

J O U R N E Y O F A M I L I T A R Y W I F E

Directed

Steps of Peace
in Times of Transition

SMALL GROUP FACILITATOR GUIDE

(JOURNEY 1)



AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

David: Stressed or Blessed? (Week 1)

Waypoints 1–5

Materials needed

- Whiteboard or chalkboard

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Share with one other person one positive and one negative aspect of a PCS.
- Relocation and its corresponding issues are among the top stresses of life.¹ What are some of the stresses associated with a military PCS? List on whiteboard or chalkboard.
- The Bible provides many stories of people who move from one location to another. Over the next few weeks we will look at a few of these stories to find biblical principles that apply to our own relocation.

Read the map (15 minutes)

Read 1 Samuel 16:10–13 and describe the scene.

The day the prophet Samuel knocked on the door of Jesse’s home changed David’s life forever. God had sent Samuel to recruit the one he had chosen to be Israel’s next king. Instead of a signature on an official form, Samuel sealed the deal by pouring oil on David’s head. The anointing of oil carried a contractual or covenantal significance between God and David.²

Samuel anointed David to be the king when he was a teenager but he did not become king until he was thirty years old³ David, and eventually his family, made multiple moves before he unpacked his bags in the royal bedroom of the palace. Several of David’s moves were the result of running for his life as jealous King Saul sought to kill him.

As stated earlier, relocation is a major stressor of life. David certainly felt stress in the midst of his relocation to the wilderness as he escaped Saul’s wrath. Yet, during this time he wrote several meaningful psalms. Let’s see what we can learn from David’s “moving” psalms that we can apply to a PCS.

Divide in pairs and assign each pair one of the following psalms:

- Psalm 34
- Psalm 52
- Psalm 54
- Psalm 142

¹ “Homes-Rahe Stress Inventory,” <http://www.stress.org/holmes-rahe-stress-inventory/> (Accessed July 31, 2015).

² Bill Arnola, *NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 231.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation: 1 & 2 Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 128.

Consider these questions as you discuss the psalm:

- How does David express his feelings toward God?
- What promises do you discover in the psalm?
- What application can you make to your military PCS from David's words?

Allow time to report and list “moving” principles on whiteboard/chalkboard.

What does 2 Samuel 7:8 tell you about God's plan for David?

What does 2 Samuel 7:8 tell you about God's plan for you?

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

What does 1 Samuel 16:7 tell you about how God views you?

What are some of the things PCS season reveals about your heart?

What have you done to combat the negative revelations?

Travelogue (5 minutes)

Retired Navy wife Amy offers this advice on dealing with PCS moves:

Have an upbeat perspective and look at it like an adventure! Your kids will be watching your response and attitude toward the move. Anticipate God's unexpected blessings as you make new friends, find a new church home, meet new neighbors, discover new ministry opportunities, and explore fun places. Moving adds patches to a colorful life quilt and no patch is quite the same!

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

Invite participants to write an action step they will take in response to this study.

Psalms of Ascent: Determined to Trust (Week 2)

Waypoints 6–10

Materials needed

- Whiteboard or chalkboard

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Share with a partner your favorite road trip traditions.

Read the map (15 minutes)

Various opinions exist as to the purpose of the Psalms of Ascent. The most common interpretation is that they are pilgrim songs sung by Jewish travelers as they journeyed to Jerusalem to attend religious festivals in ancient Israel. Psalms 120–134 made up what we could call their road trip playlist.

The journey described in these psalms is a journey that leads to the heart of God. Each holds a reminder of the goodness and help of God.⁴

Today we will look closely at Psalm 121 and see how we can apply the message to a military PCS.

Read Psalm 121 aloud. Have half the group read verses 1–2, followed by the other half of the group responding with verses 3–8.

- What question does Psalm 121 ask in the opening lines?
- Why might this question be important as a traveler begins a journey?
- What is the psalmist's response in Psalm 121:2?
- How is this response a confession of faith?
- What word does the psalmist repeat throughout the psalm (vv. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8)?

Strong's Hebrew definition of *keep* means to guard and protect as a watchmen.⁵

How does this psalm encourage you as you consider the process of a PCS?

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

How is moving from one place to another like an ascent or climb?

Psalm 121 is a psalm about trusting God to get you safely to your destination. What obstacles keep you from fully trusting God during a PCS move?

⁴ Nancy deClaise-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 887.

⁵ Strong, James, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Crusade Bible Publishers, 1980), Strong's number 8104, 118.

