

benefit of doubt

CREW LEADER GUIDE: WHEN LIFE DOESN'T GO AS PLANNED - BENEFIT OF DOUBT PART THREE

Message Summary:

This sermon addresses the common struggle of doubt that arises when God doesn't fulfill our expectations or follow the script we've written for our lives. Using the story of Naaman from 2 Kings 5, the message explores how we naturally fill in the blanks of uncertainty with our own plans and expectations, often writing ourselves at the center of the story rather than God. The sermon emphasizes that doubt often stems not from questioning who God is, but from wrestling with what He's doing in our lives. The central theological point is that God writes better stories than we do because He sees the full picture—past, present, and future—and prioritizes internal transformation over external circumstances. The message challenges believers to surrender control, trust God's authorship, and interpret their pain through the lens of God's character rather than interpreting God through the lens of their pain.

Key Points:

- Doubt doesn't mean you're going the wrong way; it's a common part of the faith journey
- We often doubt God because we're expecting our lives to unfold in ways He never promised
- Our brains naturally fill in the blanks of uncertainty, creating scripts for how we think things should happen
- We write incomplete stories because we can't see all possible outcomes, we're biased toward optimism, and we default to what's familiar
- The pictures we paint can become the prisons we live in when we refuse to let God rewrite our expectations
- God writes better because He addresses both internal and external issues, sees the full view generationally, and writes with revelation in mind
- We must put ourselves at Jesus' feet rather than expecting God to come to us on our terms
- Emotions aren't meant to lead us; we must interpret our pain through the lens of God rather than interpreting God through the lens of our pain
- Community plays a vital role in helping us disarm our doubt and see God's perspective
- The choice is between saying "I thought" (holding onto our expectations) or "He said" (trusting God's word)

Key Scripture:

- 2 Kings 5:1-14 (The story of Naaman)
- Habakkuk 1:12-13 and 3:17-18 (Wrestling with doubt while trusting God)
- 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 (Paul's thorn in the flesh)
- Philippians 1:6 (God completes what He begins)
- Ephesians 3:20 (God does immeasurably more than we ask or imagine)
- 1 Samuel 16 (God looks at the heart, not outward appearance)
- John 12:32 (If I be lifted up, all will be drawn to me)
- Philippians 1:6 - "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion"
- 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 - "My grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness"

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Discussion and Reflection

1. How does Naaman's detailed expectation of how God would heal him reflect our own tendency to write scripts for how God should work in our lives?
2. In what ways might we be walking away from God's healing or blessing simply because it looks different than we expected?
3. What is the difference between praying with a preference versus demanding God fulfill our script, and how can we discern when our prayers cross that line?
4. How does the story of Naaman reveal that God is often more concerned with healing our hearts than just fixing our external circumstances?
5. When Paul says he will boast in his weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on him, what does this teach us about interpreting our pain through the lens of God rather than interpreting God through the lens of our pain?
6. What familiar prisons have you created in your life by painting pictures based on past experiences rather than allowing God to lead you into greater freedom?
7. How can we distinguish between healthy planning and preparation versus filling in the blanks with our own incomplete or biased expectations?
8. What role does biblical community play in helping us overcome doubt, as illustrated by Naaman's servants speaking truth to him in his moment of rage?
9. Where did you get your story about who God is and what He does, and does that story align with what Scripture actually reveals about His character?
10. What might you be missing in your life right now because you are expecting God to fulfill a script He never wrote?

Practical Challenge:

Here are a few ways to help activate key next steps this week:

- **Rewrite your script:** Write down an area where you've been holding tightly to your expectations. Then physically tear it up or cross it out and write "God writes better" over it.
- **Change your prayer posture:** For one week, begin every prayer time with "God, I come to you" instead of immediately asking for what you need. Focus on worship and surrender first.
- **Memorize Scripture:** Choose either Habakkuk 3:17-18 or 2 Corinthians 12:9 to memorize this week as a reminder that God writes better.
- **Invite accountability:** Share the script you've been clinging to with one trusted person and ask them to check in with you about surrendering it to God.
- **Practice gratitude:** Each day this week, write down one way God has written your story better than you would have, even if it was painful at the time. Reflect on those seasons and on how God cared for you and refined you, strengthening your dependence on Him.