

KINGS



PRESIDENTS

POLITICS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD
Small Group Leader's Guide

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A WORD ON DISCUSSION GUIDES

IT PROBABLY GOES without saying that leading discussion around issues like politics can seem daunting, but we want you to know that it doesn't have to be! We have compiled this guide because we don't want the church to be subjected to silence on such an important issue just because of the challenges associated with talking about it. Please be assured, this guide and this book are not intended to make conversation difficult but to open a way of thinking about political life that is faithful to the biblical witness of God's people and to make the conversation *less* difficult by having it in a new light.

The simple premise at the center of this study is that, as long as politics is understood as my way over your way, we will often struggle with the anxiety that such a system produces. God offers us a better hope! We pray your group will discover that hope through this study. As we have heard from various groups who have used *Kings and Presidents* for small group study, we have been encouraged by their stories of how those with different political backgrounds and opinions have found a new kind of hope in the pages of 2 Kings. We humbly offer this resource in the hope that the Spirit-breathed stories of 2 Kings will open a similar way for your own group and that you will come to know more deeply the hope God offers that no election ever can.

The spirit in which we have approached this study was one of pastoral concern for a people who were fretting and prone to anxiety because of the American political climate of our time. We wanted to offer a better hope, a hope offered to God's people from the time God called them into existence. And if you are wondering how you might approach guiding this conversation in your own ministry setting, our best suggestion is to do so with a spirit of offering a hope beyond what the current, us-versus-them political climate can muster. God offers a different way, and for this we are grateful!

Our prayer for you as the leader is that you might be able to gently guide your group to know the way of hope, to see the distinct way in which God has been working for thousands of years to call forth a salt-and-light kind of people who will be a blessing to the nations precisely because they are not caught in the political anxiety of the nations.

We hope that you will:

- Pray for your group in advance, asking God to bless the conversation as a model of what it means to be a people of reconciliation.
- Read over the first seven chapters of 2 Kings two or three times in one sitting to get a feel for the overall shape of the book.
- See the distinctly different vision of politics that God has offered.

- Allow that vision to offer a new way of imagining political possibilities.
- Look at what 2 Kings is telling us not only in the stories themselves but also in the way the stories are compared to one another.
- Don't fear the difference of political opinions in your group, but model for the group a way of seeking to understand where each person is coming from.

When it comes to leading discussion through this study, we recommend:

- Opening each session with prayer and asking God to guide the whole group to a new understanding of faithfulness to God's way.
- Gently challenging group members to let God transform their minds and hearts in all aspects of life, including their understanding of what politics are and what they are for.
- Engendering an atmosphere of exploration and truth-seeking by making space for all voices to be heard.
- Keeping discussion primarily focused on the biblical text at hand and asking what the text might be saying to us about political life today.
- Closing each session by praying the Lord's Prayer together as an expression of unity under the way of Jesus, through whom God is bringing "unity to all things" (Ephesians 1:10).
- Having fun! Be honest and open about the new insights you are having and the joy that comes from being challenged by Scripture.

SESSION 1

Introduction

★ THE RECOUNT

There are several visions being offered to the contemporary church when it comes to politics. One is the world of kings, which tends to operate in terms of power politics. In the world of kings, politics are usually understood in opposition to others. In the world of kings, things get done by overcoming the opposition and having your will enacted in larger society.

The world of the kingdom, on the other hand, hopes and prays for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done (Matthew 6:10). The world of the kingdom sees the way things are done in different terms. Its vision is guided by a people gathering not to advance their own agenda but to be redeemed by God's distinct and strange way of redeeming the world.

The world of the kingdom offers a contrasting view of what politics are and what they are for. It does not assume that politics are about enacting our own will over others; instead, it prefers to see God's kingdom come according to the way God has chosen to act. What we see in 2 Kings is God's way of acting contrasted with the way kings tend to act. While kings prepare for conflict for the sake of making a great name for themselves or their nations, God is busy being faithful to the poorest in the land. While kings work out their pursuit of power through conquest, God works among those who have been conquered. While kings see the world in terms of power, the people of God see it in terms of God's faithfulness to the least of these.

