



Session 10
Spring 2016
Middler

Elisha turns back the soldiers

2 KINGS 6:8-23

prepare



PRAYER

God, I need your presence and power to work in me. Come, Holy Spirit—let's do this together today. Amen.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To glimpse the results of feeding an enemy army

STORY SUMMARY

Israel's neighbors were raiding their land. Elisha tipped off the king of Israel about Aram's plans to capture the Israelites. The angry king of Aram sent his troops to capture Elisha, who asked God to blind the soldiers. Elisha led the blind men to the king of Israel. Instead of killing them, Elisha ordered a feast and enemies ate together. After that the Arameans no longer came raiding in the land of Israel.

teaching tips for middler

The context and events of today's story may seem quite removed from the lives of children today (an enemy army, miraculous blindness, a great feast). But like other stories this quarter, today's story explores peaceful strategies that children may be able to use in their everyday experience. Help children expand the concept of "enemy" by thinking about people they do not like, who annoy or frustrate them, or who are not their friends.

Decide which Explore activities you will do. Create calls for bringing in various biblical foods. Try to find a few things children may be unfamiliar with, such as goat cheese, olive oil (and bread for dipping), lentil or fava bean salad, barley bread, pomegranate seeds, figs, or dates (fresh or dried). Check Supplies and To do throughout the session to see what needs to be prepared.

This story is set in a part of the Bible that confuses many readers. The children of Israel have divided into two separate kingdoms, Judah and Israel, and the Bible text jumps from one to the other in disorienting ways. The names of some of the kings are found in two different forms, and sometimes two different kings have the same name.

The stories of Elisha are set in Israel, the northern of the two Israelite kingdoms. The capital city was Samaria. The nation just to the northeast of Israel was Aram. In older Bible translations, Aram was often called Syria, a translation that goes back to the Greek and Latin. To avoid any misidentification with the modern nation of Syria, however, it is best to refer to it as Aram, as it is written in the Hebrew.

Aram and Israel conducted annual raids on each other's territories. This practice was widespread and was not limited to the ancient Middle East. Here, the delightful story is told without the names of either the king of Israel or the king of Aram. In this way it is transposed from being a story about a particular historical event to one that has broad application.

Elisha the prophet

Elisha first appears in the Bible as a disciple of the more famous Elijah. In one of the earliest of his stories, he is harassed by a large group of boys on account of his baldness. This is not an auspicious beginning.

Elisha emerges as a prophet for the little man. For the most part, his prophetic actions are small deeds done for poor folk in need. A village needs a cleaner water supply. A widow is about to lose her children in payment for defaulting on a debt. The caterer for a band of prophets is woefully short of food. A poor man loses a borrowed ax head.¹

Elisha played a reluctant role in the war with Moab (chapter 3), but he is remembered more as a peacemaker. He healed the commander of the army of Aram (chapter 5). In the present story he gets into trouble because time and again he thwarts the intention of Aram to raid Israel.



Reversal of sight

A key concept in this story is sight. The Arameans "see" that they have horses, chariots, and a great army. They "see" that their opponent is only one little bald-headed prophet. Seeing this, they have great confidence. The servant of Elisha "sees" the same sight and is terrified until Elisha says to him, "Fear not."

"Fear not" is a command most frequently given in Scripture and it is often accompanied by "Have faith!" Loss of faith is not unbelief as much as it is fear.

Elisha then prays for the pattern of sight to be reversed. The servant now "sees" that there is a reality beyond mathematics and military reasoning. The

Arameans now "see" that they are reduced to helplessness despite their military might. In their helpless state, Elisha leads the whole Aramean army unwittingly into the Israelite capital city and to the king of Israel.

The king of Israel now "sees" his enemies captive and ready for execution. In yet another stunning reversal of sight, however, Elisha suggests that the king is not looking at captives; rather, he has guests. At this point, the story shifts from hostility to peace. The enemies are fed. To share a meal with someone in the ancient world was to establish a covenant of peace.

For at least one episode in the Old Testament, the world was transformed from fear to faith, from hostility to friendliness, and from killing to kindness. Are the realities of the unseen world enough that the people of God could do it again? "Sight" in this story is a way of looking at the world through the eyes of faith. Whether one sees the world and other people as essentially hostile or as potentially friendly is a basic question of faith in God.

1. 2 Kings 3:19-22; 4:1-7, 42-44; 6:1-7.

gather

supplies

- *Glow* magazines
- *Shine Songbook and CD*
- *Year Two Songbooks* (optional)
- CD player
- Signs and cards for Spiritual practice

poster pack

- Community connections poster
- Bible memory poster (Isaiah 65)

to do

- Make signs that say "at home," "at school," "with friends," and "by myself." Post at four different areas in your meeting space.
- Make cards that say "Jesus is with you always," enough for each child. Place them on a table or chair in the middle of the room.

media connections

- *What Does Peace Feel Like?* by Vladimir Radunskys
- YouTube video "Down by the Riverside" by Playing For Change
- Internet search for a food bank/food pantry in your area
- Bible atlas for information on Aram/Syria, Dothan, Samaria (Try *The Student Bible Atlas* or *The Complete Bible Handbook*.)