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Military wife Marta shares honestly about an unwelcomed assignment:

“It’s okay to admit it! Not everything we face as military spouses comes up as roses. For us to try to say otherwise is a huge disservice to our fellow military spouses. When we pretend to be happy with everything the DoD hands us, we undermine the legitimate feelings of those who struggle. If, our reactions and responses are authentic we show others that while not everything is always hunky-dory, we can overcome the trials. Some military orders will upset us, but we cannot stay in that place of anger or disappointment.

“In my fifteen years as a military wife, our current assignment is the first one at which I have balked. I am not happy! But guess what I’m doing? I’m looking for houses, researching the area, connecting with friends there. I’m doing what I need to do to support my Soldier, prepare myself, and brace my family for impact. In the midst of my frustration, I’m making sure I’m handling my military spouse business. I don’t like everything Uncle Sam hands down, but I remind myself that I chose this life. I need to own what comes with it.”

What are your thoughts?

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

Invite participants to write an action step they will take in response to this study.

Elijah: Overwhelmed but Not Overcome (Week 3)

Waypoints 11–15

Materials needed

- Whiteboard or chalkboard

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- What do you enjoy about a PCS?

Read the map (15 minutes)

The book of 1 Kings, Chapter 17 introduces us to one of the more colorful personalities in Scripture, Elijah. His name means, “whose God is the Lord,” or “my God is Yahweh.” He comes on the scene abruptly without clear information about where he was born, his family history, or his education or training. Scripture describes him as the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, which may mean he was not a native of Gilead but an immigrant.⁶ We know he was a powerful man of God who took his marching orders directly from the Lord.

Elijah was anything but a stoic, stuffy theologian. He engaged with the political and religious environment of his day and was bold to declare that he stood on the side of the Lord. As we look closely at some of Elijah’s moves to various locations, we will see various responses that reveal his attitude toward each move. Just as PCS moves can bring out the best and worst in us, Elijah displayed a spectrum of emotions and actions as he moved from place to place.

Form two small groups and assign one of the following to each group:

- Read 1 Kings 17:1–7 and describe the scene.
- Read 1 Kings 17:8–16 and describe the scene.

Why do you think God first sent Elijah to Cherith?

How did God care for Elijah in Cherith and Zerephath?

How do these stories challenge you to trust God during a PCS move?

⁶ August H. Konkel, *The NIV Application Commentary 1 and 2 Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 296.

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

Discuss the challenge to finding rest during a PCS move. Why is it important to find moments of rest and refreshment? How did God provide rest for Elijah during his moves?

What do these Scriptures offer during overwhelming times?

- Psalm 3:4
- Psalm 34:17
- Psalm 50:15

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Read the following words of wisdom from military wives. Underline anything that resonates with you:

“Try to enjoy the ride! Focus on one thing at a time when possible, build in vacation time on the way to your next assignment and stop at roadside attractions when you can. Make memories on the way, in guest housing, instead of trying to rush the process.” —Holly

“If you feel overwhelmed by all that must be done, pray as Elizabeth Elliott did: ‘Lord, show me the next thing.’” —Renée

“Always take leave en route. Take every travel day allowed and spend that per diem! Enjoy the stops along the way! Who knows when or if you will pass that way again?” —Christine

What are your thoughts?

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

Invite participants to write an action step they will take in response to this study.

Elijah: Never Alone (Week 4)

Waypoints 16–20

Materials needed

- Whiteboard or chalkboard
- Poster board or chart paper/markers

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Divide into pairs (preferably with someone you don't know well) and discover five things you have in common.
- Loneliness often accompanies PCS season. The prophet Elijah also experienced feelings of isolation following a major move.

Read the map (15 minutes)

The background for this week's study is found in 1 Kings 18:20–40. Elijah and the prophets of Baal had a contest to see who worshipped the true deity.

Summarize the outcome of the competition in 1 Kings 18:38–40.

Elijah experienced a great victory. Yet, we find him exhibiting fear in the next chapter. What reason does 1 Kings 19:1–3 give for his actions?

Why do you think Elijah's faith shifted so drastically?

How does Elijah feel, according to 1 Kings 19:10?

On Mt. Horeb God repeated the question to Elijah, "What are you doing here?" As a wise counselor, God was asking him to do some soul-searching and reevaluation of his circumstances. He allowed Elijah to vent his frustrations and he patiently listened. We often look for the miraculous and the spectacular as the only way God can speak and show himself. God's message to Elijah is his message to you and me. He is sometimes in the quiet moments of change, the times of waiting, and yes, even the times of disappointment.