As we engage the stories of 2 Kings, we will see the way these worlds are narrated in contrast to each other. We will see how these worlds act, how they understand political life, and what possibilities they see as a result. To be sure, the world of the kingdom is different from the world of kings, and the challenge to us will be to have the fortitude to embrace the strange way God has of working in the world.

★ EXERCISE

Ask each person to share what they hope to learn in this study and their hopes as they begin the journey.

★ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think politics are *for*? What is the purpose of politics, and what does that mean for the way we understand politics?
- The authors make a distinction between the world of kings and the world of the kingdom. What do you think they mean by this? What are the distinctive characteristics of each one?
- How do you see the world of kings and the world of the kingdom playing out in the world today?
- On page 18, the authors write, “*This is what the worship of the church does: It gathers us in on all sides, surrounding us in God’s history of salvation and calling us to interpret the world—including politics—through that history.*” What do you hear in this assertion? What possibilities and challenges does this statement present? Can our worship change the way we imagine politics?
- What did you learn or find particularly interesting from the introduction about the history of faith’s relationship with politics?
- The book lists several challenges when it comes to applying the Bible to modern politics while noting that the Bible should be authoritative and instructive to Christians when it comes to politics. What did you find interesting or challenging about those notions?

SESSION 2

THE PATTERN OF TWO WORLDS

Chapter 1

★ SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 2:7–15

★ THE RECOUNT

In the transition from Elijah to Elisha, the mantle comes to be a sign of what is most true about the role of the prophet in Israel. The mantle signifies God's presence and a reminder that the mantle of God's presence is more important than the man who happens to be wearing it. In times of political transition and turmoil, we tend to focus on particular leaders. We experience disorientation, or we become anxious about an impending transition from one leader to another. All of this would be normal in the world of kings. Because the current king holds the power and is attempting to enact his own way, we have good reason to wonder about what a transition from one leader to another may be like and whether that transition will be beneficial for us.

One of the interesting things about the world of the kingdom is that it doesn't place a crown on a king's head as a sign of leadership; rather, it places a mantle on a prophet's shoulders. While the crown symbolizes the king's power and signals his authority, the mantle symbolizes that the prophet is acting under God's authority. Therefore, it doesn't particularly matter which prophet is speaking so long as they are speaking faithfully for God.

This story is written down about the time Israel is living through a major political transition in the nation's history. They are moving from having their own political rulers to being exiled from their homeland and governed by those who do not know God's ways. To put it mildly, they are disoriented in this time of transition, causing frustration and anxiety. The story of Elijah passing the mantle to Elisha serves to remind the people of God that God's faithfulness endures in times of transition. The people of God do not need to fear a massive political shift precisely because God remains faithful. The messages and agendas of the kings may change, but the word of God, spoken by the prophet, remains.

If the people of Israel buy into the world of kings, they will think the world rises and falls according to who the king happens to be. But this story challenges them, and it challenges us. It challenges us to buy into the world of the kingdom, which shows that God will still speak and act as God always has,

even though a different political ruler has ascended to the throne. And while it may be disorienting to experience times of political transition and change, we don't need to fear it turning the world upside down because the world of the kingdom isn't ruled by transitory political rulers but by the unfailing love of the God who comes to us in faithfulness, working all things for good.

★ EXERCISE

Share with the group a time when you felt disoriented. It could be a funny story or one that demonstrates the real power of disorientation.

★ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What have you learned in this chapter about a mantle?
- As you heard the story of the transition from Elijah to Elisha, what stood out to you about that transition?
- On pages 37 and 38, the authors write, "*When Elisha emerges from the Jordan River, cloaked in the same mantle that Elijah wore, it sends a signal to those who are reading between the lines in the midst of political disorientation: Remember which world you live in.*" What do you find hopeful or not hopeful about this message?
- This chapter distinguishes between the role of a king and the role of a prophet. What are some of the primary differences between kings and prophets, and why do those differences matter?
- Consider the way a people in political exile would hear this story. How would it be good news to them?

