

SESSION 2

Serve with Trust



QUESTION 1:

Whom would you trust to lead you through difficulty or danger?

THE POINT

Service to God should be fueled by trust in Him.

THE PASSAGE

1 Kings 17:7-16

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

On June 30, 1859, tightrope walker Charles Blondin astonished the world when he walked just over a thousand feet across Niagara Falls on a cable about three inches thick. The cable sagged about sixty feet in the middle, forming a sharp slope, and the drop was nearly two hundred feet.

After that first daring walk across Niagara Falls—and then back!—Blondin would perform the feat many more times, always escalating the risk and amazing the crowds. Later, he would cross blindfolded, on stilts, and even wearing a gorilla suit and pushing a wheelbarrow.

Blondin's enthralled audiences responded with wild applause. But when he asked for a volunteer to ride on his back while he crossed the falls, they were less than eager. The crowds believed he could do it, but no one believed it enough to climb on his back. Only his manager trusted in Blondin enough to accept his challenge. That is real trust.¹

Elijah similarly demonstrated real trust in serving God. He didn't just talk about what God could do. He built his life on it and showed others how to do the same.

1 Kings 17:7-12

7 And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

8 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,

9 Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

11 And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

12 And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

Instructions don't always make sense. For example, note the following warning labels:

- ▶ Do not use while sleeping.—Warning label on a hairdryer.
- ▶ Remove child before folding.—Warning label on a baby stroller.
- ▶ This product is not intended for use as a dental drill.—Warning label on a carpenter's drill.
- ▶ May cause drowsiness. Use care when operating a car.—Warning on a bottle of *dog* medication.²

Ridiculous instructions are easy to disregard. But what do you do when the instructions don't make sense? Even more, what do you do when those instructions come from God? That's the dilemma Elijah faced while in hiding by the brook Cherith, where God had been feeding him during the drought (1 Kings 17:2-6).

Elijah was out to prove Yahweh was the One true God. The prophet had declared God would stop the rain indefinitely, proving He alone had the power to water the land and feed the people. But this prophecy put Elijah in grave danger from Ahab and Jezebel, the nation's rulers who worshiped Baal. So God had led Elijah into hiding at the Wadi Cherith. A wadi is a rocky watercourse that runs dry most of the year but fills during the rainy season. Water flowing from this brook and food brought by ravens sustained Elijah.

QUESTION 2:

What helps you trust God's guidance when it doesn't seem to make sense?

After some time, even the wadi dried up. As time went on without rain, the stream stopped flowing. But why? Surely the God who miraculously stopped the rain and sent ravens with food could keep a wadi filled, even during a drought. God cared about Elijah. God certainly has the power to do all things, so why did He allow the life-sustaining wadi to run dry?

"Why" questions hit us all. Why did I get laid off? Why did my husband leave? Why have I gotten this illness that prevents me from working? Why did my 401(k) plummet? Why has my provision disappeared? Yet, when God is our Provider, we will always have what we need. The nature of the provision may change, but He Himself is our Source. Sometimes what God permits us to lose or endure points us to the truth that He is all we really need (2 Cor. 12:7-10). It is a matter of learning to trust in Him and not in the things He provides.

Trust comes easily when God's leading makes sense, but that's not always the case. When the brook Cherith dried up, God directed Elijah to go to Zarephath. That was strange guidance because Zarephath was in Phoenicia, Jezebel's home and the center of Baal worship in that region. Furthermore, God promised to support Elijah on the income of a widow living there. That sounded

improbable because widows in that agricultural society typically lived in abject poverty. Yet that was where God sent Elijah, and Elijah trusted God enough to go.

Arriving at the city gate, Elijah met the widow as she was gathering wood. When he asked her for water and food, it only seemed to reinforce that this seemed like an outrageous plan since the widow was preparing to make her final meal with her last flour and oil. With the pantry bare, she had reconciled herself to the idea she and her son would soon starve to death. Other people might have turned around and walked out the door thinking, “If I’m going to make it, I’ll have to provide for myself.” But Elijah trusted God enough to follow through with His “absurd” plan.

