

# GOD'S HAND IN MEETING OTHERS' NEEDS

Leader pages on pp. 148-151

**THE POINT:**  
GOD BLESSES AS WE  
SERVE OTHERS.

## 2 KINGS 4:8-17,32-37

<sup>8</sup> One day Elisha went to Shunem. A prominent woman who lived there persuaded him to eat some food. So whenever he passed by, he stopped there to eat. <sup>9</sup> Then she said to her husband, "I know that the one who often passes by here is a holy man of God, <sup>10</sup> so let's make a small, walled-in upper room and put a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp there for him. Whenever he comes, he can stay there."

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<sup>11</sup> One day he came there and stopped at the upstairs room to lie down.

<sup>12</sup> He ordered his attendant Gehazi, "Call this Shunammite woman." So he called her and she stood before him. <sup>13</sup> Then he said to Gehazi, "Say to her, 'Look, you've gone to all this trouble for us. What can we do for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?'" She answered, "I am living among my own people." <sup>14</sup> So he asked, "Then what should be done for her?" Gehazi answered, "Well, she has no son, and her husband is old." <sup>15</sup> "Call her," Elisha said. So Gehazi called her, and she stood in the doorway. <sup>16</sup> Elisha said, "At this time next year you will have a son in your arms." Then she said, "No, my lord. Man of God, do not lie to your servant." <sup>17</sup> The woman conceived and gave birth to a son at the same time the following year, as Elisha had promised her.

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<sup>32</sup> When Elisha got to the house, he discovered the boy lying dead on his bed.

<sup>33</sup> So he went in, closed the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. <sup>34</sup> Then he went up and lay on the boy: he put mouth to mouth, eye to eye, hand to hand. While he bent down over him, the boy's flesh became warm. <sup>35</sup> Elisha got up, went into the house, and paced back and forth. Then he went up and bent down over him again. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. <sup>36</sup> Elisha called Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite woman." He called her and she came. Then Elisha said, "Pick up your son."

<sup>37</sup> **She came, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; she picked up her son and left.**

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### MEMORY VERSE

### KEYWORDS

**Prominent (v. 8)**—The Hebrew is most often translated "great" and can refer to greatness in any sense. In this instance it indicates the woman being of great wealth and social status.

**Attendant (v. 12)**—A Hebrew term with a broad range of meaning. Can refer to a personal

attendant, household servant, or follower.

**Lay on the boy (v. 34)**—Some have tried to argue that Elisha's actions were an example of CPR being used in the ancient world.

# HOW CAN BELIEVERS FIND WAYS TO SERVE OTHERS?

My call to the ministry came later in life. At 32 years of age, I was attending seminary full-time, working two part-time jobs, and my wife worked full-time. We were doing our best to take care of three small children and ourselves. Money was tight. A man from my home church knew of our financial stress and handed me a check for a large amount of money. Immediately my pride took over and I said, "Thanks but we'll get by." After his insistence that I take the money, I refused again. In response, this man said something I've never forgotten. He said, "If you don't take this money, you'll take away the joy and blessing I have from giving it."



Initially I thought his statement was simply trying to convince me to take the money, but as I've grown in my walk with the Lord, I understand now what he meant. For believers there's a joy and blessing that comes as we let God work through us for the sake of others. Meeting the needs of others can reveal God's hand at work.

## Look for Opportunities to Be a Blessing // 2 Kings 4:8-10

When Elisha assumed Elijah's role as God's prophet, he also assumed his duties. It's unclear what all that might have encompassed but we see from today's text that part of those duties involved travel. The sons of the prophets played a role in calling God's people back into a covenant relationship with God and it's possible that Elisha would travel regularly to meet with these men. We can also surmise that Elisha's call as prophet to God's people required participation in national interests, whether social or political, which would require traveling. Whatever the case, in verse 1 we see Elisha traveling to Shunem. The implication from "whenever he passed by" suggests Shunem wasn't the destination but simply part of the route.

There was a prominent woman who noticed Elisha's frequent travels through Shunem. I'm sure there were other inhabitants that noticed it as well, but she saw it as an opportunity to be a blessing to him. She persuaded him to eat some food in her home and it became a regular stop for Elisha when he traveled through Shunem. Her desire to be a blessing to him didn't stop with just food. She enlisted her husband to build a private guest room equipped with the essentials for Elisha. Through her provision of food and lodging, this Shunammite woman served Elisha. What do we learn about meeting the needs of others from this Shunammite woman?

When believers surrender their lives to Jesus Christ, they also willingly assume certain duties. One of those duties is to bless others by meeting their needs. Blessing others isn't easy, and it

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always involves sacrifice. That reality may not jump out at us from these verses but there were some specific barriers in place that made it difficult for the Shunammite woman to bless Elisha.

