in prayer is the same access we have today, and the Holy Spirit within us gives us even greater standing before the Father.

Crying out to God is different from whining. Passionate, desperate, faith-filled prayer moves God. It is not about having perfect composure, but about

knowing who holds the answer.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Go around the group and share one time in your life when something that looked like a disaster turned out to be something God used for good. How did you feel in the middle of it compared to how you feel about it now?

Section 1: Planting Before Harvesting

The widow was down to her last handful of flour and a little oil. Elijah asked her to make him a cake first, before providing for herself and her son. She obeyed, and the supply did not run out.

The pastor described this as a principle: you have to plant before you can harvest. Where in your life is God currently asking you to give or act before you can see a result?

The pastor mentioned several areas beyond finances where this principle applies, including personal witness, praying with strangers, and visiting people in the hospital. Which of these feels most challenging to you personally, and why?

What is the difference between stepping out in faith and being reckless? How do you discern which is which?

Section 2: Our Expectations of God

The pastor described what he called "designer God" theology, the tendency to want a God who is always available to us on our terms, while we give Him the busy signal when He wants something from us.

Be honest with yourself and the group: in what areas of life are you most likely to expect God to perform for you while being slow to respond when He calls you?

The pastor said, "God is sovereign, and by sovereign I mean He does not need anybody or anything to be God." How does truly believing in God's sovereignty change the way you pray or the way you respond to unanswered prayer?

Have you ever started something you believed God called you to, a habit, a commitment, a ministry, and then let it fade? What got in the way, and what would it look like to revisit that?

Section 3: Responding to Hardship

The widow's son died after the flour and oil miracle. Her first reaction was to blame Elijah and connect the death to her sin. Elijah cried out to God in desperation, stretched himself over the boy three times, and God raised the child back to life.

The widow blamed Elijah for reminding her of her sin and for her son's death. Have you ever blamed a messenger, a pastor, a friend, or a fellow believer for something painful that happened in your life? What was underneath that reaction?

The pastor pointed to John 9 and John 11, where Jesus corrected the assumption that suffering is always caused by someone's sin. How does this change the way you think about difficult situations in your own life or in the lives of people you know?

The pastor said that focusing on Christ during pain does not necessarily remove the pain, but it changes our capacity to endure it. He suggested this is what Jesus Himself did on the cross. Do you agree with this? What does it look like practically to shift your focus from pain to Christ?

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12 that he would boast in his weaknesses because God's grace was sufficient. What would it look like for you to move from tolerating your current hardship to actually boasting in it? What would have to change in your thinking?

Section 4: Prayer and Crying Out

Elijah did not have a formula. He cried out, stretched himself over the boy, cried out again, and God heard him. James later wrote that Elijah was a man just like us.

The pastor drew a distinction between whining and crying out to God. How would you describe the difference in your own words? Which one do you tend toward when things go wrong?

The pastor said it is a great thing to cry out to God, but that the model is not my will, but yours be done. What makes it hard to surrender our desired outcome when we are in the middle of praying for something that matters deeply to us?

Elijah cried out even though he did not understand what was happening and God had not given him a plan. Is there something in your life right now where you need to cry out to God without having a plan or an explanation? Take a moment to share it with the group if you are comfortable doing so.

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your group meets again.

1. Identify one thing God has spoken to you about that you started but did not finish. Write it down, pray over it this week, and take one concrete step toward it.
2. Practice planting before harvesting. This week, do one act of faith before you see any return. Pray with a server at a restaurant, stop and speak to someone you do not know who is struggling, or give something you were holding back.
3. Audit your theology. Take one belief you hold about how God works and

test it against Scripture this week. Ask yourself honestly: is this what the Bible teaches, or is this what I prefer to believe?

4. Shift your focus during a current hardship. When pain or frustration demands your attention this week, pause and spend five minutes worshipping God before you return to the problem. Note what changes, if anything.

5. Pray with passion, not just with words. Set aside time this week to cry out to God about something that genuinely burdens you. Do not just recite a prayer. Bring your full emotion before Him, and end with not my will, but yours be done.

Closing Reflection

The pastor closed with this thought: "If you wanted to wipe us out, it would have been easier to do than to keep us alive." Take a few minutes at the end of your group time to go around and have each person name one specific thing God has kept them through that they are grateful for. Close in prayer, thanking God for His sovereignty, His grace, and His willingness to hear our cries.

Scripture References for Further Study

1 Kings 17:8-24 -- The widow of Zarephath and the raising of her son

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 -- Paul's thorn in the flesh and God's sufficient grace

James 1:2-4 -- Counting trials as joy

James 5:17 -- Elijah was a man just like us

John 9:1-7 -- The man born blind and the glory of God

John 11:1-44 -- Lazarus and the glory of God through death

1 Corinthians 2:9 -- No eye has seen what God has prepared for those who love Him

Matthew 26:39 -- Not my will, but yours be done