

ADULT LESSON

God's Constant Presence in a Changing World



TEACHING PROPOSITION

God is our unfailing source of strength and purpose, through which we can overcome the pain and separation of life's transitions so that we can continually serve God in an ever-changing world.

TEXT

2 Kings 2:1-12

LEADER PREPARATION - IN PERSON

- Using PowerPoint, Keynote, or another slide show software, prepare one slide each about Elijah and Elisha, providing some background details about each prophet. Use some or all of the information provided in Appendix A.
- Include a slide with the text of 2 Kings 2:1-12.
- Gather Bibles and Bible dictionaries.
- Include a slide with the closing liturgy (see the Sending Ritual below) OR Make paper copies of the closing liturgy.
- Arrange to have access to AV equipment to play video and slides.

LEADER PREPARATION - VIRTUAL

- Using PowerPoint, Keynote, or another slide show software, prepare one slide each about Elijah and Elisha, providing some background details about each prophet. Use some or all of the information provided in Appendix A.
- Include a slide with the text of 2 Kings 2:1-12.
- Gather Bibles and Bible dictionaries.
- Include a slide with the closing liturgy (see the Sending Ritual below) OR Make paper copies of the closing liturgy.
- Arrange to have access to AV equipment to play video and slides.

RESOURCES & MATERIALS - IN PERSON

- Bibles and Bible dictionaries
- Dry erase board w/markers and erasers
- AV equipment to play video and slides
- Slides with background information about Elijah and Elisha
- A slide or paper copies of the closing litany
- Imagination!

RESOURCES & MATERIALS - VIRTUAL

- Slides with background information about Elijah and Elisha
- A slide with the text of 2 Kings 2:1-12
- A slide with the closing litany
- (Even more) imagination!

CLASS OUTLINE

- 2-3 minutes Welcome, Opening Prayer
- 5 minutes Brief Presentation on Elijah and Elisha
- 5 minutes Scripture
- 20 minutes Reflecting on the Scripture
(OPTIONAL 25-minute Research Activity; only use for a 1½-hour class)
- 20 minutes Discussion
- 5 minutes Sending Ritual

As attendees arrive, play this video on a screen (for an in-person class) or through screen sharing (for a virtual class): "Order My Steps In Your Word" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmzCyxHIYol>

GATHERING RITUAL

When it is time for class to begin, welcome everyone and invite people to join you in prayer. You may use this prayer from the Book of Common Worship or say your own.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with Your most gracious favor and further us, with Your continual help, in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in You. May we glorify Your holy name, and finally, by Your mercy, obtain everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

GOD IS OUR UNFAILING SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND PURPOSE...

Integrate the following Teaching Points into your opening remarks:

- We begin today with one of the lectionary scriptures from the book of Second Kings.
- At first glance, the titles "1 and 2 Kings" urge us to envision books about historic monarchies and their respective reigns.
- However, the books of Kings are a much larger part of the grand sweep of scripture's story – they are the story of "salvation's history."
- In this part of the grand sweep of God's Story, Elijah, a prophet, has taken center stage since his sudden entry (1 Kings 17:1).
- Elijah has dominated the political life of Israel just as he has dominated the narrative, often preempting any focus that would naturally fall to the official monarchy.
- Our particular text today is the "departure" of Elijah and the transfer of prophetic authority to his disciple and successor, Elisha.
- What happens in this text certainly accomplishes the transfer of prophetic authority, but it also enhances the enduring preeminence of Elijah in the Jewish and, thus, the Judeo-Christian faith traditions.
- Before Elijah's dramatic moment, we see transition preparations between Elijah and Elisha.

Scripture

Before reading the scripture, ask participants to close their eyes and imagine themselves in the story as you read it. Ask them to imagine what they are seeing, hearing, smelling, and feeling as the events unfold.

Read 2 Kings 2:1-12

Reflecting on the Scripture

Invite participants to use their Bible or Bible app, or to pull up a Bible website. Divide the class into three groups, providing at least one Bible for each group or prepare a slide with the 2 Kings 2:1-12 passage on it.