What do these Scriptures tell you about being/feeling alone?

- Hebrews 13:5
- Proverbs 18:1
- Psalm 73:23
- Psalm 23:4

In what ways does God care for Elijah physically, emotionally, and spiritually?

How do God's actions toward Elijah give you confidence when you think about a PCS move?

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

Join with one or two other people and develop a strategy for dealing with isolation following a move. Create a poster listing your “tips.”

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Brenda: On our last move (we were living off post) I did a “reverse Welcome Wagon.” I made up gift bags filled with little items for my neighbors—some baked goods and a card with my name, address and phone number. Then I dragged my husband to go door to door and introduce ourselves. We were renting in a nice neighborhood and I knew people would be nervous about the new folks. I made some great friends and ended up working with one of them to start our community hospitality committee.

Sandy: Ask your friends if they know somebody who lives where you are going. Ask them to connect the two of you so you can have an initial contact on the other end for specific questions that sometimes only a woman would think of.

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

Invite participants to write an action step they will take in response to this study.

Paul: A New Address Spells Contentment

Waypoints 20–25

Materials needed

- Whiteboard or chalkboard

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- How many times have you moved in your lifetime?
- How many times as a military spouse?
- What prevents you from finding contentment during a PCS move?

Read the map (15 minutes)

How would you define contentment?

Contentment: “An internal satisfaction, which does not demand changes in external circumstances.”⁷

What does the apostle Paul write about contentment in Philippians 4:12–13?

People are prone to misuse Paul’s words as a biblical magic lamp to rub and have “all things” being made better. That would make God a magic genie that instantly wipes out difficulties. In *The Most Misused Verses in the Bible*, Dr. Eric Bargerhuff writes that Philippians 4:13 “... is about having strength to be content when we are facing those moments in life when physical resources are minimal.”⁸

Join with another person and discuss what you learn about contentment as presented in the following Scriptures:

- Hebrews 13:5
- 1 Timothy 6:6–8
- Matthew 6:33
- Philippians 4:19
- Isaiah 26:3

Following a time of discussion, invite participants to share their discoveries. Write one-word concepts on the whiteboard.

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

Notice the key word learned in Philippians 4:11. What has military relocation taught you about contentment?

⁷ Holman Bible Staff, *Holman Concise Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 133.

⁸ Eric J. Bargerhuff, *The Most Misused Verses in the Bible* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 102.

Susan Miller in her wonderful book, *After the Boxes Are Unpacked*, writes:

To let go allows God to mend you.

To start over allows God to mold you.

To move forward allows God to mature you.⁹

How can military moves help you let go, start over, and move forward?

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Here's some wisdom from fellow military spouses. Underline anything that resonates with you:

Remember that it's just stuff and stuff can be replaced. Nothing you own is more important than the people in your family, so learn to laugh off the inevitable and focus on the relationships and the adventure. —Tracy

Tell yourself, "It's all just stuff." Don't worry about losing things or having broken items when you get to your next duty station—just enjoy the adventure! —Kristina

What are your thoughts?

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

Invite participants to write an action step they will take in response to this study.

9 Susan Miller, *After the Boxes are Unpacked* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 183.

Paul: Blessed Are the Flexible (Week 6)

Waypoints 26–30

Materials needed

- Whiteboard or chalkboard

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Share with a partner the last time you had to change your plans. How did it make you feel?

Read the map (15 minutes)

The apostle Paul had every intention of traveling to Asia in order to preach the gospel and plant churches. However, an interesting thing happened on his way to the border.

Join with two other people and read Acts 16:6–10 and discuss the following questions:

- How many times did Paul have to change his plans?
- What phrases illustrate Paul's response to the change of plans?
- How did Paul's awareness of his calling affect his willingness to be flexible in his circumstances (Acts 16:10)?

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

What is your normal response to unexpected changes?

What do you learn about flexibility from Philippians 4:12–14?

Travelogue (10 minutes)

What do you think about the following PCS advice from fellow military sisters?

Plan, and then be flexible! —Jennifer

Keep a sense of humor. —Janice

“Nothing done or said 30 days before and after a PCS counts against the marriage.’ I heard this early on in our 30 years of Army life and it served me well. Moving is stressful and this helped us to keep perspective—any arguments during a PCS would never be revisited.” —Lisa

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

Invite participants to write an action step they will take in response to this study.