

RTM

reaching/teaching/ministering curriculum



December 7, 2008
Coping with Crisis
2 Kings 4:8-37

MINISTERING HELPS

Group Prayer

Get everyone in your group praying today. During the class prayer time, give folks 1-2 minutes to pray silently for those who are mentioned. Then give another minute and ask members to pray for themselves... either that God would speak to them through the lesson; or if prayer time is at the end, that God would help them to apply a meaningful part of it to their lives.

Stay Connected

Use the RISK report found in your attendance folder and assign names of those who are most at RISK of falling into inactivity. Make sure these folks are personally invited to your class Christmas party through a phone call or personal visit.

REACHING HELPS

One of our biggest ways to reach adults with the message of Jesus is coming up in just a few weeks.

Christmas Celebration is FBC Allen's Musical Christmas Card to our community. This two-hour musical extravaganza begins with an hour of seasonal upbeat Christmas music. The second hour is a costumed presentation of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, helping folks to understand His ultimate mission... making possible the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

The presentations will be at 7 p.m. on December 12, 13, and 14; and this year, we will have a matinee presentation at 3 p.m. on December 14th.

This is a GREAT outreach event, if we will make the effort to invite the unchurched and unbelievers. You must have a ticket, but tickets are FREE and can be picked up in the foyer or at the church office.

TEACHING HELPS

Times of crisis can be packaged differently for folks. A bad doctor's report, a lay-off at work, or the loss of a loved one all can throw us into crisis mode.

For some, crisis causes us to want to run away. For others, crisis makes us want to fight with all our might against it. But for those who are children of God, God wants us to trust Him so that our faith will grow.

Let today's lesson be a challenge to your group to "faith it" when times of crisis come.



Coping with Crisis

2 Kings 4:8-37

The bitter news of Dawson Trotman's drowning swept like cold wind across Schroon Lake to the shoreline. Eyewitnesses tell of the profound anxiety, the tears, the helpless disbelief in the faces of those who now looked out across the deep blue water. Everyone's face except one -- Lila Trotman, Dawson's widow. As she suddenly walked upon the scene, a close friend shouted, "Oh, Lila ... He's gone. Dawson's gone!" To that she replied in calm assurance the words of Psalm 115:3 "*But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.*" All of the anguish, the sudden loneliness that normally consumes and cripples those who survive did not invade that woman's heart. Instead, she leaned hard upon her sovereign Lord, who had once again done what He pleased.¹

Faith must be the basis for dealing with any crisis. James 1 explains that crisis, tragedy, and hardship grow mature faith, "*...the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*" Romans 8 reveals that God is the provider of hope, help, and purpose during times of crisis, "*...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*" Faith is the catalyst through which healing, maturing, and restoration unite.

1. Faith Prior to the Crisis – (v8-10)

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."*

Elisha the prophet did much of the same work as his

Teaching Points

Introduction...

On the marker board, write the word CRISIS. Ask for your group to create a good definition for the word CRISIS.

Next ask your group to come up with 7-10 things that might happen to someone that would be considered a CRISIS event. Write those things underneath the word CRISIS.

Next, come up with 7-10 possible emotional/physical/spiritual responses that people might have in a time of crisis. Write each of these on the board underneath the things mentioned as crisis issues.

Now looking at these responses, ask the group to consider the following... "If God really works all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28), which of these would tend to work against God's activity, and which would tend to work to accomplish God's purpose for a crisis?"

Help your group to understand that we are not talking about denying feelings or being some "super Christian" who isn't touched emotionally by crisis. But many of us allow our emotions to take us into non-productive places during a crisis that actually can make the crisis worse.

In today's lesson we will learn about a woman who, in the midst of her grief and loss, reached out in faith to God, and by doing so saw God do an amazing miracle in the midst of her crisis.

1. Faith Prior to the Crisis (v8-10)

- Read the entire passage of 2 Kings 4:8-37.
- From the commentary, tell the group a little about Elisha.
- Talk about what the lady encouraged her husband to do for the prophet. What did this say about her heart for the Lord and the work of the Lord? Do you think she did this to earn God's favor or because she believed in the work of the Lord? Is there a difference?
- What are ways we can grow our faith before the crisis hits? Does it really matter?

