

GOD'S HAND IN MEETING OUR NEEDS

THE POINT:
GOD PROVIDES FOR OUR NEEDS.

Leader pages on pp. 142-145

2 KINGS 4:1-7

¹ One of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant, my husband, has died. You know that your servant feared the LORD. Now the creditor is coming to take my two children as his slaves."

² Elisha asked her, "What can I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" She said, "Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil."

³ Then he said, "Go out and borrow empty containers from all your neighbors. Do not get just a few."

⁴ Then go in and shut the door behind you and your sons, and pour oil into all these containers. Set the full ones to one side."

⁵ So she left. After she had shut the door behind her and her sons, they kept bringing her containers, and she kept pouring.

⁶ When they were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another container." But he replied, "There aren't any more." Then the oil stopped.

⁷ **She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go sell the oil and pay your debt; you and your sons can live on the rest."**

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

A widow's situation (v. 1)—In biblical times, widows were in a very vulnerable position. They often lacked economic, legal, and physical means of support and could be easily taken advantage of.

Feared the LORD (v. 1)—To revere the Lord is to fear Him in the sense of standing in awe of Him.

Oil (v. 4)—A major component in ancient Israel. Because of its many uses in daily life, it was also an important commodity of trade.

Pay (v. 7)—The Hebrew term can mean to complete or finish; to make good (as in paying debts) as well as to make whole or good (in the sense of restoration).

HOW CAN WE SEEK GOD'S PROVISION IN OUR TIME OF NEED?

Floyd told our small group he had been sensing God was calling him into full-time Christian ministry. The next step would be going to a theological seminary for training. There was just one problem. Six months earlier he had made a commitment to his parents to take a leading role in the family business. Going to seminary would leave his parents in a bind. We asked what he planned to do. He said he had prayed about it and then said, "I just found out my older sister and her husband are moving back home to start working in the family business." I said, "Great! When do you start seminary?" He replied, "Well, I'm still not sure if God is calling me into ministry."

Floyd had a real need in his life and God provided a solution, but Floyd was having trouble seeing it. We need God's help, especially in times of uncertainty or distress. The question isn't, "Will God respond?" More often the question is, "Will we respond to God's help in faith and obedience?" Today's session will encourage us to do just that.

Cry out to God // 2 Kings 4:1-2

Not much is known about the sons of the prophets, but perhaps it's best to simply say they were followers of Elijah and Elisha. It has been proposed

that the widow of verse 1 was Obadiah's widow. The debt was perhaps incurred when Obadiah hid and provided support for 100 prophets that Jezebel intended to kill in retaliation towards Elijah (1 Kings 18:1-16). That's one explanation, but the debt could also be the result of sacrifices made by the prophets and their families as they followed God's call to serve Him.

Regardless, verse 1 tells the story about a widow of one of the sons of the prophets crying out to Elisha and describing an overwhelming need. She owed money to a creditor, and because her husband had died, she had no way to pay it. To settle the debt, the creditor was preparing to take her two children as slaves. In response, Elisha asked a simple question: "What do you have in the house?" She replied, "Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil."

This was a serious situation and a definite cry for help. Let's take a closer look to see how the action of the widow can guide us to follow her example.

- This was not a cry for justice but a cry for mercy. The creditor was simply following the law by taking the children as slaves. Her cry was not to ask God to right a wrong but to be merciful to her and her children.



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- She cried out to Elisha, but she was seeking God's help. Making her need known to God's prophet was simply the appropriate conduit to seek God's mercy. She sought help from the Lord because she knew Him to be a God who demonstrates personal concern.
- Her cry for help was genuine. Facing the future with nothing but a jar of oil is the definition of poverty and desperation. She sought God's help because she knew Him to be a God who can do above and beyond what we expect or deserve.

Sometimes we are hesitant to seek God's help in our time of need. Below is a list of reasons I've used in the past for not seeking God's help and maybe you can identify with them. We hesitate to ask God for help because:

- Admitting we need help is sometimes viewed as an admission of weakness.
- We feel we don't deserve it.
- Our faith is weak. We either doubt His willingness to work in a miraculous way or we're afraid we won't like His solution.

Regardless of our reasoning, we shortchange ourselves when we don't seek help from the One who loves us and saved us. Paul ended his letter to the Ephesians with this reminder:

"Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us—to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21).

Sometimes we need to be reminded that God is merciful towards His people. His mercy is demonstrated by His willingness to get involved in our personal lives and problems. And sometimes it takes the form of the miraculous.

WHY ARE WE SOMETIMES HESITANT TO CRY OUT TO GOD FOR HELP IN OUR TIME OF NEED?