Divide the class into three groups and provide each group the corresponding task from below:

- **Group 1: What can you discern about who Elijah is from this story**
- **Group 2: What can you discern about who Elisha is from this story**
- **Group 3: What can you discern about who God is from this story?**

Spend 10 minutes in small groups or breakout rooms on this task. When the small groups have reconvened into the whole, have each group report on what they found.

Use the slide show presentation prepared before class to emphasize what was learned in the group exercise and to add any key understandings that may have been missed. If this is a 90- minute class, use the exercise in Appendix C instead of the slide presentation.

After the presentation, ask:

- **What does this add to our understanding of who Elijah and Elisha are, and about who God is?**

THROUGH WHICH WE CAN OVERCOME THE PAIN AND SEPARATION OF LIFE'S TRANSITIONS

Using the Insights Page, craft a slide presentation or weave the Teaching Points on the Insights Page into a mini-lecture or discussion to further reinforce the themes and lessons from the scripture. Discuss the following questions with the class:

- **Where do you most connect with Elijah's and Elisha's stories?**
- **When have you experienced the end or beginning of an important chapter in your life?**
- **What emotions were involved? How did your life change?**
- **In what ways does this story speak to how we handle these transitions?**
- **This text is not simply about personal lives, but also community. Our church polity ensures that there is a rotation of leadership so one person (or a small group of persons) never remains in sole power. We are a nation that routinely experiences leadership and power transitions. What are the thoughts and emotions that arise when a transition in leadership occurs?**
- **What can we tell about how Israel may have responded to the change in leadership?**
- **What does this story have to say to us today about transitions in leadership?**

- Where was God in the midst of Elijah's, Elisha's, and Israel's personal and communal transitions?
- Where is God in the midst of our transitions?
- What does this story tell us about God's role in helping us cope with change?

Weave the following teaching points into the discussion:

- God was present with Israel, Elijah, and Elisha in the midst of the whirling wind and tumult.
- God is with us through all the changes and transitions in our lives.
- Over and over again, scripture teaches us that God is faithful and constant.
- God holds us steady and is the rock to whom we look for strength in the midst of change – whether in our personal, church, community, or world lives.

SO THAT WE CAN CONTINUALLY SERVE GOD IN AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD

Too often, teaching sessions rush to prescribed outcomes and activities when it is more helpful and faithful to create space for participants to consider how they will connect faith and daily living. This section creates space for discernment.

Discernment about faithful living is best carried out in community. Use the following questions or those of your own to prompt honest, vulnerable, and deep discussion about embodying our faith in the world. This can be done as a whole group, in small groups, or in pairs. In this session, we are creating space for the work of the Spirit in building a bridge between what we believe and how we live. Because discipleship is a "team sport," we do this together, in conversation with other disciples who are on this journey with us. The key is for each person, in community, to wrestle with how this new understanding of covenant will change the way we think, the way we act, and who we are at the core of our being as we all seek to live into greater faithfulness.

Weave the following Teaching Points into the transition to the discerning question.

- Too often, in Church School or Bible Study, or even worship, once we are finished, we simply go on about our lives as if we had never spent time with the scripture.
- But scripture, by its very nature, is to linger within us. Powered by the work of the Holy Spirit, it is meant to change how we think, live, and act and inform the decisions we make about our personal and communal lives.
- So, in this section of today's lesson, we are going to spend our remaining time discerning how we might live—differently—because we have encountered a God who is constant and faithful...a God who is present with us even in difficult times.
- Let us consider this question...

Now that we understand God is our unfailing source of strength and purpose, through which we can overcome the pain and separation of life's transitions, how will we serve God in an ever-changing world?

CLOSING RITUAL

Project the following closing liturgy on the screen (or through screen sharing for a virtual class) or pass out paper copies. Ask the group to join you in the bolded responses.