1 Kings 17:13-14

13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

The spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) that started in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 thrust our world into a situation that is the stuff of nightmares. Across the globe, millions became sick, and hundreds of thousands have died. Governments ordered people to stay at home. Businesses closed and furloughed workers. Schools and even churches shut down. In short, things we’d always depended on—the economy, jobs, businesses, and for many, health—were letting us down.

Because of the rapid upheaval of our routines, we faced the question: Will we trust God, reject fear, and encourage others to do

the same? Even when the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, another crisis will inevitably raise its head. Every time this happens, it is a new opportunity to trust God and lead others to trust Him too. That's exactly what Elijah did in his situation.

The widow had nothing to offer Elijah and no prospects of getting more. She had lost hope and given up. Elijah might have joined in her despair. After all, he also had nothing for sustenance and no "check in the mail." The difference was Elijah had learned from experience that his God always provided. Elijah didn't have to see God's promises with his eyes to claim them by faith.

Elijah responded to the widow with the words God speaks to us time and again throughout Scripture, "Fear not." He allowed God to speak *through* him to comfort and encourage the widow in that moment. The contrast between the widow and Elijah is not unlike the scene centuries later in a storm-tossed boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus' terrified disciples woke the Master saying, "Lord, save us: we perish." And Jesus calmly replied, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" (Matt. 8:23-26). Both Elijah and Jesus knew: God is sovereign over the universe, and our all-loving, all-powerful God holds all things in His hands. In that knowledge, fear must bow to faith.

The widow was focused on her lack. "I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse" (1 Kings 17:12). Elijah challenged her to see what God could do with what she placed in His hands. Again, Elijah's actions compare with those of Jesus when He instructed His disciples to feed the five thousand. They responded like the widow, "We have here *but* five loaves, and two fishes" (Matt. 14:17, emphasis added). But Jesus challenged them to offer their meager resources to God and see Him do what only He can accomplish. By directing the widow to feed him before feeding her son and herself, Elijah invited her to believe God's promise.

Just as Elijah had predicted the drought, he prophesied continuing provision for the widow as if he had already seen it

happen. With his ear tuned closely to the voice of God, Elijah spoke aloud with confidence what God had impressed on him in secret. His example serves as a model for us. Will we believe God's promises against the daily drumming of despair? Will we hold fast to faith when hope seems lost? Will we share our faith and invite others to trust with us in the God who never forsakes His own?

QUESTION 3:

What provisions of God in the past have encouraged you to trust Him in the present?

1 Kings 17:15-16

15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

Polio was the most feared disease of the twentieth century. At a time when most scientists believed only vaccines made from live viruses would work, Jonas Salk developed an effective “killed-virus” polio vaccine. He grew virus samples and then deactivated them with formaldehyde, which prevented them from reproducing. Injecting these impotent strains into the bloodstream triggered the immune system to produce protective antibodies.

To Salk, the science seemed sound; his vaccine worked on monkeys. But he could not really know that it was safe and effective until it was tested on humans. So in 1952, he gave the vaccine to himself, his wife, and his three children. What Salk believed in theory was proven in life. And today polio has been virtually eradicated worldwide.³

What Salk believed in his heart, he had to test to prove. Only then could he say in truth, “I know it works because I’ve tried it myself.” Trust in God is kind of like that. We can trust and believe based on how God worked in biblical times, and our faith can grow when we hear testimonies of what God has done for others today. But nothing is like the confidence we possess when we take Him at His word and see His power for ourselves. We must personally trust His faithfulness and His provision. We must trust His promises and see God move mountains and resurrect what was dead.

That’s what happened when the widow in Zarephath did what God’s prophet told her to do. Rather than playing it safe and holding onto the little she had, she let it go. Ignoring reason, she used her last resources to feed Elijah. By trusting God, she opened the door for Him to prove Himself. As a result, the widow, her household, and Elijah all ate for many days. God miraculously multiplied what she trusted to Him, and He provided for her throughout the three-and-a-half-year drought (Luke 4:25). God demonstrated His sovereignty even in Zarephath, a Phoenician town where people believed Baal reigned supreme.

