

## SESSION 6

# Lead Others to Serve



### QUESTION 1:

*In whose footsteps do you one day hope to follow?*

## THE POINT

Lead others to serve God.

## THE PASSAGES

1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:6-14

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”<sup>1</sup> So said Nelson Mandela, political activist and South Africa’s first democratically elected president who led the campaign to end apartheid. His legacy was built on choices to act for the benefit of others who would follow.

In his fight to promote justice and end human suffering, Mandela spent twenty-seven years in prison. For the first eighteen years, he was held in a cell with no bed or plumbing, assigned to do hard labor and regularly endured inhumane punishment.

In 1985, Mandela was offered release under the condition that he cease to engage in political activities. He refused. “I cannot and will not give up any undertaking at a time when I and you, the people, are not free. Your freedom and mine cannot be separated.”<sup>2</sup>

Elijah similarly looked beyond his own life to a greater mission. Like him, we can act today to leave an impact long after we’re gone.

## 1 Kings 19:19-21

**19** So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.

**20** And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?

**21** And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

**KEY WORD: Mantle** (19:19)—Many prophets wore a robe, cape, or loose-fitting tunic called a mantle or cloak. Passing this mantle to another signified the transference of prophetic responsibility and God’s accompanying power.

The 2003 animated feature film, *Finding Nemo* made a huge splash with audiences. We cheered as clown fish Marlin journeyed across the ocean in search of his son, Nemo. But Marlin didn’t succeed in finding Nemo on his own. He might never have completed his mission without the company of a small, ever-upbeat, blue tang fish who struggled with short-term memory loss. Dory supported Marlin in his mission, encouraging him to “just keep swimming” through all the obstacles that stood in his way.

But not everyone on a mission recognizes their need for the help of others. Some think, “If I want the job done right, I’ll have to do it myself.” Or, “I don’t have time to enlist and train other people.” Or, “I’m not sure I trust anyone else with this responsibility.”

Elijah was not like that. When God told him to enlist Elisha to carry on his mission, Elijah didn’t hesitate. Elijah went in pursuit of Elisha and initiated the invitation.

Elijah found Elisha busy working his land. Elisha's use of "twelve yoke of oxen" to plow indicates his family was wealthy. Here was a man who had ties—to his family, his work, his possessions, and the land. By all appearances he was settled and content.

So why would Elijah disturb Elisha in the middle of his work to call him to the difficult job he was doing? Why should Elisha be interested? Simply enough, God had told Elijah to do it. And to disobey would be to rob Elisha of the opportunity to fulfill God's calling on his life. It was not an inconvenience to be interrupted; it was an honor to be invited to join God in His work.

Elijah made his invitation to Elisha with an unspoken gesture. His "mantle," or cloak, was symbolic of his office as a prophet of God. Casting his mantle over Elisha's shoulders meant he was selecting Elisha as his successor, transferring his prophetic power to the younger man. Elijah made the invitation, but he could not control Elisha's response.

Elisha was willing to follow Elijah right away, but he made one request. Before leaving his old life behind, he wanted to bid farewell to his family. Similarly, in Luke's New Testament account when Jesus beckoned a follower, the man agreed but wanted first to "go bid ... farewell [to]" his family. Jesus answered, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:61-62).

Elijah's response to Elisha's request was to leave the choice up to Elisha. Elijah basically said, "Don't ask me if you can go say good-bye. God is the One calling you to this task." It wasn't up to Elijah to persuade Elisha. He only needed to present the invitation as God had instructed. In the end, Elisha accepted the invitation, cutting ties to his old life by breaking the plow and slaughtering his oxen.

#### **QUESTION 2:**

***What can we learn from Elisha's response toward serving God?***

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## 2 Kings 2:6-11

**6** And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.

**7** And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.

**8** And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

**9** And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

**10** And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.

**11** And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

In 1992, ABC News reporter Diane Sawyer interviewed evangelist Billy Graham. The conversation steered toward the topic of death and how the evangelist wanted to be remembered. Dr. Graham commented, “I don’t want them to say big things about me because I don’t deserve them. I want to hear one person say something nice about me and that’s the Lord. When I face him, I want to hear him say to me, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant’... I’m not sure I’m going to hear it, but that’s what I would like to hear.”<sup>3</sup> Billy Graham lived with the end in mind. He knew what he wanted the result to be when he came to the end of his life. And he kept that goal in view as he served in his lifetime. There’s great value in living with the end in mind.

Elijah obeyed God’s plan because he served with the end in mind. As he approached the end of his life on earth, Elijah traveled from Gilgal to Bethel (about eight miles), then to Jericho (another fourteen miles) to see the students at his prophetic schools one last time. Elijah gave Elisha permission to stay behind, but Elisha insisted on following. He knew Elijah would soon be gone (2 Kings 2:1-5).

