

BIG IDEA SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Small groups that focus on the Big Idea for the week can use this guide to apply the message to life and take action. Feel free to use whatever parts of this guide best fit your group personality and time frame. Do NOT feel like you have to use every question. All verses, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version (NIV).

6.13/14.09 // TOUGH TIMES – Find God

BIG IDEA: In tough times I need the presence of God with me, and the purpose of God for me.

This session is based on material from Geneva Brown, Adult Ministry Director – Community Christian Church, Shorewood campus (IL) – newthing.org

// Ice Breaker _____

Option 1: Do you enjoy camping and being out in the wilderness? If so, share your funniest camping story. If not, why?

Option 2: If you were stranded in the wilderness, what would you want in your survival kit?

// Questions for Discussion _____

Wouldn't it be great to have a "wilderness" survival guide for the tough times we go through? We have that available to us in God's Word. There are many lessons packed in its chapters on how to survive the tough times, but for now let's focus on just one—the story of Elijah.

1 Kings 19:1-4

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." ³ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

Elijah was known as the greatest of all prophets. He just experienced the two greatest spiritual victories of his lifetime: the defeat of the prophets of Baal, and the answered prayer for rain. But he feels alone, afraid, discouraged and depressed – his life had been threatened.

1 When someone threatens you, how do you tend to react? Why?

- a. Run and hide (I hate confrontation!)
- b. Puff up your chest and confront them.
- c. Back down and take it.
- d. Communicate in a healthy way.
- e. Curl up in a ball and cry.
- f. Other:

2 Have there been times in your life when you've said those words: "I've had enough, Lord"? Describe that time, and how you dealt with it.

1 Kings 19:11-15

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

¹⁴ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

¹⁵ The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram."

3 Share your observations from this passage about how God spoke to Elijah. What do you need to do in your life to hear God more?

4 Elijah didn't experience God through his power, the earthquake, wind or fire, but he experienced God's presence through a gentle whisper.

5 When was the last time you experienced God's presence in your life? Describe that time and how you felt closer to God.

6 How would your life change if you heard from God every day? How do you think it would change our church?

7 Read the following quotes about God's presence, pick your favorite and share why.

"Just remaining quietly in the presence of God, listening to Him, being attentive to Him, requires a lot of courage and know-how." -- Thomas Merton

"Security is not the absence of danger, but the presence of God, no matter what the danger." -- Author unknown

"Peace is not the absence of affliction, but the presence of God." -- Author unknown

8 How can you focus more on God and less on the troubles in your life?

When we focus more on finding God and less on our trials during the tough times, we grow closer to Him. We experience a peace beyond anything we can imagine. Suddenly our lives become more about praising Him and having a relationship with Christ, and less about wallowing.

We can choose to make God the most significant relationship in our lives and spend time in His presence. When we do, that's when we find purpose! God's presence leads to God's purpose for our lives.

9 What does this verse mean to you and how does it apply to your own life?

Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

10 What purpose(s) do you feel like you have right now for your life?

What Elijah accomplished is available to us. We have to be intentional about finding God in the tough times and remaining in His presence. We also need to serve and honor Him through our purpose. When we continue to do God's work even through the fear, loneliness and depression is when we experience our greatest moments of faith, just like Elijah!

// Application_____

- **Commit to memory Romans 8:28**

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose

- **Over the next 7 days set aside time every day to be in God's presence. Call a friend from group in the middle of the week to see how you can help support them in this. Come back to group next time to share the difference that made in your life.**

// Prayer_____

Pray for each other –what needs to be done to accomplish more time with God.
Pray for God's purpose to be clear and carried out in your lives.