

Read also Romans 12:17-21. Today's storyteller is Janet Stahl. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Edward Snowden had a predecessor. You know Snowden? He worked for the CIA and the DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency). He was Dell's representative for the NSA (National Security Agency). Then he transferred to Booz, Allen, Hamilton, another private contractor with the NSA in Hawaii. Shortly thereafter he began releasing classified documents to the media, and just as quickly the Department of Justice, the Department of State, the President, and nations from around the world were on his tail.

Regardless of what you think about Edward Snowden, he's not the first to be able to cull secret information. Another man frustrated kings and heads of state because he had a way of getting classified information. But his method was quite different. He had an inside track with God. JANET, come tell us the story.

This story takes place in Golan Heights. (MAP) It's located in the far northeastern corner of Israel. Nations in the area have been warring for centuries so this story could very easily happen today. The question is, if we were confronted with a like situation today, would we have the faith of Elisha? Would our faith be strong enough to teach the next generation? Or the person who works for you?

We hear about intelligence all the time –so see how relevant the Bible is! The king thinks he has a security leak. But it's worse. He has a man of faith to deal with.

Can you imagine this headline today? World News reports – “Man of Faith Ruins Normal Conduct of War.” If the article went viral, the man of faith would be mocked, derided, and dismissed. But Elisha did just that. His faith had real impact.

What does it take to have that kind of faith?

- Prayer – talk to God about your concerns.
- Trust – that he hears you.
- Belief – that God will act.
- Stand – on God's promises.

Faith is a lifestyle of prayer, trust, and belief. If you never crack open the Bible you are going to be less apt to believe it. If you never pray, your faith is going to be weak. You will not believe God will act, and living by faith will be harder to see.

For example, the Bible says, “God bends down to listen to my prayer for mercy” (Ps 116:1-2). What a picture. That eradicates the thought that God doesn't care. Flip back a few pages and you read, “For the angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him and delivers them” (Ps 34:7).

Consider those verses when your circumstances are stressful. Let them soak into you.

Hearing God's voice is not an academic exercise, such as, say, learning how a computer application works. I can study *Microsoft Office for Dummies* and learn how to work Word or Excel or Powerpoint. I can become proficient but it doesn't change my life. But reading the Bible is different. The Bible is alive with God's Spirit—it's not a program. God is not just interested in you doing the right thing. The Holy Spirit wants to open up a whole different level of life for you. You enter God's world when you pray, believe, and willingly follow, like Elisha.

Following God's system takes humility. You are not in control. Elisha was "out there" in faith. He trusted when it appeared that things were the worst, yet he wasn't afraid. That is God's system. God wants to relieve you of fear.

We must pray, trust that God hears us, and believe God helps us.

Elisha's success rate against the army was extraordinary. He was such a threat that the king of Aram sent his entire army against this one man. An entire army was no contest for God.

Do you see God as that kind of resource? Or have we tamed Jesus, *The Lion* of Judah, to the point that prayer is like talking to a declawed kitten?

At this week's prayer meeting we read the story of a boy with epilepsy. The disciples tried to heal him but failed. So the boy's father went to Jesus. Addressing the crowd and the disciples, Jesus said, "How long must I put up with this perverse and faithless generation?" (Mt 17:17).

That seemed a little harsh! Come on Jesus! But I looked up "perverse" to see what Jesus meant. Perverse means "willfully determined or disposed to go counter to what is expected or desired." Jesus meant that God expects and wants you to ask for what you need, God expects you to trust that God hears, and God wants you to follow as God answers.

Elisha expected extraordinary help with the invaders because he turned to God. He could have thought, "Maybe God isn't listening. Maybe God doesn't want to help me. He could have *not prayed* because he didn't think it mattered.

But he believed God listened, trusted that God would do something, and followed what God said. And, God even gave Elisha a vision. He saw a multitude of horses and chariots.

But Elisha wasn't bragging like he was something special. He wasn't going around with a prideful, puffed out chest. He humbly asked. And God was good!

However, Elisha's young servant didn't have faith. He had not yet learned God's promises like: "He will redeem me unharmed from the battle that I wage" (Ps 55:18) and "Under his wings you will find refuge, for his faithfulness is a shield" (Ps 91:4).

So "calm man" Elisha asked the Lord to open his eyes.

Faith is being able to see what you cannot see. Faith grows from our trust and God's trustworthiness. *Faith is a partnership between you and God.*

You let yourself be absolutely convinced that God is good.

I'm convinced that my house will not fall down on my head. How much trust I have in that has to do with how much I know about the strength of the house, its history, and extenuating circumstances.

Elisha trusted God so much he did not even fear the extenuating circumstance of an entire army coming against him.

He wanted his servant to trust too, and he wants that for you. So he prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord." Are your eyes of faith open?

What army of trouble is surrounding you? What fear overwhelms you? Ask God to open your eyes to His help. Perhaps you will see something you never saw before.

Now let's go back to Edward Snowden. When he had access to classified information, he said he leaked it, "to inform the public as to that which is . . . done against them." He downloaded over one million documents, probably double that, mostly related to our military operations, tactics, and procedures.

Some call him a patriot. Others call him a traitor. But he is charged with crime against the nation - two counts of violating the Espionage Act and theft of government property.

Contrast that with God's man. Elisha was protecting his nation, but he did it God's way—with honesty, integrity, and by leaning on God for help.

The outcome was much better.

A man of faith relies on God, listens, and looks for guidance. God guided him to help people, not hurt them. It worked not only for the benefit of his own nation, but the benefit of his enemy.

Who would have ever thought of feeding the enemy? God tamed a whole nation with a meal. God was killing them with kindness.

Have you ever thought of killing bad attitudes with kindness? Or extinguishing hatred with generosity? Can you understand now why the New Testament says, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."

God indeed took care of the vengeance, and the Arameans stayed away from the land of Israel after that.

That's Elisha's testimony of what having faith in God means. Seek God as if God is a huge blessing in your life, believe God is trustworthy, and open your eyes of faith. Work in the best interest of others. Do not be proud. Serve your enemy.

Steve, I hope that is what you take away from First Presbyterian Church. As you live into a lifestyle of faith, you will be a blessing indeed.

AMEN