- Leader:** When our world is changing and we have no one to guide us, we pray to you, revealing Lord,
All: And You answer, "I will not leave you."
Leader: When seasons in our lives come to an end, and we are rudderless, we pray to you, guiding Lord,
All: And You answer, "I will not leave you."
Leader: When we grieve for all that is lost, we pray to you, comforting Lord,
All: And You answer, "I will not leave you."
Leader: When we do not know how to fix what is broken, we pray to you, healing Lord,
All: And you answer, "I will not leave you."
Leader: When we are overwhelmed by the daunting task that is life, we pray to you, omniscient Lord,
All: And you answer, "I will not leave you."
Leader: Guide us, omnipresent Lord, as we move forward in the midst of changes.
All: Give us strength and spirit, that we may serve you.

Writing Team



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INSIGHTS PAGE

- This story is about the transition in leadership from the prophet Elijah to the prophet Elisha.
- From the beginning of the story, we know that God is about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, indicating that this is the end of Elijah's earthly life and mission as a prophet of Israel and that God is involved in this story in powerful ways.
- Elijah lives on in two ways, according to 2 Kings 2. First, he never undergoes a physical, mortal death as he is taken to the heavens in a whirlwind. Elijah's death-defying conclusion leads to his transformation as a precursor to the Messiah in the New Testament and post-Biblical traditions. Second, Elijah's ministry carries on in that of Elisha, his successor, who confirms Elijah's perpetuation by doubling and repeating many of Elijah's same miracles earlier in Kings.
- God has given Elijah authority and power to accomplish his role as a prophet of Israel and guides Elijah in his work as a prophet.
- Elisha is loyal to God and to Elijah. Three times, Elijah tells Elisha to stay behind while Elijah goes where the Lord sends him, and three times Elisha insists, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."
- Elijah uses his mantle to part of the water of the Jordan so that they can cross on dry ground. Note the similarity between this scene and the story of Moses parting the Red Sea. This reference implies that, like Moses, Elijah is a truly great prophet.
- When Elijah asks Elisha, "What may I do for you before I am taken from you?" Elisha responds by asking for a double portion of his spirit. Many scholars believe that Elisha is referring to the double portion of a father's estate that was traditionally inherited by the oldest son of a family. The oldest son would need this extra portion of the inheritance to keep up the father's estate and continue with the father's work after he died. This indicates that Elisha is asking for the inheritance (spirit) that he needs to continue Elijah's work after he is gone.

- The “double share” is one more portion than is normally distributed (see Deut. 21:15-17; 1 Sam. 1:5). The phrasing is odd, because “double share” refers to something quantifiable, but Elisha asks for rûah, for the force and vitality, energy and authority of Elijah, none of which is quantifiable. He asks to be invested in Elijah’s power as a prophet.
- When Elisha asks for a double share of Elijah’s spirit, Elijah tells Elisha that he cannot grant this. Elijah is aware that his power and authority as a prophet come from God and only God can decide if Elisha will receive the power and authority he needs to follow in Elijah’s footsteps.
- Elisha does see this happen, telling us that God granted Elisha’s request. God has given Elisha the power and authority he needs to continue Elijah’s work as a prophet of Israel.
- Before Elijah is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, a fiery chariot and horses separate Elijah and Elisha. Elijah is not in the chariot. He is in the whirlwind. Scholars suggest two meanings behind the image of the fiery horses and chariot: 1) Elijah is being recognized as a powerful defender of God’s people; and 2) There must be a separation between Elijah, who is ascending to the heavenly realm, and Elisha, who is to remain in the earthly realm to lead God’s people.
- This story gives credibility to Elisha’s leadership as a successor to Elijah.
- This change in leadership is bearable for the people of Israel because God is present with Elisha just as he was with Elijah.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR SLIDE PRESENTATION