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Starting Over*, Multnomah Press, 1977, p. 67.

predecessor Elijah; however, he did it in a vastly different way. He was called while plowing a field. Upon seeing Elijah, Elisha killed his oxen, used the wood from his tools to build a fire, and prepared his own farewell feast. The action made his decision final and decisive. (1 Kings 19) He ministered as a prophet for about 50 years in Israel. Known to be calm, cool, and collected, much of Elisha's work was ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of individuals he met on his journeys. Such is the story of the Shunammite woman.²

Our story begins while Elisha is doing his normal prophetic duties, ministering to those in his journeys. Along the way, he stopped in the City of Shunem located near Jezreel in the northern part of Israel's territory. While ministering there, he was invited to eat and stay with a wealthy, childless couple. The invitation was extended to Elisha by the woman. The woman quickly realized Elisha's position, and her faith in Yahweh led her to approach her husband with the request of making the top of their home into a "Prophet's Chamber." Looking in from the outside, it is evident that she was the faith leader of the home and sensitive to God's calling. From that point forward, Elisha would stay with the couple when he was near Shunem.

This early part of the story helps us to see that faith doesn't just magically appear. Faith is nurtured by a sensitive heart. This woman was nurturing a faith in the Lord that resulted in actions like the action of providing a place for the prophet to stay.

2. Faith to Believe when it's Good News– (v11-17)

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, "Well, 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. "Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" 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.

2. Faith to believe when it's good news.. (v11-17)

- What do you think Elisha had in mind when he first wanted to do something for the woman? Obviously Elisha changed what he wanted to give, into giving her something she really wanted. How is this a good reminder for us as we give to others at Christmas?
- Was the woman emotional about the good news? Do you think she completely accepted it at first? How do you know that she did in faith accept it? (Obviously there were physical things she had to do to have the baby, and she and her husband did those things)
- Do you think this caused her faith to grow?

Faith's blessings touch the most personal desires.

Having been blessed by the Shunammite woman, Elisha wanted to return that blessing. He called for the woman while in his room to ask her how he could be a blessing in return. As a prophet, Elisha was a prominent

dignitary. He would have influence with the King along with his top leaders. Elisha most likely frequented these men with warnings and messages from the Lord. Although the leadership was wicked, they respected Elisha's position and power. In Elisha's mind, maybe they could do something for the Shunammite woman on Elisha's behalf. The woman's reply revealed her content spirit and so she returned downstairs.

Elisha then turned to his servant to ask the same question. Gehazi's reply revealed his ability to observe - the woman had no children because her husband was old. In ancient culture, barrenness was seen as a curse from God. Children guaranteed they would be cared for in their old age, children were a sign of God's blessing, and a

² A History of Israel's History, Wood.

child would allow the woman to nurture and love as God intended. Elisha agreed with Gehazi, and he called her once again to the room. Standing in the doorway to the room, Elisha revealed God would bless her by giving her a child within a year. Unlike most women who are childless and receive conception as a blessing, her response was one of hope not circumstance. Her response revealed that a child was a true desire within her spirit and she would not be mocked, not even by a man of God. God fulfilled the promise and within a year of the prophecy, the Shunammite woman gave birth to a son.

3. Faith to Believe when it's Bad News: Seek God – (v18-28)

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

3. Faith to believe when it's bad news... SEEK GOD! (v18-28)

- Have the class explain what the crisis was. What do you think were some of the woman's actions and thoughts as she held her dying son?
- Why do you think she was so intent on getting to Elijah? In the Old Testament, was the Holy Spirit available to all believers as He is today? (No... He rested on specific people to accomplish specific things, at specific times, for specific purposes.) So her running to Elisha was in effect the same as running to God for help.
- Was she perfect in her faith? How does the story let us know that she was conflicted in her emotions, yet still in faith ran to God? How is this story much like the story of the man in Mark 9:24? What did the man mean when he said, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief" in Mark 9:24?
- What are ways we can run to God in faith today? Does being a person of faith exempt us from being conflicted with emotion? What should we do when our feelings are conflicted with our faith?

Crisis comes at inopportune times. The boy, being out with his father during harvest, approached his dad with an excruciating headache. The man, probably the owner of the field, could not leave so he instructed one of his servants to carry the boy to his mother so she could care for him. The mother received her son and held him until he died at noon. Immediately her thoughts turned to the man of God. She placed the child in Elisha's room and called her husband so she could be led to Elisha. Her husband, taken back by the request and not knowing about the child's death, agreed.