SESSION 3

THE UPSIDE-DOWN HISTORY OF GOD'S KINGDOM

Chapter 2

★ SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 4:1-7

★ THE RECOUNT

In this passage, a woman is considering selling her sons into slavery. She has no husband, no income, and no means of making an income. She is at the end of her rope. She appeals to Elisha, who asks her what she has. Her meager possession at that point is simply a little oil. Elisha then instructs her to ask her neighbors for containers—many of them!—and to begin to pour the little oil she has into them. To her amazement, the containers all fill to the brim, and a way is made for her to sell the oil, rather than her sons.

While this story is powerful in and of itself, it is even more powerful when it is read in contrast to the story that immediately precedes it. In 2 Kings 3, we hear a story of a king doing what the author of 2 Kings wants us to see that kings do. He decides he will take resources from a neighboring kingdom by leading a coalition of other kings to battle for those resources. His plan ends in disaster, and he begs Elisha to explain why God would allow his battle plan to come to this kind of an end. When all is said and done, the king loses a substantial number of soldiers in his army and doesn't come away any richer than he was to begin with. His thirst for power has actually left him with less power.

When we read these stories together, we should see a stark contrast between the power of the king and the powerlessness of the widow. We can see in this contrast a king who is operating squarely according to the world of kings and a widow who has no hope but the world of the kingdom. The king demands to know why God isn't going to bless his own plan to take power, and the widow simply throws herself at God's mercy.

The question seems to be peeking out, just below the surface: *Which world will you live in? In which of these worlds will you place your trust and hope?* The challenge in this story is that we are so often tempted to rely so heavily on the world of kings that we forget that the world of the kingdom is operating quietly in a surprising and different way. And yet, there is our hope. Our hope is that God

remains faithful to those who have little power, even while the powerful seek to amass more power for themselves.

★ EXERCISE

Ask the group to share stories about times when they lost power (like electricity, for instance). What was it like to move from a world of having power to a world where there was no power? How did life change in those moments?

★ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When you compare the story of the king to the story of the widow, what do you see? What does this comparison tell us about how God acts?
- How do you see the king referring to God? What do you think the king thinks about God's role in his drive to power?
- How do you see the widow referring to God? Whom does she understand God to be?
- Where or how have you seen God working quietly in faithfulness, rather than in the political headlines?
- The authors write that, in comparing these two stories, the writer of 2 Kings is asking us to choose between the world of the king and the world of the widow. What makes this choice such a difficult one?

SESSION 4

CLAIMING INVISIBLE POLITICAL OPTIONS

Chapter 3

★ SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 4:8–37

★ THE RECOUNT

This story centers around a woman who is capable of seeing things that others are not. While others around her see the world of kings, she sees options being given to her according to the world of the kingdom.

As a woman with an aging husband, this woman faces the very real possibility of destitution. Moved by compassion for her, Elisha wonders what can be done. Putting in a good word with the king seems to be a valuable gift that carries with it the implication of the king taking the woman as one of his wives when her husband dies. If the king does take her, the world of kings will open widely to this woman. She will have access to the power and riches that come with being married to a king! Never again will she have to worry about losing her wealth.

The woman's answer to Elisha seems foolish. She rejects his offer and opts instead to remain in her situation. "I have a home among my own people," she says. If we were to look at her decision from the perspective opened to us by the world of kings, this decision appears to be a blunder. She has wasted her chance at securing her place in the world of kings! Instead, she opts for a place in the world of the kingdom. This is the response of someone who can see a way other than the way opened to her by the world of kings. Her vision is capable of seeing a possibility of life in the world of the kingdom, where she trusts her life to the faithfulness of God, rather than the riches of kings.