QUESTION 4:

How is trust in God developed and strengthened?

Our willingness to trust God and act in faith gives Him the opportunity to display His power. When a Roman centurion trusted in Jesus’ ability, the Savior healed the centurion’s servant from a distance (Matt. 8:5-13). When the woman who had suffered with bleeding for twelve years dared to reach out and touch Jesus’ robe, He told her, “Thy faith hath made thee whole” (9:20-22). Jesus commanded ten lepers who needed healing to go and show themselves to the priests. And as they obeyed, they were healed (Luke 17:11-15).

In the modern world, no one better modeled how to trust, try, and prove God than George Müller of nineteenth-century Bristol,

England. Müller famously founded orphanages and trusted God to provide miraculously for the children under his care. In his autobiography, he wrote, “I want to show these people that God is faithful and can be trusted without reservation ... by giving my brothers visible proof of the unchangeable faithfulness of the Lord, I might strengthen their faith...This is the primary reason for establishing the orphan house...that God would be magnified because the orphans under my care will be provided with all they need through prayer and faith.”⁴ Müller’s daring faith challenges us still today: How will we trust, try, and prove God? And how will others see God’s faithfulness proven as a result?

QUESTION 5:

How has God used others to strengthen your trust in Him?

ENGAGE

One of the great hymns of the faith is “Trust and Obey.” Under the headings below, write several phrases from today’s text that link trust in God with obedience to God. Then write several phrases that show areas in which you have trusted and obeyed God this week.

From the Text

Trusting God:

Obeying God:

From Your Life

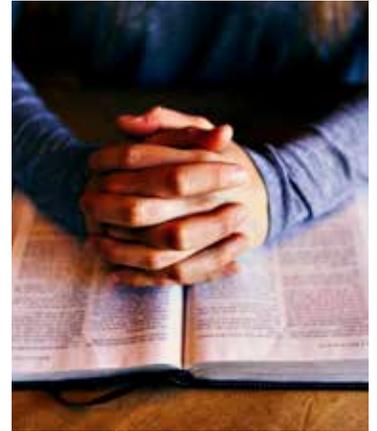
Trusting God:

Obeying God:

LIVE IT OUT

The chorus to an old hymn proclaims: “Jesus, Jesus, how I trust him! How I’ve proved him o’er and o’er!” Louisa Stead penned these words in 1882 after watching her husband drown attempting to rescue a drowning boy. The loss left Stead and her four-year-old daughter penniless. From her crisis, she wrote the lyrics that challenge us still today.⁵ How will you express your trust in God?

- ▶ **Trust.** Identify one thing God has told you to do that doesn’t seem logical. Do it anyway.
- ▶ **Encourage.** Name someone struggling with a crisis. Share with this person your hope in Christ. Tell him or her how God has brought you through trouble and pray with the person.
- ▶ **Give.** Give an “outrageous” gift to your church or someone in need. Trust God to replenish what you need.



END NOTES

1. Richard Cavendish, “Blondin’s first tightrope-walk across Niagara Falls,” *History Today*, June 6, 2009, historytoday.com/archive/blondin-s-first-tightrope-walk-across-niagara-falls.
2. “21 Stupid Warning Labels that Will Make You Feel Like a Genius,” *Reader’s Digest*, June 16, 2020, rd.com/funny-stuff/funny-warning-labels.
3. Christopher Klein, “8 Things You May Not Know About Jonas Salk and the Polio Vaccine,” *History*, March 25, 2020, history.com/news/8-things-you-may-not-know-about-jonas-salk-and-the-polio-vaccine.
4. *The Autobiography of George Müller*, (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1985).
5. C. Michael Hawn, “History of Hymns: ‘Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus,”” *Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church*, September 18, 2014, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-tis-so-sweet-to-trust-in-jesus>.