

# ASHES & EMBERS

## CLAY 2023

### PRE-GATHERING BIBLE STUDY

This Pre-Gathering Bible Study was written by Rev. Aneeta Saroop and Rev. Nathan Fong, our Keynote Speakers for *CLAY 2023: Ashes & Embers*, in partnership with the CLAY 2023 National Planning Committee. This resource is intended for Home Teams to make use of as they prepare for, travel to, and participate in this summer's gathering.

Consider gathering around a campfire as you share this Bible Study as a Home Team. How does God speak to, and through, your home team? Perhaps your group enjoys preparing, serving, and eating meals together. Maybe you would enjoy roasting hotdogs and/or marshmallows while you do this Bible Study. Maybe music, song and dance are what brings your group to life. Feel free to adapt and adjust how you use this resource to your group's size, setting and personality!



## CLAY 2023: PRE-GATHERING BIBLE STUDY

Life isn't easy. It seems like with every passing year, it gets even more difficult. If you don't believe that, look back maybe 5 or 10 years and think about how life was back then. Probably easier, would be the logical estimation. It's like the more years we've lived, the more problems we have. Mo' years, mo' problems.

But maybe thus far in life, things have been pretty good. Maybe life has been pretty privileged so far. Maybe problems have been easily dealt with up until now, and worry and stress have been at a minimum. And that's ok.

So that begs the questions:

1. Where is God seen in the world? In life? In what events has God been most apparent?
2. Where should God be seen in the world? In life? In what events should God be more apparent?

It's possible that your answer to the above is "nowhere" or "never" or even "Jesus?". It's possible that we don't even know how to look for God, let alone how to recognize God's presence. It's possible that we never even thought to try. And that's ok.

But then maybe we have looked for God. Maybe we heard something from someone at some point and we decided that God needed to be found. Maybe this is the driving factor for you being here and participating in this study and planning on attending the CLAY Gathering, Ashes & Embers.

### **READ: 1 Kings 19:9-14**

*At that place he came to a cave and spent the night there.*

*Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."*

*He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire, and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."*



Elijah wasn't having a really good run. He was tired, stressed, and very likely afraid. He cried out to God for help, and God appeared before him, but perhaps not how one would think God would appear. Not in a strong wind, shattering earthquake or raging fire, but in the sound of sheer silence that followed.

God appeared in a whisper.

That doesn't mean that God only appears in whispers and unassuming low decibel sounds, but it does mean that God can appear in the whispers. It also means that God can appear in the loud and boisterous. God can appear in our lives as well.

3. Reflect back on the past week. In what ways may God have appeared?  
Where can we see God's love for us and for all people?
4. What can help in making God more recognizable in the future?

The funny thing about that passage is that Elijah was basically the same before and after his encounter with God, as signified by the same lament that he gives. He still wasn't having a good run. He still was tired, stressed, and perhaps afraid. His situation didn't change.

But perhaps his attitude did. He was more assured that God was with him.

Right after this episode, Elijah was led to meet Elisha and was reintegrated back into community. Life still wasn't easy, but now Elijah was no longer alone. Not physically, not mentally, and definitely not spiritually. Elijah was, is, and always will be in the presence of God, even in the sparks, flames, embers, and ashes of life.

5. In what ways has community made God apparent?
6. In what ways has your community brought life, love, and hope?

God is seen not only in the powerful and the strong, but in anywhere that there is life, love, and hope. Thanks be to God.

The Lord be with you.

***And also with you.***

Let us pray.

Steadfast God, you constantly find ways to tell us we are yours and you are with us. Reveal yourself to us in the mighty and mundane and give us your strength and courage for the way ahead. In Jesus we pray.

***Amen.***