We are tempted on every side to turn away from the options given to us in the world of the kingdom. We often come to believe that, unless we align ourselves with the world of kings and its attendant systems, structures, and authorities, we will be left out, made to be destitute. But the world of the kingdom offers an alternative way of trusting in something other than what the world of kings offers. It is to trust our lives to the way God has established for God's people.

The hope we find in this story is shown to us by a woman who knows the ways of God so deeply that she can see another way, even when others cannot. And the way she sees is the way of God, who offers hope and salvation in ways that are often at odds with the world of kings.

★ EXERCISE

Show the group an invisible-image stereogram, widely available on the internet (magiceye.com or other sites). Ask the group to indicate whether they can see the hidden image. Ask them why they think some can see the image while others cannot.

★ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What kind of different options do the world of kings and the world of the kingdom offer us today?
- What allows the woman to see options for her future that are different from the options that the world of kings offers?
- How can we have the vision to be able to see options that others can't see? What adjusts our vision to see the options offered to us in the world of the kingdom?
- If you and your group were to attempt to see the world today given the eyes of the world of the kingdom, what possibilities might you see to some of the most pressing issues facing our society?

SESSION 5

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND FAITHFUL LIVING

Chapter 4

★ SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 4:38–41

★ EXERCISE

Make two batches of cookies, one with the required sugar and one without. Offer both batches to members of the group and ask for their reactions. Reveal to them that there was a missing ingredient and that once the ingredient was mixed in, it made the final product much better.

★ THE RECOUNT

If we are called to live in the world of the kingdom, how are we to engage the world of politics?

In one of the more entertaining stories in 2 Kings, we find Elisha trying his hand at cooking. A large pot of stew is made for the company of prophets who are working at the time, and somehow, a problematic ingredient finds its way into the stew, making the whole pot either actually poisonous or simply too distasteful to eat. When the men proclaim to Elisha that there is a problem with the meal, he suggests that flour be added to the pot. The flour is enough to balance out the noxious effects of the bad root, and the company happily consumes the stew.

This story falls in what we refer to as a story valley—a collection of short stories between two large narratives that tell the tale of the world of kings. It's almost as if the writer of 2 Kings is attempting to say, "Welcome to God's valley. Let me tell you how things go in God's valley." In this valley, we find this story telling us something about how God's people are to deal with problematic, death-inducing aspects of life. Rather than attempt to strain out that which causes death, Elisha simply adds in more good. In God's valley, the way we deal with poison is to pour more life-giving good into the mix.

There is another valley that theologians who have engaged the world of politics have spoken of for centuries. Augustine of Hippo, a leading thinker in the Christian tradition, spoke of a "time between the times" of creation and new creation. He imagined that the time of creation before the fall was the truest way of life and that the new creation God will bring at the end of time will also be a true way of living in which all things will be set right. We are currently living between those times, and between

those times, politics are probably about as good as we can do at establishing a just and moral society. According to Augustine, Christians don't think of politics as evil or as good but as a temporary fix to a problem that reaches back to the fall of creation.

But the church is to live in memory of the garden of Eden and in hope of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21). That means we don't think politics are the end-all of human civilization, but we live now in the power of the Holy Spirit, such that God makes the church capable of living now like the full reality of the new creation has already dawned. The church is the place where God's redemption and new creation are breaking into our time.

Because we live hopefully, we are not called to withdraw from political life completely but to pour ourselves into it with the understanding that politics is not the ultimate hope of our world. In other words, we take a page from Elisha's cookbook and, rather than attempting to strain out the bad as if politics are our last hope, we simply add more good into the stew in the hope that God's redemption is already at work in our world.

As Christians, we are welcome to engage politics for the sake of pouring life-giving goodness into the process. But we don't assume that the meal being made is the food that will be our food for life. At the Lord's Table we find our true food, and as we partake of that meal, we feast on true goodness that makes a way for new creation to break into the old; flour is being poured into the deadly stew.

★ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Augustine taught that politics were a secondary good while God's redemption was the primary good. What do you think of that distinction?
- What do you think of the notion of adding more good when it comes to politics? Based on what you have learned in this study so far, what do you think the good is that we are to add in?
- What does it look like for the church to be the place where God's future redemption is breaking into the present? What are the characteristics of a church that is living in the hope of the New Jerusalem?
- What practical steps can be taken to make your local church a place where the future reality of God's full redemption is breaking into the present?
- How can the church learn to live in the valley as a witness to the rest of the world?

SESSION 6

PURCHASING POWER AND THE POWER TO PURCHASE

Chapter 5

★ EXERCISE

Consider hosting a small silent auction for your group. Tell them they are able to purchase any of the items. Have a number of items available for purchase, but include among them a certificate that says, “One Healing” and one that says, “One Faith in God.” When the auction is complete, talk with the group about why it felt so strange to have things like faith and healing available for purchase. Ask them how much they think one should have to pay—the going rate, in other words—for faith in God. What makes that idea so strange in our minds? Turn to the text for this session and have someone read it aloud.

★ SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 5:1–19

★ THE RECOUNT

In this story, we encounter one of the most pressing political issues of any organized society—the economy. We will see in this session that economic power is a part of political life and that, as residents of the world of the kingdom, even our economic life is shaped by the world of the kingdom.

Of course, the world of kings often has a different idea for the way we ought to engage economic life. Naaman, one of the central figures in this story, knows all about the world of kings. He is a great supporter of the world of kings, a mighty warrior who has been called upon many times to defend his king’s attempts to gain more power for himself. Naaman is an Aramean, which means he is a political enemy of Israel. He has spent his life fighting for Israel’s adversary.

When he comes down with leprosy, the Aramean king is willing to do whatever he can to make sure his finest warrior is healed. A powerless, Israelite slave girl (whose powerlessness is confirmed in that we don’t even know her name) suggests that Naaman seek healing from the prophet Elisha. Instead, Naaman sets out for Israel in search of Israel’s king.

Again, the writer of 2 Kings is attempting to show us something in the comparison between these figures. A powerless slave girl, speaking to the one who has the most power, offers him something that makes no sense in the world of kings. In the world of kings, there is a way to get what you want, and it doesn't come through seeking a prophet. In the world of kings, you need political power and money to get what you want. So Naaman sets off for Israel in search of the king, rather than the prophet. He takes his largest entourage, making the most opulent display of economic power he can muster. He shows his power and flashes his wealth. And none of it matters.

The king can't heal Naaman. Even though Naaman is playing the game of the world of kings to the best of his ability, his hope cannot be found in the world of kings with all its economic and political might. The king turns Naaman away, and Naaman eventually turns to the prophet, as the slave girl suggested. When Naaman eventually gets to Elisha, the prophet doesn't seem to be the least bit impressed with all the spectacle that surrounds Naaman. Elisha doesn't even come out to meet Naaman and his extravagant following, which Naaman considers an insult. When those who live in the world of the kingdom don't fit themselves into the rules of the world of kings, it usually isn't received well.

Finally, Elisha offers Naaman a cure for his disease, but it's a cure he can't purchase with all the economic power in the world. The healing isn't for sale. It is a gift of grace.

The world of the kingdom doesn't function according to the economic maneuvering that is at home in the world of kings. In this story, Naaman thinks he must put on a display of economic power to get what he wants. In the world of the kingdom, however, grace is a gift, and we don't need to flex our economic muscle to receive it. The economy of the world of the kingdom is predicated upon gift. What we receive is not what we are owed but what God has graciously chosen to provide to us as a gift. For this, thanks be to God! Who of us can actually afford to pay for what it will take to heal us?