Their journey followed the same route the Israelites first made upon entering the promised land. At the Jordan River, Elijah struck the water with his rolled-up mantle and the water parted for them to cross. These details echo God’s parting of the Red Sea for Moses and the Israelites (Ex. 14:21-22), and Joshua’s leading the Israelites into the promised land (Josh. 3:14-17). It was a reminder that God had a plan for succession of leadership just like He did when Joshua followed Moses.

Elijah followed God’s direction to prepare for the time when his life on earth would be over. And he mentored Elisha to serve in his stead. Determined to see that Elisha would be ready for the role, the elder prophet continued preparing him to the finish. Anticipating the end of his life on earth, Elijah said to his protégé, “Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.”

It’s the question every mentor should ask. The window of time available to influence and aid those who will carry on our ministry is limited. At every opportunity we get to pour into their lives, we must ask:

- ▶ “What wisdom can I impart?”
- ▶ “What tools and resources can I provide?”
- ▶ “How can I train you?”
- ▶ “How can I encourage you?”
- ▶ “How can I pray for you?”
- ▶ “How can I model servant leadership for you?”

Faced with Elijah’s question, Elisha decided to go big or go home. He had a huge vision and huge goals. He was going to need great power to serve. He asked no less than a double portion of Elijah’s

spirit. Indeed, the Bible attributes twice as many miracles to Elisha as to Elijah, but that was not the point of his request.

In ancient times, the primary heir inherited a double portion of his father's estate. Elisha wanted to step into Elijah's shoes and serve in his place. He wanted to inherit his responsibility. And for that, he would need the spiritual strength Elijah possessed. It was a request only God could grant. Elijah simply explained the condition that would tell Elisha if his request had been granted. That condition was met as Elisha watched Elijah taken up into heaven in a spectacular display that honored the significance of his life and legacy.

### QUESTION 3:

*How have others challenged you to a lifestyle of faithful following?*

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## 2 Kings 2:12-14

**12** And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

**13** He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan;

**14** And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.

In a 4 x 100 meter relay race, each team runs around the track in an assigned lane with four sprinters. During each sprinter's leg of the race, he or she must carry a baton and pass it to the next runner. The handoff is tricky because the starting runner is running at full

speed with outstretched arm as the incoming runner is sprinting to finish and place the baton in the next runner's hand. A sloppy handoff can cost the race.<sup>4</sup>

In the 2004 Olympics in Athens, the American team was expected to win the 4 x 100 meter relay. Three of its four runners had already won first, third, and fourth place in the 100-meter finals. Only five runners at the games managed to clock a 100-meter time less than 10 seconds, and three of the five were on Team USA.

But speed is not everything in a relay race. One poorly executed baton handoff slowed the Americans down, while the British team delivered three perfect passes. It was enough to cost the “unbeatable” Americans the race. The British won by one one-hundredth of a second.<sup>5</sup>

In both discipleship and leadership, passing the baton is no less crucial. Elisha was clearly undone at the sight of his mentor leaving him. His cry of “My father, my father” indicated the nature of their relationship and the depth of his loss. Elisha rent his garments in mourning. It was the end of a prophetic era. But it was not the end of God's work in Israel.

By mentoring Elisha to replace him, Elijah had left a legacy that ensured a great prophet would still be calling God's people to obedience. Because of Elijah's preparation, Elisha was able to carry on his work without missing a step. As Elijah was swept up in the whirlwind, his mantle fell near Elisha. The mantle Elijah had once cast over Elisha's shoulders was now his to pick up and make his own. He did so without hesitation, assuming Elijah's responsibilities and stepping into his new role as the prophet over Israel.

#### **QUESTION 4:**

***What are the characteristics of a life well-lived?***

Leaving that place where he had lost his mentor, Elisha retraced his steps. Standing once more on the bank of the Jordan River, he called on God to be with him as He had been with Elijah. When



God empowered Elisha to part the waters just as Elijah had, He proved He was still at work, and His power was upon Elisha just as it had been upon his master.

It takes a self-sacrificing leader to consider building God's kingdom over building his or her own reputation. How easy it is to for one who has excelled to not want to share the spotlight with a successor. Elijah is a model for us in seeing beyond ourselves.

### QUESTION 5:

***How can our group ensure that ministry is ongoing in our church?***

## ENGAGE

***Use this opportunity to honestly reflect and consider your current service in the body of Christ. Place an X where you fall for each statement:***

Not so much= 0, Somewhat = 5, Definitely true = 10

I am currently serving God in a way that blesses others.

