

WHEN YOUR PROVISIONS FALL SHORT

Leader pages on pp. 108-111

THE POINT:
GOD PROVIDES WHAT
YOU NEED WHEN YOU
NEED IT.

1 KINGS 17:5-16

⁵ So he proceeded to do what the LORD commanded. Elijah left and lived at the Wadi Cherith where it enters the Jordan.

⁶ The ravens kept bringing him bread and meat in the morning and in the evening, and he would drink from the wadi.

⁷ After a while, the wadi dried up because there had been no rain in the land.

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⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to him:

⁹ "Get up, go to Zarephath that belongs to Sidon and stay there. Look, I have commanded a woman who is a widow to provide for you there."

¹⁰ So Elijah got up and went to Zarephath. When he arrived at the city gate, there was a widow gathering wood. Elijah called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup and let me drink."

¹¹ As she went to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand."

¹² But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I don't have anything baked—only a handful of flour in the jar and a bit of oil in the jug. Just now, I am gathering a couple of sticks in order to go prepare it for myself and my son so we can eat it and die."

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¹³ Then Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid; go and do as you have said. But first make me a small loaf from it and bring it out to me. Afterward, you may make some for yourself and your son,

¹⁴ **for this is what the LORD God of Israel says, 'The flour jar will not become empty and the oil jug will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the surface of the land.'**"

¹⁵ So she proceeded to do according to the word of Elijah. Then the woman, Elijah, and her household ate for many days.

¹⁶ The flour jar did not become empty, and the oil jug did not run dry, according to the word of the LORD he had spoken through Elijah.

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Elijah left . . . (v. 5)—Elijah immediately obeyed God's command to demonstrate his faith that the Lord would provide for His prophet.

After a while (v. 7)—The Hebrew phrase literally meant "at the end of days." No precise time period before the wadi stopped flowing can be determined.

LORD God of Israel says (v. 14)—Elijah's emerging faith led him to make a promise to the widow based on the authority of the Lord God of Israel.

Flour and oil . . . (v. 16)—Each morning when she arose and went over to the flour jar and the oil jug, she found just enough to make bread for one more day.

HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND GOD'S ABILITY TO PROVIDE FOR OUR NEEDS?

Steven Callahan survived seventy-six days in the Atlantic Ocean after his sailboat sank. He managed to escape on a life raft, surviving in the open water on fish that he speared, some rainwater, and the basic equipment he managed to salvage from his boat. Seventeen-year-old Juliane Koepcke was the sole survivor of a plane crash in an Amazon rainforest. She trekked the jungle for eleven days, dealing with wild animals, insects, and hunger. Both people understood the desperation of survival when provisions fell short. It takes a certain kind of person with strong instincts and a relentless will to live to survive the elements in solitude and uncertainty. Those with less tenacity would surrender to certain destruction, but these two kept struggling, clinging to the hope that they would persevere.

Rewind a few thousand years and you'll find an obscure prophet of God living through threats, a divine drought, and devastating circumstances. This prophet burst onto the Bible scene as quickly as he departed on a chariot of fire. His name, Elijah, wouldn't be obscure for long. This first chapter of his story gives us a glimpse of how we can trust God when provisions fall short.

He Can Provide at Any Place // 1 Kings 17:5-7

In a culture of Baal worship, Elijah's name is providential. It means, "The LORD He is God" (1 Kings 18:39). He first appears in the Bible as a messenger of God to a corrupt and wicked king named Ahab. His prophecy is dark. He delivered a strong message from God to the king. God was sending judgment in the form of a drought. We know the saying, "Don't shoot the messenger." This adage would mean nothing to Ahab and Jezebel his queen. Truth-tellers are never safe among the narcissistic rulers. God knew this, so He commanded Elijah to reside near the brook of Cherith. There, God provided food to Elijah in an unusual way. A raven would bring him food every day and night. This primitive form of DoorDash® surely wasn't what Elijah expected. Who would?

And then there was the brook which provided water. Until . . . it didn't. You'd expect that after God announced a drought. What does one do when you are doing what you sense God telling you to do and the resources fail?



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A man named Doug was a layman who felt God calling him to plant a church in another town. A few couples followed him. He left with such enthusiasm, but after a few months he lost his secular job in the city where he was planting the church. Later his eight-year-old daughter received a devastating diagnosis of a rare form of cancer. He entered a very personal wilderness of doubt and despair. Did he misunderstand God? Was he being punished for hubris, believing he really heard from God?

He came to realize that God was doing something more in his life than he realized. "So many times I felt like God was so far away, but I began to realize He wanted me to trust Him more. I would never have grown if I hadn't been through the wilderness of 2017."