In the world of the kingdom, the grace to heal what we so deeply need isn't something we can purchase. Of course, we are still tempted to do so. We like to know what everything costs, and sometimes we like to know how much we can get for as little as possible. But the economy of the world of the kingdom works differently. Gifts of grace are freely given, and we freely give ourselves in return. We don't barter for grace; we gratefully receive it, while gratefully giving ourselves to it. If we treat grace according to the world of kings, however, we will be tempted to see what we can get for the lowest price. We will play the economic game for the sake of our own benefit. This story demonstrates that we can't negotiate for what we really need, anyway, and that grace is offered as a gift, so we don't need to take an approach of trying to get a lot for a little. We can give ourselves away, knowing that grace will abound. The economy of the kingdom is rich, indeed!

★ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why does Naaman go to the king instead of to Elisha?
- Why does Naaman get so frustrated when Elisha doesn't go out to meet him and his entourage?

- What expectations does Naaman have?
- How are Naaman's expectations similar to ours now?
- What strikes you about the idea that the economy of the world of the kingdom is based on free grace?
- How does living in the world of the kingdom shape the way we engage in the world, especially in economic terms?

SESSION 7

THE ECONOMICS OF PLENTY

Chapter 6

★ EXERCISE

Offer to the group an unappetizing food item that is not commonly eaten. Tell them you will sell it to them for a hundred dollars. If no one takes the offer, ask if they would reconsider if there was nothing to eat and if the country was in a famine. If they had been without food for two weeks, would they be willing to pay for that item? Then ask the group to share about times when they've been hungry enough (if ever) to pay high prices for food that isn't very good. What led them to that point?

★ SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 6:8—7:2

★ THE RECOUNT

This is a story about impossible choices, but it also highlights a political notion that has to do with economic exchange—scarcity. The way we view money, resources, and the acts of buying and selling are all wrapped together with the way we understand politics. Often, our economic philosophy drives our political outlook.

This story has a lot to do with outlook. Again, it really is two stories that are set beside each other for the sake of comparison. In the first story, Elisha and his servant look upon an enemy military force, surrounding the city of Dothan. When his servant cries out in despair, Elisha advises that the servant should take account of those who are more numerous than the enemy army. Then Elisha asks God to open the eyes of his servant, and the servant sees a much larger force occupying the hills around the city. Elisha then prays a second time, and the eyes of the enemy army are blinded. Elisha convinces the army to let him lead them to their destination, and he leads them to Samaria, a central city in Israel. They are easily taken captive, fed, and released at Elisha's request.

The second part of the story is meant to show the blindness of the king when compared to Elisha's ability to see. The writer is making a point here to demonstrate that those who live in the world of the kingdom can see options that the world of kings cannot offer.

In this harrowing narrative, the king is walking on the wall of the city as some of his most impoverished subjects cry out to him. A military siege has prevented the people in the city from receiving

food, and they are starving to death. A woman, caught in a trick, has eaten her own son as a way of escaping starvation. In that culture, the horror of this is even more than mere cannibalism (terrible as that in itself is); she is devouring her own future. This act signifies utter and complete hopelessness.

Making her case to the king, she asks for help. The king becomes frustrated and ultimately tells the woman that only God can help. Interestingly, the king is walking atop the wall of the city, where the vantage point should be most clear, but he still cannot see. Rather, his response is to tear his clothes, blame God, and have Elisha killed.

The king sends his messenger to Elisha, and Elisha does what prophets do, speaking the truth of what God will bring to a given situation. He tells the king's servant that the entire economy will be changed in a day, which sounds ridiculous. Apparently, Elisha can still see options that the king cannot.

The world of the kingdom is again differentiated from the world of kings. The only option the king can see comes according to the world of kings. Force, might, and power are in short supply, but those are the only options the king can see. Because the king can only see economic salvation coming through power, might, and force, he cannot see salvation at all. Indeed, the king is correct when he says that only God can save the city, but what the king cannot see is that God saves in a very different kind of way.