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

I am purposefully learning from someone more spiritually mature than I am.

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

I am purposefully encouraging others who are spiritually "younger" than I am.

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

I am serving in order to please God, and not please humans.

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

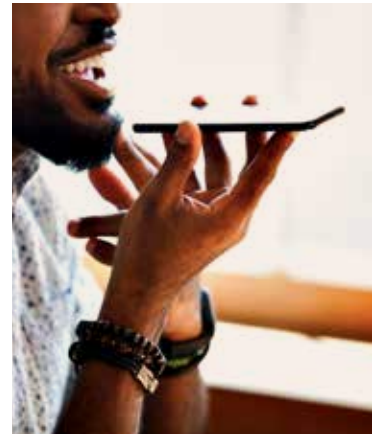
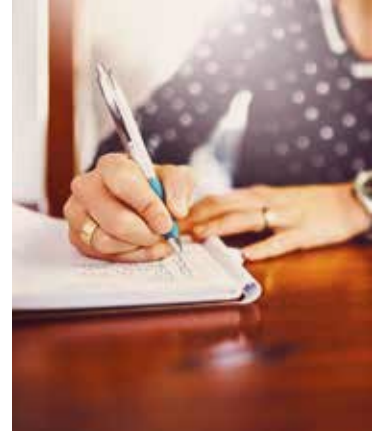
I am aware of the needs in my local church and am willing to meet them if I am able.

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

## LIVE IT OUT

Nelson Mandela said the difference we make to others' lives determines the significance of the life we lead. In leading others to serve God, we will leave a legacy of significance.

- ▶ **List.** Consider the legacy you want to leave for God and list actions you will take toward that goal. Serve with the end in mind.
- ▶ **Encourage.** Choose one new believer you can encourage. Cultivate a relationship of pouring your faith and wisdom into his or her life.
- ▶ **Mentor.** Evaluate how you can cultivate new leaders in a ministry where you now serve. Begin intentionally training them to reproduce your work or replace you in your role.



### END NOTES

1. Dana Forde, "Mandela's life inspires service community," *Nelson Mandela Foundation*, July 22, 2014, [www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/mandelas-life-inspires-service-community](http://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/mandelas-life-inspires-service-community).
2. Nelson Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life* (Popular Prakashan, 1990), 196.
3. "Billy Graham 1992 interview with Diane Sawyer ABC News," *YouTube*, March 2, 2018, [youtu.be/ZWgMEemCF\\_xk](https://youtu.be/ZWgMEemCF_xk).
4. "4x100 Metres Relay," *World Athletics*, [worldathletics.org/disciplines/relays/4x100-metres-relay](http://worldathletics.org/disciplines/relays/4x100-metres-relay).
5. Ben Chodos, "10 Greatest Upsets in Summer Olympic History," *B-R*, May 4, 2012, [bleacherreport.com/articles/1171485-the-10-greatest-upsets-in-summer-olympic-history](http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1171485-the-10-greatest-upsets-in-summer-olympic-history).

# COMING NEXT QUARTER

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## NO DOUBT: SIX THINGS WE CAN KNOW FOR SURE