As Christ-followers we sometimes believe the lie that just because we are obedient, God will make things easy. However, we learn from experience that God often brings us into hard places when the brooks of comfort, refreshment, and happiness dry up. The big question for all of us is this: What will we do when the brook dries up? Dry brooks reveal our character and confidence in God. When the brook dries up, we have choices to make:

- Will we judge God and resent Him for our circumstances, or will we remember His faithfulness?
- Will we panic and develop an alternative plan that strays from the principles of the faith, or will we settle in, be still, and wait?
- Will we choose to believe that the drought is permanent, or will we zoom out and see this as one chapter, not the whole story?

Doug isn't still living through the dry brook of 2017. His story is so much bigger than that. He'd be the first to tell you that the nightmare of that year, only strengthened his resolve. The story of his struggle wasn't the one he expected. It's much better.

Habakkuk mirrors this truth: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though the flocks disappear from the pen and there are no herds in the stalls, yet I will celebrate in the LORD; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!" (Hab. 3:17-18).

Through every setback, failure, and shortfall, God is whispering, "Do you trust Me?" There is a peace and quiet confidence when we are left with God alone. When we enter the fellowship of His suffering, we realize that we are not alone. We were never alone, even when our provisions fell short.

WHEN HAVE YOU SEEN GOD PROVIDE IN AN UNEXPECTED WAY?



DIGGING DEEPER PROVISION

1 Kings 17:6 states, "After a while, the wadi dried up because there had been no rain in the land." "Geshem" is the Hebrew word for rain, and while it does refer to physical rain, it can also be used to describe God's blessing and provision.¹³ Just as the brook or stream that had provided water for Elijah dried up and God told him to move, there are times when the provision of God will dry up in a place where blessing once flowed because God's time for us in that place has expired, and we have another assignment elsewhere. Accepting a new assignment means change, which isn't always easy. However, just as God provided for us in the last place, we can have confidence that He will provide for us at our next stop as well.

Has there ever been a time in your life when God's grace, blessing, or provision seemed to dry up? What was your response?

He Can Provide through Any Person //

1 Kings 17:8-12

There's a thread that runs through the Bible. God's plan is not a self-help, self-saving plan where we pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps and chart our self-propelled course on a solo journey. God's plan has always been connection. We were created to live in community, not isolation. The logical move for a sovereign God would be to take Elijah to the door of a rich tycoon who had cupboards full of provisions and comfort food. You could imagine God bringing him to a prosperous shepherd with flocks of sheep so that his beloved servant could recover from the bird food and brook water.

Elijah was commanded to get provision from an unlikely person. He was instructed to go to a widow, the bottom rung of the social ladder, with a handful of flour and a dash of oil. At first glance, this is an odd couple. Both had needs. The widow needed faith and Elijah needed flour!

Notice the widow's response when he asked for food: "As the Lord your God lives, I don't have anything baked—only a handful of flour in the jar and a bit of oil in the jug. Just now, I am gathering a couple of sticks in order to go prepare it for myself and my son so we can eat it and die" (v. 12).

HOW HAS GOD USED OTHER PEOPLE TO PROVIDE FOR YOU?

Remember the formula. It was not Widow + God. It was Widow + Elijah + God. God is always driving us back to community. It wasn't just coming from God. It was coming from God through Elijah. She had to choose to cooperate with this starving stranger.

In the same way, Elijah had to rely on the scant resources of the widow. He, too, had to look beyond himself to partner with someone. This is the same formula that Jesus taught us, "Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:19-20).



He Provides with Awesome Power // 1 Kings 17:13-16

God had a plan already in the form of Elijah, but it would require some faith on the woman's part. Faith compels us to trust what we can't see, so that we will give even when we don't seem to have extra. When we have that kind of faith, miracles follow. C.S. Lewis concluded, "I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare."¹⁴ If we continue to live consumed by our own feelings of scarcity, afraid to make plans, afraid to give, we will miss out on God's providential care. Christ-followers can live with extreme expectancy, optimism, and faith. When we choose this life, we see beyond the troubles of tomorrow and we catch a vision of God's storehouse of blessing that hides behind every challenge we will face. God's provision comes when we trust Him and believe that He is who He says He is in His Word.

The story is told of a town out West in the 1800s. The community suffered under the burden of a long, relentless drought. The pastor of the church called the church together for a special prayer meeting. The word got out and the small church was full of anxious, broken people. The pastor stood in the pulpit and said, "You probably all know why I called our town to prayer. We are asking God to open up the heavens and send forth showers from on high."

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Amens scattered across the assembly. Suddenly an old, tattered looking cowboy grabbed his hat and popped out of his seat. The pastor called out to the stranger, "You are certainly welcome to stay and pray." He shouted back to the pastor, "Brother, I'll be right back. If we're praying for rain, I need to get that new saddle off my horse!"

May we have that kind of faith. What would our world look like if Christ-followers had so much faith in God that we started preparing for breakthroughs before they broke through?