Remember the first part of the story. When Elisha's servant sees not enough, Elisha sees plenty. It really is just a matter of being able to see it. The question for us is whether we have been shaped to see scarcity or whether we have been shaped to see plentitude. In the world of kings, where there is a scarcity of power and might, there is a lack of everything else too. But one of the things we continue to see in 2 Kings is that God provides in different ways and that we need to be shaped to see the plentitude in God's strange way. God provides more than enough oil for a widow with no power or might, and Elisha can see in this situation the plentitude that will reshape the economy of the city within a day.

★ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is Elisha able to see things that others can't?
- Why can't the king see a way out of the situation?
- On pages 124–126, the authors speak about the “myth of scarcity” that is found in the Old Testament, embodied in many kingly figures. What do you think of this myth? How does it continue to function today?
- The king in this story seems only to be able to see the immediate situation, rather than seeing a larger view. Do you think our vision is like the king's?
- On pages 129–130, the authors speak of the notion of stewardship of possessions, as if our possessions are on loan to us from God. How might this mindset help our vision of scarcity?

SESSION 8

THE SANCTIFIED VISION OF THE KINGDOM

Chapter 7

★ EXERCISE

Place an eye chart on a wall and ask for two volunteers to serve as team captains for a friendly competition, and give each captain five small objects (corn kernels, slips of paper, or something similar). Let them know that for each letter that is missed on the vision test, they will lose one of their items, and the last team with objects left will be the winner. Then let the captains take turns choosing their teams.

The teams should provide one member of the team to take the vision test covering one eye and reading one line. For every letter they miss, take an item from the captain. Have teams take turns, and then repeat until a winner is produced.

★ PASSAGE

2 Kings 7:3–20

★ THE RECOUNT

This story picks up where the last one left off. It is a story about political vision and whose vision we tend to trust. If you remember the last session, the city of Samaria is under siege, and its residents are starving to death. Elisha sees plenty where the king can only see scarcity.

Several leprous men near the city gate determine that they are about to die anyway, so in a last-ditch effort at survival, they make their way out of the city to approach the enemy army as the sun is going down. These men are not welcome in the city because of their disease. Upon arriving at the enemy lines, they find only empty tents and literally enough food to feed an army. They feast for a while before deciding they should go back to the city to proclaim the good news that the siege is over and there is enough food to feed the city.

As the lepers walk up to the city walls to spread the good news, the king and his lieutenants interpret their behavior as a trick designed by the enemy to lure the people out of the city so they can be attacked. At this moment, we can begin to see that the king doesn't trust the vision of outsiders. These men have seen the salvation of the city, but the king doesn't trust them. Elisha, however, can see that this is what is going to turn the economy upside down in a day.

We rarely trust the vision of those who are unlike us or those who are outcasts. But what we see in this story is that God often uses them to deliver good news of salvation. If we stick to the world of kings, we will probably see their proclamation as a trick or a threat, but in the world of the kingdom, their proclamation to us announces a new day of salvation. Yes, it may turn things upside down, but it is also saving us.

A sanctified vision is a vision that is set apart to God's purposes. We often tend to trust the vision of kings, but we shouldn't discount the vision of the kingdom, which is a strange and different way of seeing, sometimes given to us by outsiders. Remember, the king can only see according to the terms of the world of the kingdom, and as a result, he can't see the salvation that is being offered. To have a sanctified vision is to have a vision dedicated to God's salvation, but it often comes to us in upside-down, unexpected ways that are different from the world of kings. The king can only see salvation coming through the world of kings—through power, might, and force. God actually uses several outcasts who have no power or might to bring the good news of salvation. This is how things work in the world of the kingdom!

★ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why can the leprous men see what the king can't?
- Why does the king not trust the good news the men are delivering?
- Why does God use leprous men to deliver the good news?
- Why is it so difficult for us to trust the vision of those who are outsiders?
- How does God use outsiders to proclaim good news of salvation to us today?
- How might we develop our vision to be able to see good news when it is presented to us? What stands in the way of our vision being developed in this way?