Led by a servant on a donkey, the woman hurried to Elisha who was several miles away at Mount Carmel. The short journey must have been an emotional roller coaster for the woman. As she approached the place of the prophet, Elisha saw her and sent his servant to see if she was alright. Obviously this was not a common occurrence as her husband and Elisha thought the visit a little odd. When Gehazi reached the woman, he asked her about her family as instructed by Elisha. She replied falsely for it was not Gehazi whom she had come to see, but Elisha, God's chosen servant. When she reached Elisha, she jumped off the donkey and wrapped herself around his ankles. This gesture revealed her humility and desperation to the prophet. Elisha could see something was wrong; however in this instance, God had not revealed to him the circumstance. "As common

under extreme stress the woman's first words to Elisha did not tell him why she had come but how she felt about what happened."³ Heartbroken and feeble, she cries out to the prophet wishing never to have had the child. Yet, hopeless and desperate, she cried out to the only one who she thought could bring hope.

4. Faith to Believe when it's Bad News: Pray like a Prophet – (v29-35)

²⁹ Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, 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. 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 upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon 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 upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

4. Faith to believe when it's bad news... PRAY (v 29-35)

- What did Elisha tell his assistant GEHAZI to do? What do you think everyone thought would happen when Gehazi obeyed Elisha? What actually happened? Why do you think God did this?
- When Elisha got to the house, what did he find and what did he do? (He went in the room and PRAYED). How is this like the story found in Matthew 17:14-21? What did Jesus mean when he said, "this kind does not come out but by prayer and fasting" in Matthew 17:21?
- When everyone was so desperately praying, do you think it helped everyone to know without a shadow of a doubt of the power of God?
- How was this a faith building moment for everyone?

Faith's response to crisis is heavenly. Elisha immediately sends his servant with his staff to the home of the Shunammite. His staff symbolized the authority of Gehazi's actions, and Elisha either believed that Gehazi's action would resurrect the child or he did it to teach him a lesson. Regardless, his instructions were clear, travel expeditiously. It was common in ancient culture to greet those who passed by on the road, and these greetings were often lengthy and time consuming. Elisha and the woman followed behind Gehazi, and soon Gehazi returned explaining his actions had not restored the boy. When the group reached the home, Elisha went into the Prophet's Chamber alone and shut the door so that he could concentrate on the petition of his prayer. Having heard from the Lord, he lay over the boy as the body turned warm but was not awakened. Elisha then turned away from the boy to the Lord again in petition. His pacing reflected the mental intensity of the petition which led him once again to lay over the body, this time the child awoke with an outburst of seven sneezes (symbolic of God's work).

5. Faith makes us want to Worship (v36-37)

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.

Elisha then re-united the woman with her child.

5. Faith makes us want to worship... (v36-37)

- How do you think the emotions of the woman changed when she saw her son alive? How do you think her faith had changed?
- What does this story let us know about trusting our emotions to lead us to the reality of a moment of crisis? What does show us about faith in God?
- Was she worshipping the prophet?

³ The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Wolvoord and Zuck.

Grateful, she fell at Elisha's feet again, this time in thanksgiving and praise to God for His mercy. Then she embraced her son and left the room in joyful gratitude for what God had done.

Throughout this story, one thing remained constant, the Shunammite woman's faith. Faith, according to the writer of Hebrews, is the substance of things hoped for without the evidence of seeing the result. Without knowing, the woman invited the Prophet to eat. Without knowing that a blessing would be returned, the woman asked her husband to build a Prophet's Chamber. Without knowing that her son would be restored, she sought God through Elijah. Without knowing, she grew in faith through her tragic crisis.

Faith is a substance; therefore there is quantity and quality to it. Jesus spoke of this aspect of faith on several different occasions. However, quantity and quality never determine the result of the crisis. They do determine the outcome. When a crisis strikes, there are several options. The right choice is James 1, patience, endurance, victory, growth.

The purpose of this story is to show the process of faith through crisis. The purpose of this story is not, "If we just had enough faith." The Shunammite woman teaches that faith is essential to coping with any crisis, large or small. God wants His children to turn to Him. He wants a relational dialogue even when the circumstances are illogical. The Shunammite's son was raised because God was most glorified. Coping in crisis ought to end with a greater dependence on our heavenly father.

Faith in crisis says... "God has something He wants to work together for good in the midst of this chaos. God, though my emotions are conflicted, I run to you, I trust you, I believe that you have a purpose and plan in this crisis and thy will be done."

Application Points...

- What are we doing now that is laying the groundwork for being a person of faith during a major crisis to come?
- How much do we act on our emotions? Can they be trusted? Does faith act in the absence of conflicted emotions, or despite them?
- By running to God in the midst of a crisis and in the midst of conflicted emotions, we are saying that we believe that...

...all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28 (NKJV)