Follow God's Instructions //

2 Kings 4:3-4

The widow's need was specific: she needed to pay off a creditor with money to prevent him from taking her children away and employing them as slaves in order to work off the debt. In verses 3-4 we see God speaking through Elisha, giving the widow specific instructions. However, there was more at work here than paying off a debt. God was inviting the widow to grow in faith. The meaning of verses 3-4 is clear. Through Elisha, God told the widow to collect as many containers as she could find, take them into her house,



DIGGING DEEPER A WIDOW

The widow, as described in the passage, represents an individual facing a dire and difficult dilemma. The widow's story includes anyone who finds themselves in a circumstance of desperation and need, seeking intervention to overcome tough times. She could symbolically represent those who are marginalized, vulnerable, or struggling in society. The story of the unnamed widow may represent broader subjects of the human experience such as poverty, dependence on God, and faith in Him to provide for your needs as found throughout the Scriptures. The widow's story draws attention to the importance of having trust in God and walking in obedience to His Word as well as highlighting the significant impact of community support and demonstrating compassion in caring for someone in need.

How does the story of the widow resonate with your life experiences to trust God to provide for and meet your daily needs?

and start pouring oil from her jar into them. Once a container was full, set it aside and fill another one.

But the key sentence in verse 3 is “Do not get just a few.” The pragmatist in me would have said, “I only need to collect one jar because I only have enough oil to fill one. And how in the world will that help me?” Somewhere in the back of my mind I hear Jesus saying to me, “you of little faith” (Matt. 8:26). Faith is what verses 3-4 is all about. In those verses we hear God calling the widow to demonstrate faith. It was the only way for her to receive God’s help.

This holds true for believers today. As we consider these verses, three basic faith responses are revealed that help us see God at work in our lives, especially when seeking His help.

- **We respond with an obedient faith.** The simple truth is the widow had to obey these specific instructions. Any variance would derail the process.
- **We respond with an expectant faith.** Gathering as many containers as she could was a clear sign of her expectant faith in God. She was willing to believe that God could do what no one else could do.
- **We respond by giving God whatever resources we have.** If all you have in your possession is a jar of oil, it immediately becomes more valuable because it is all you have. Yet, for her to receive God’s help, it was necessary to give what she had to God and let Him be in charge of it.

We can see through the widow’s example that God invites us to position ourselves to receive all that God has for us. Make room for God’s abundance to be received, regardless of what it might look like.

HOW DOES GOD TAKE OUR LITTLE AND USE IT TO MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE?

Recognize God’s Provision //

2 Kings 4:5-7

After receiving instructions from God through Elisha, the widow and her sons immediately obeyed. Never mind the odd look from the

neighbor or the uncomfortable question, “What do you need it for?” She obeyed precisely what she had been told to do. We see that through the repetition of the wording in these verses.

Once the containers were collected, it was the moment of truth. She took her one jar of oil and started pouring. Can you imagine the amazement she must have felt when her jar of oil filled the first container yet there was still oil in her jar? Can you imagine the look of wonder and awe that was written on their faces as God miraculously kept the oil flowing? God miraculously filled every jar with oil, and the wording of verse 6 suggests that the oil stopped flowing only because there were no more containers.

So, what do you do with a house full of containers filled with oil? I think it’s instructive to see that



the widow went and told the man of God what happened. She clearly understood God had miraculously filled the containers with oil. She may have had her own ideas of what to do, but she did the right thing by continuing to seek God’s guidance. Once again, we see clear and practical instructions: “Go sell the oil and pay your debt; you and your sons can live on the rest.” This was nothing short of a true miracle. What do we learn about God from this passage about Elisha and the widow?

Technically, we know that miracles are acts or events orchestrated by God that suspend human or natural powers and agree with God’s character

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and plans. I hope that you believe that God still works miracles today. The landmine we must avoid here is a superficial and universal deduction from this story that says, "The story of the widow teaches that God will get you out of debt if you ask Him and believe in Him." That's poor interpretation and poor theology.

In the Gospels, we sometimes see Jesus perform a miracle and then tell the witnesses of it to not tell anyone. This may sound counter-intuitive until we understand that the focus of Jesus's ministry was not miracles. The miracles were designed to point us to a greater reality. That greater reality is Jesus is God and He alone can save you.

A great truth about God is that not only is He able to meet our needs, but He also desires to meet our needs. Don't hesitate to cry out to Him. After you do, look for God's hand at work, doing what only He can do.

HOW DO THESE VERSES DEMONSTRATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN AND DIVINE ASPECTS OF PROVISION?

DID YOU KNOW?