BUILD COMMUNITY

Welcome children warmly. Ask everyone to share something fun or surprising that happened to them in the past week or two. Choose an activity from the Community connections poster (one you have not tried yet or a favorite of the group).

WORSHIP TOGETHER

Sing "God Is a Good God," track 7 on the Shine CD, page 13 of the *Year Two Songbook*. (Lyrics are also at the back of *Glow*.) Add motions if children wish.

Turn to the "God of peace prayer" on page 30 of *Glow*. Choose children for each of the "One" lines and read the prayer together with pauses for reflection.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Set up a small prayer walk with four stations. Post four signs along different walls in your meeting space: "at home," "at school," "with friends," and "by myself." On a chair or small table in the middle of the room, place a card for each child that says "Jesus is with you always." Add a place mat and candle or vase of flowers if you wish.

Invite children to walk to each station (in any order) and spend a little time thinking of a situation or person in that place that needs prayer. After visiting all four stations, children should stop at the middle table and pick up a card. Then children can walk back to each station and think about Jesus being present with the situation or person they prayed for earlier. Play "Peace Pilgrim's Prayer" (track 16 on the Shine CD) or other reflective songs during this time.

teaching tip

Today's Spiritual practice may take more time than usual. You may want to do it during Explore time. For more information about using prayer walks with children, see page 55 of the *Shine Together* handbook.

Bible memory

Review the sung version of the verse if you practiced it last week. Then children can create their own versions of the Bible memory passage by filling in the blanks on page 30 of *Glow* with different animals and descriptions. (Provide assistance as needed.) Volunteers can share their versions; then say the passage from the poster together.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

—Isaiah 65:25

experience

SHARE THE STORY

Children can find Elisha on the timeline on pages 22–23 of *Glow*. Show 2 Kings 6 in a Bible. Explain that today's story takes place when Israel had kings. Prophets sometimes gave advice to the kings.

Spread out a large story cloth. Lay out cards labeling different corners of the mat: "king of Israel," "king of Aram," and "village of Dothan." Place a story figure for Elisha near Dothan and a figure for the king of Israel near his sign. Lay out a string of beads in the king of Aram corner to represent the Aramean soldiers. Read the story from page 110 of *Shine On*.

- During the second paragraph, take Elisha to the king of Israel and then back to Dothan.
- During the fifth paragraph, lay the beads in a circle around Elisha.
- During the sixth paragraph, move Elisha to the king of Israel, followed by the Aramean beads. Surround them with another string of beads to represent the Israelites.
- During the last paragraph, spread out a paper towel and line up the beads on either side of it with the king and Elisha.

WONDER AND REFLECT

Reflect in silence and then offer these questions, giving time for pondering.

- I wonder how Elisha knew what the king of Aram was planning to do with his army.
- Imagine how the soldiers of Aram felt as they went blind; were led into Israel; and were given a feast.
- I wonder why Elisha told the king to feed the soldiers instead of kill them.
- I wonder if Elisha ever doubted that God was with him.
- I wonder if you have ever had a surprise ending to a fight.

PEACE NOTES

On the "Road to peace" poster, have children choose the sign that best fits today's story. ("I can surprise an enemy with kindness.") Say that making peace is often about changing things up, doing the unexpected, or surprising people with good when they expect hate. Help children think of conflict situations where they could do something surprising to change things up. Play a recording of the song "Down by the Riverside." Sing it together, replacing the line "gonna lay down my sword and shield" with unexpected things the group mentioned.

**Gonna lay down my sword and shield
down by the riverside. (3x)**

**Gonna lay down my sword and shield
down by the riverside.**

Ain't gonna study war no more . . .

teaching tip

If you are making a timeline in your room, post a nametag for Elisha close to David's from last week.



**Elisha turns back
the soldiers**

2 Kings 6:8–23

supplies

- Bible
- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- *Glow* magazines

storytelling props

- Story cloth
- Story figures for king of Israel and Elisha
- Small signs for king of Israel, king of Aram, village of Dothan
- Two strings of beads
- Paper towel

poster pack

- "Road to peace" poster

to do

- Make or find two strings of beads. (*Suggestions:* Cut an inexpensive parade necklace in two or thread pony craft beads on string.)
- Practice telling the story with the props.

teaching tip

Search online for versions of "Down by the Riverside" by Sweet Honey in the Rock or Playing For Change. If your group does not like singing, try chanting the song instead.