Elijah

- From the beginning of the story, we know that God is about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, indicating that this is the end of Elijah's life as a prophet of Israel.
- Three times, Elijah tells Elisha to stay behind while Elijah goes where the Lord sends him. From this, we can discern two things: 1) As a prophet, Elijah goes where God leads him; and 2) Elijah is prepared to take these last journeys of his life as a prophet alone.
- Elijah uses his mantle to part of the water of the Jordan so that he and Elisha can cross on dry ground. From this, we can discern that God has given Elijah authority and power to accomplish his role as a prophet. Also, note the similarity between this scene and the story of Moses parting the Red Sea. This reference implies that, like Moses, Elijah is a truly great prophet.
- Elijah asks Elisha, "What may I do for you before I am taken from you?" This indicates that Elijah wants to prepare Elisha to take over his leadership as a prophet of Israel.
- When Elisha asks for a double share of Elijah's spirit, Elijah tells Elisha that he cannot grant this. Elijah is aware that his power and authority as a prophet come from God and only God can decide if Elisha will receive the power and authority he needs to follow in Elijah's footsteps.
- Before Elijah is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, a fiery chariot and horses separate Elijah and Elisha. Scholars suggest two meanings behind the image of the spirited fiery horses and chariot: 1) Elijah is being recognized as a powerful defender of God's people; and 2) There must be a separation between Elijah, who is ascending to the heavenly realm, and Elisha, who is to remain in the earthly realm to lead God's people.

Elisha

- **Three times, Elijah tells Elisha to stay behind while Elijah goes where the Lord sends him, and three times Elisha insists, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." This indicates Elisha's loyalty not just to God, but to Elijah, as well.**
- **At each of the first two locations, a company of prophets asks Elisha, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" and both times, Elisha answers, "Yes, I know—be silent." We can discern from this that Elisha is both aware of and saddened by Elijah's imminent departure.**
- **When Elijah asks Elisha, "What may I do for you before I am taken from you?" Elisha responds by asking for a double portion of his spirit. Many scholars believe that Elisha is referring to the double portion of a father's estate that was traditionally inherited by the oldest son of a family. The oldest son would need this extra portion of the inheritance to keep up the father's estate and continue with the father's work after he died. This indicates that Elisha is asking for the inheritance (spirit) he needs to continue Elijah's work after he is gone.**
- **Elijah indicates that he cannot grant this request, but that Elisha will know if the request was granted if he sees Elijah as he is being taken to heaven. Elisha does see this happen, telling us that God has granted Elisha's request. God has given Elisha the power and authority he needs to continue Elijah's work as a prophet of Israel.**
- **Elisha tears his clothing after Elijah ascends to heaven, indicating his grief over his separation from Elijah. However, in the next section of the Bible, we learn that Elisha picks up Elijah's mantle, and, despite his grief, continues Elijah's ministry as a prophet.**

God

- From the beginning of the story, we know that God is about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, indicating that God is involved in this story in powerful ways.
- The Lord sends Elijah to three different locations, indicating that God is involved in Elijah's work as a prophet and is in fact leading the way for Elijah.
- Elijah uses his mantle to part of the water of the Jordan so that he and Elisha can cross on dry ground. From this, we can discern that God has given Elijah authority and power to accomplish his role as a prophet.
- When Elisha asks for a double share of Elijah's spirit, Elijah tells Elisha that he cannot grant this. Elijah's power and authority as a prophet come from God and only God can decide if Elisha will also receive this power and authority. Elisha does see this happen, telling us that God has granted Elisha's request. God has given Elisha the power and authority he needs to continue Elijah's work as a prophet of Israel. We can discern from this that God is present in the transition of leadership from Elijah to Elisha and that God will lead Elisha in the same way that he led Elijah.

LEARNING ABOUT ELIJAH AND ELISHA (OPTION A FOR 90-MINUTE CLASS)

In Person Teaching

- Divide the class into two groups and give each group at least one Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia. Instruct one group to research the prophet Elijah. Ask them to provide a few background details about what the prophet Elijah did and/or why he was considered to be a good prophet. Instruct the other group to research the prophet Elisha. Ask them to provide a few background details about what the prophet Elisha did and/or why he was considered to be a good prophet. Give each group 15 minutes to research. Then bring the groups back together and ask each group to report on their findings

Virtual Teaching

- Divide the class into two groups and provide each group with a link to the HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/harper-collins-dictionary>). Instruct one group to research the prophet Elijah. Ask them to provide a few background details about what the prophet Elijah did and/or why he was considered to be a good prophet. Instruct the other group to research the prophet Elisha. Ask them to provide a few background details about what the prophet Elisha did and/or why he was considered to be a good prophet. Give each group 15 minutes to research. Then bring the groups back together and ask each group to report on their findings (10 minutes).