In the ancient Mediterranean world, olive oil had many practical uses during the days of the prophet Elisha. For example, olive oil held economic significance. In addition to economic importance, Israelites also used olive oil as a part of their cultural norms as described by the many other following ways: **Dietary Health Benefit.** Olive oil provided nutritional value for cooking, flavoring foods, and salad dressings making it a good choice for daily meals. **Medicine and Cosmetic Benefits.** Olive oil was valuable for its medicinal and healing properties and also advantageous for skincare and haircare treatments. **Ceremonial and Rituals.** Olive oil played a role in religious ceremonies or rituals to anoint kings and priests. It was also used as fuel for lamps in both temples and households.

Biblical Truth: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows (Ps. 23:5).

What are some common resources today that God can use to be a blessing to not only you but others?

LIVE IT

How can you distinguish between wants and needs?

Hebrews 4:16 tell us, "Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need." Ask God to reveal to what the true needs are in your life.

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- **Ask for help.** Lower your pride and raise your faith by asking God to help you in your time of need. Make it a matter of consistent prayer.
- **Help those in need.** Look for God's hand at work revealing to you how you can be a blessing by meeting the needs of someone who is in a desperate situation. Ask God to help you to be discerning, sensitive, and compassionate in response to those in need.
- **Express gratitude.** Change your focus to express gratitude in everything (1 Thess. 5:18) and you will demonstrate faith and trust in God to supply your need according to His riches through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

DAILY READINGS

1. PREPARE TO RECEIVE // PSALM 5:1-3

George Muller was a 19th century pastor and missionary in England. He built an orphanage, which, over the years, served 17,000 children. Times were always tough. Often George had no money at all, but his faith in God was rock-solid. Whenever in need, George prayed to God, and God always provided. One morning, the children were all dressed for school, but there was no food for their breakfast. George sat all 300 of them at the dining tables in preparation for their morning meal. After he thanked God for the food that was not there, he waited for God to move. Within minutes, bread and milk were delivered to the orphanage, and the children enjoyed their meal.¹¹

The lesson—When you pray in faith, prepare to receive your blessing.

2. HOW DID GOD DO THAT? // JEREMIAH 32:27

Sandra's monthly income routinely fell short of what she needed to pay her bills. A payment was scheduled to be automatically withdrawn from her bank account, and Sandra knew that there was not enough money in the account to cover it. A missed payment would result in penalties and extra fees, which she could not afford. So, she cried out to God for help, and God answered. The bill was paid, but to this day, Sandra cannot explain how, except that God answered her prayer. God hears our cries and meets our needs, sometimes in inexplicable, perhaps even miraculous, ways.

We may not know how God did it, but we can be thankful!

3. GOOD GOD! // ISAIAH 55:8-9

Good Luck! is wished to folks every day, perhaps as they set out to take a test, play in the big game, or interview for a job. Some say luck is where preparation meets opportunity. Others insist we make our own luck. Christians know that there is no such thing as luck, since God is in control of everything, and luck is usually connected to something happening by chance. So, instead of wishing someone good luck, encourage them to pray for God's help, then offer to

pray for and with them, too. When God responds to our prayers and provides us with what we need, His love and power are what make that provision available. Luck has nothing to do with it.

It's not Good Luck; it's our Good God!

4. PRACTICE KINDNESS // MATTHEW 25:35-40

Most of us can relate to busy schedules: work deadlines, church meetings, kids' activities, meal preparation, dinner with friends, and much more. The needs of others are not intentionally ignored; there are simply too many distractions to pay attention, right? God calls us to remember those in need just as Jesus gave His life to meet our needs. No matter how full our schedules or what we have or don't have, there is always room for small acts of kindness. Make it a family ministry, a group challenge for your Bible Study class, or a personal daily commitment. God gives freely to us every day. When we show kindness to others, we show it to the Lord. "And the King will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" (Matt. 25:40).

Let's reflect His love for us by reaching out to others with kindness.

5. THE JOY IN GIVING // LUKE 10:30-37

Nine-year-old Kelvin Ellis, Jr., just received one dollar from his dad for getting good grades in school. Instead of buying candy or a toy, Kelvin's only plan was to give that dollar to a homeless person. When he saw a disheveled man in the coffee shop, Kelvin walked up to him and offered him the money. It turned out that the man was not homeless, but in fact millionaire entrepreneur Matt Busbice, who was deeply touched by the youth's kindness. When asked what he had hoped to get from giving the man the dollar, Kelvin responded, "Joy, because I helped someone." Since that fateful morning, the two have developed a rich and lasting friendship, one built on the loving and giving heart of a child and his selfless, sacrificial act.¹²

"God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).