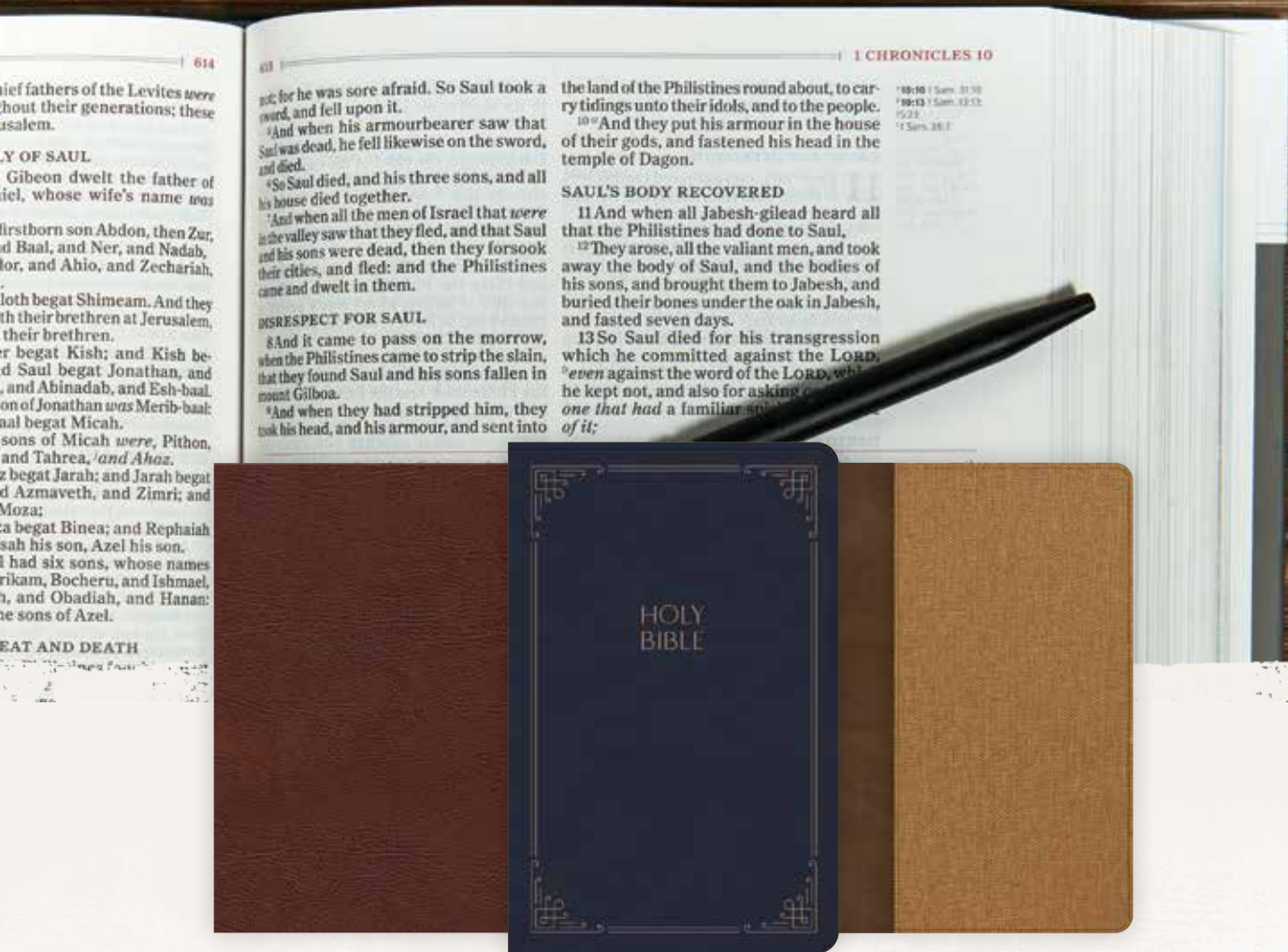
- Session 1 **Sure of Forgiveness** (1 John 1:5–2:2)
- Session 2 **Sure of a Relationship** (1 John 2:3-11,15-17)
- Session 3 **Sure of the Truth** (1 John 2:18-29)
- Session 4 **Sure of Victory** (1 John 3:19–4:4)
- Session 5 **Sure of God’s Love** (1 John 4:7-13,19-21)
- Session 6 **Sure of Salvation** (1 John 5:1-5,11-13,18-21)

## WALKING IN CONFIDENCE

- Session 1 **The Basis for Confidence** (Genesis 12:1-8)
- Session 2 **Confidence in the Face of Fear** (Genesis 12:10-13,17–13:4)
- Session 3 **Confidence in the Midst of Conflict** (Genesis 13:5-11,14-18)
- Session 4 **Confidence in Seasons of Uncertainty** (Genesis 15:1-6,13-16)
- Session 5 **Confidence After We Fail** (Genesis 16:1-5; 17:1-9)
- Session 6 **Confidence in Times of Testing** (Genesis 22:1-14)

## GIVE THANKS TO GOD

- Special Focus **Give Thanks to God** (Psalm 100:1-5)



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## THE CHURCH GOD DESIRES

No church is perfect, but the church can be ever striving to become more like Jesus, the head of the church. It's important, then, for the church to evaluate its ministry, mission, and witness. Jesus delivered messages to seven different churches in the Book of Revelation, and His messages provide an ideal way for us to evaluate how the church is doing—and how we, as individual members of His church, are doing.

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## ELIJAH: LIVING OUTSIDE THE COMFORT ZONE

We do not go looking for difficulties; difficulties have a way of finding us! Typically, we do what we can to avoid difficult situations, but there are moments in life when we need to willingly step into something challenging. The life of a believer is a life of service to God, and that service often calls us out of our comfort zones. The Old Testament prophet Elijah modeled for us both how to rely on God regardless of the challenges and mistakes we can avoid.

**Jennifer Denning** has loved writing and leading Bible Studies as a pastor's wife and lay leader for over thirty years. By day, she leads a team of software developers located in North Carolina and Bolivia.