explore

CREATE

Create a simple “feast” together by having children prepare portions of biblical foods. Try to find some things they may be unfamiliar with, such as goat cheese, olive oil (and bread for dipping), a lentil or fava bean salad, barley bread, pomegranate seeds, figs, or dates (fresh or dried). Eat together as you explore the information about biblical foods on page 31 of *Glow*. Talk about who children might consider “enemies” and what it would look like to serve a meal to your “enemy” today.

supplies

- *Glow* magazines
- Bible-times foods
- Paper towels

RETELL

Post the signs used in Share the story at three places around the room. Start at the “king of Aram” sign and have children work together to tell the story. Travel together to the signs as the action moves to that place. One child can refer to *Shine On* to help keep the group on track.

supplies

- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- Signs for “king of Aram,” “king of Israel,” “village of Dothan” (from Share the story)
- Tape

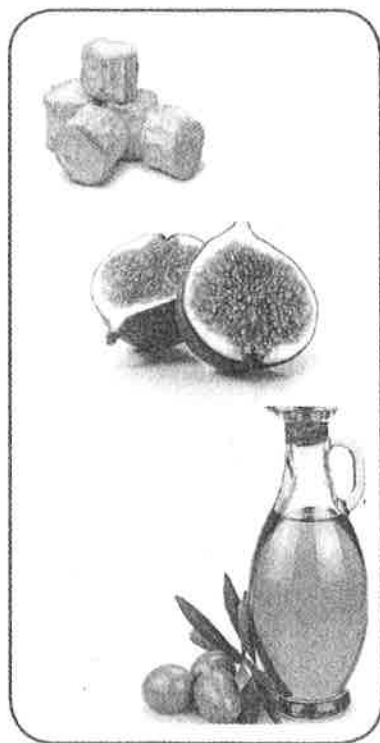
GLOW

On page 32, children can create graffiti art to illustrate Bible passage about food and enemies, using the space in *Glow* or larger paper. Children can also work together or individually to complete the peace tile puzzle. If needed, make physical versions of the tiles on heavy paper so children can manipulate them.

Answers: 1. feed the enemy, 2. act quickly, 3. walk away from fighting.

supplies

- *Glow* magazines
- Colored pencils/markers
- Heavy paper (optional)



CONNECT

Play the Peacemaker game from the poster pack. Today, add the Bible trivia cards cut from page 93 of this guide. (The answer key for the trivia questions is also on that page.) Follow the game instructions on back of the poster pack cover.

For smaller groups: Children can individually draw their responses to the Dove card situations rather than acting them out with a partner.

supplies

- Peacemaker game, cards, and instructions (from poster pack)
- Bible trivia cards (from Additional resources)
- Pawns

other ideas

- Walk an obstacle course with a guide while blindfolded to simulate the experience of the Aramean soldiers.
- Look up information on Eric Lomax, a former soldier who chose to forgive his enemy. Show a clip from the movie *The Railway Man*.
- Create a skit about a modern-day situation where someone is surprised by kindness.

bless

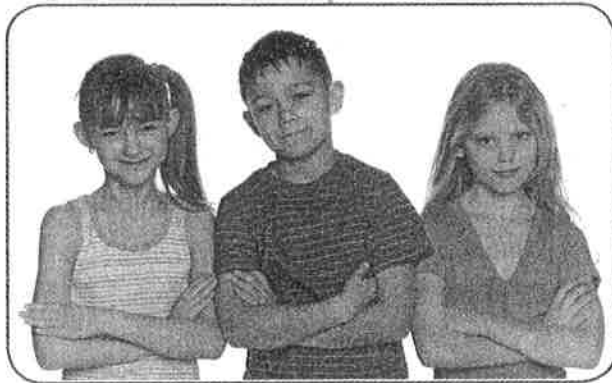
PRAY

Play “Óyenos, mi Dios,” track 15 on the Shine CD and invite children to sing or hum along. (Music and lyrics are on page 24 of the *Year Two Songbook*, and lyrics are also at the back of *Glow*.)

Pray, asking God to hear and respond to the requests you have for yourselves and others. Invite children to speak simple prayers for God’s help if they want.

looking ahead

For next week’s Spiritual practice you will need bubbles, preferably one container per child.



SEND

Send children with this blessing:

When you feel surrounded or scared, may God open your eyes. Like Elisha, may you sense God’s presence and power all around you. Amen.

supplies

- Shine Songbook and CD
- Year Two Songbooks (optional)
- CD player

Before leaving the classroom on a given Sunday, I take five or ten minutes to read the Bible story for next week. This gives me time through the week to let it percolate and think about how I may want to adapt an activity for my group. And it is so much better—easier for me and better for the kids I teach—than coming to the lesson cold on Saturday night.

—Anna Speicher
Elgin, Illinois

leader’s closing prayer

Take a few minutes to reflect on the meaning of today’s story. Are there any people in your life that could be invited to a peacemaking meal or for cup of coffee?

Thank you, God, for your presence in this space with us today. Multiply this story into myriads of modern-day permutations, in the lives of the children and in my own life. Amen.