Meditate on the truths we find in the wilderness of Zarephath:

- God has a plan, but it might cost you everything.
- You'll never regret giving anything away for the sake of God's larger story.
- We're in this thing together. It's hard for any believer to follow God without a community.
- Challenges we face today prepare us for greater challenges in the future.

From the willingness to surrender the flour and oil, we can assume that the widow entered the same realm of faith as the old cowboy. God blessed the cooperation of these two strangers and His provision just kept going.

DID YOU KNOW?

When Elijah said that there wouldn't be anymore dew or rain in the land, he was, in effect, challenging the false God, Baal. Baal was known as a fertility god who also sometimes carried the name Lord of the Rain and Dew.¹⁵ As a result, calling a drought in the land was a direct challenge to this "fertility deity." Elijah wanted all the people to know that the only real God was Yahweh. In our world today, there are many other false gods and religions as well. The only way our world will know the truth is if we have the courage to take it to them. To do that, we can't stay quiet. One of the most powerful witnesses we have is our testimony, and there will be times when God will direct us to share that. Think of a time when you could have shared your testimony, but you didn't. What hindered you? When that time comes to speak up for the One true God, we must listen and obey.

Biblical Truth: We overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony (Rev. 12:11).

How will you respond the next time you are presented with an opportunity to speak up for Christ?

LIVE IT

What do we learn about God and ourselves during times of need?

Every crisis that we face is an opportunity to grow in our faith. Also, every struggle we encounter is an opportunity to be the hands and feet of our Savior. I'm so thankful that God has a plan even when I can't see it. He's always there, waiting for His cue. His cue is our faith. He's the hero of this epic and, like Elijah, we get to be a part of the story.

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- **Write.** Reflect on and journal a list of times God has provided and cared for you in unexpected ways. Offer a prayer of thanks for His provision.
- **Give.** Enter into your own story of faith and generosity. Ask God who you can be a tangible blessing to, and then do it. It doesn't matter how large or small! You won't regret it.
- **Volunteer.** Find a shelter or feeding center and volunteer your time. This is a busy season for those who offer mercy. Don't miss the blessing of giving back.

DAILY READINGS

1. "MORE THAN ENOUGH" // PHILIPPIANS 4:19

The widow at Zarephath possessed only a little flour and oil when Elijah met her but it would provide her with one last meal. God took her insufficient supply and turned it into an abundance of resources. God provides all our requirements regardless of our present circumstances according to Philippians 4:19. God sees every person who exists. God knows your difficulties and will deliver support through channels you cannot anticipate. You should accept the belief that God has a plan for your life. Trust in your faith whenever you doubt, it serves as a guiding light that can illuminate your path.

God provides in abundance that will exceed your expectations.

2. "TRUSTING GOD IN EMPTY SEASONS" // PSALM 37:25

The feeling of anxiety emerges naturally when resources become scarce. The Bible assures us through Psalm 37:25 that God remains faithful beyond all human limitations including financial status and employment security and life circumstances. God provided for the widow even after she had finished preparing her last meal because of her faith. During times of uncertainty God extends His hand to receive your complete trust. What objects do you need to surrender to God right now? God knows your inner self and knows exactly what you need. Trusting God during times of emptiness builds endurance and strengthens your spiritual belief.

God remains present with you always and His provisions will always be enough.

3. "GIVE GOD WHAT YOU HAVE" // JOHN 6:9-13

The small crowd of people contained a boy who owned five loaves and two fish which was not enough to feed 5,000 individuals. Through Jesus's power the small amount of food he received turned into enough to feed all 5,000 people. The widow at Zarephath gave away her available resources.

The essence of faith requires you to present your scarce resources so God can make them grow into remarkable outcomes. God can use what you provide to create miracles beyond your understanding when you give him your resources no matter how small they seem. Your contributions hold value because they produce meaningful effects in the world.

Your faith should lead you to distribute what you have.

4. "WHEN THE BROOK DRIES UP" // ISAIAH 43:19

Elijah depended on the brook for his water needs until it finally ran out of water. He did not lose his calm because he believed in God who had already arranged another water source in an unexpected widow with oil and flour. The situation demonstrates how we tend to hold onto previous resources even though God wants to establish new ones. God brings forth rivers through the deserts according to Isaiah 43:19. Trust in His plan even though it brings discomfort because changes are necessary to accept. God brings his provision through unexpected channels which create fresh possibilities for blessings.

God will guide you toward unexpected opportunities.

5. "DAILY BREAD, DAILY TRUST" // MATTHEW 6:11

During the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches believers to ask for their daily bread during the present day. God sent manna to the Israelites each day during their wilderness journey to demonstrate their dependence on Him. God provides our needs one day at a time instead of giving us everything we need for a year in advance. Our daily trust in Him builds stronger faith and deepens our connection with God. Start your day by asking for divine direction because He will supply everything you require. God's provision arrives at the right time without deficiency or failure. Enter each new day with unwavering assurance and hope.

God gives you both strength and endurance.