- The Shunammite woman was described as “prominent” but that doesn’t necessarily mean wealthy. The root meaning is “great” or “elder.” Perhaps she was wealthy but providing food and lodging required some sacrifice.
- The Shunammite woman rightly described Elisha as “a holy man of God.” This phrase gave Elisha a status above the sons of the prophets and showed a sense of awe and reverence. This would naturally cause her to think that Elisha was unapproachable and perhaps viewed a mere Shunammite woman unworthy of his time or presence.
- The Shunammite woman knew her plans to bless Elisha put a strain on the social customs of the day. We see this in verse 15 with the inclusion of the words “she stood in the doorway.” The private room was necessary to provide the appropriate separation between the Shunammite woman and Elisha, and she respected that separation by not entering his room.

These same barriers can prevent believers today from looking for opportunities to be a blessing to others. Believing we are short on time or money, wondering if anyone would even want our help, or worrying that our efforts might get the stink-eye from observers can stop the process before it starts. These and any other excuses we might come up with are poor starting points for our obedience to God and His call on our lives. A better place to start is the realization that we are blessed, which paves the way for us to bless others.

### WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE TODAY TO ACTIVELY MEET THE NEEDS OF OTHERS?

## Focus Less on Your Own Needs //

2 Kings 4:11-17

Evidently the Shunammite woman managed to put the building of the upper room at the top of her husband’s honey-do list because it appears to have been constructed without delay. The gratitude Elisha expressed in verse 13 would seem to suggest that this was his first time staying in the private upper room. This prompted Elisha to extend God’s blessings towards the Shunammite woman in a surprising way.

Gehazi, Elisha’s servant, was enlisted to act as an intermediary between Elisha and the Shunammite woman. This was socially appropriate as mentioned earlier, but it also introduces Gehazi



### DIGGING DEEPER THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN

Psalms 37:37 states, “Mark the perfect man and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.” This thought brings to mind the Shunammite woman who served the prophet Elisha. She is portrayed as being a woman of outstanding character. The qualities that comprised her character included recognizable traits:

**Discernment and Wisdom:** She perceives that Elisha was a holy man of God.

**Faithfulness and Trust:** She holds to God’s Word of promise to bear a son.

**Resilience and Strength:** She seeks the help of Elisha when her son dies in the face of trials all while maintaining composure and not blaming Elisha.

**Persistence and Faith:** She kept unwavering and unmovable faith ultimately in God’s power and in the prophet to intercede for her.

**Which character attribute of the Shunammite woman do you struggle with the most and what can you do to cultivate growth?**

as a key player in the story. Through Gehazi, Elisha recognized the extent of the Shunammite woman's efforts to provide for them which led him to ask the question: "What can we do for you?" To demonstrate the depth of his gratitude, Elisha made a generous offer. Because of his position as prophet, Elisha had the ear of the king and the commander of the king's army. Should this Shunammite woman and her husband be in need of security or resources, Elisha could arrange provision. But her answer, "I am living among my own people," is a declaration of security and resources that the family community was currently providing. What might have held this woman back from asking anything of the prophet?

This is where it gets interesting. Elisha was perplexed, seen in his question to Gehazi, "Then what should be done for her?" Speaking to the king or the commander of the king's army was probably the best Elisha could do. What had more value than money or a special favor from the king? It was then Gehazi suggested the Shunammite woman be blessed with something favor or money couldn't provide: "Well, she has no son, and her husband is old."

I wish I could have seen the expression on the Shunammite woman's face when she heard Elisha tell her she would have a son in her arms within the year. However, we do get a glimpse of her surprise by her words: "No, my lord. Man of God, do not lie to your servant." Elisha didn't lie. The Shunammite woman gave birth to a child, a blessing she had not expected.

So, it's probably an understatement to say that the birth of this son was surprising. It was a miracle, just as it was for Abraham and Sarah with the birth of Isaac, and for Zechariah and Elizabeth with the birth of John the Baptist. It was also the affirmation that blessings are received because of the purity of motives. And finally, it was a blessing that removed the constant shadow of shame and humiliation and replaced it with a sign of favor: a son.

### HOW HAVE YOU BEEN BLESSED AS A RESULT OF MEETING ANOTHER'S NEEDS?



## Trust in the Power of God //

### 2 Kings 4:32-37

Some time had elapsed, and the boy had grown old enough to walk out to the fields where his father worked yet still small enough to sit on his mother's lap. One day his head began to hurt and then he was dead in just a few hours. The Shunammite woman immediately knew that she needed to go to Elisha (4:22-28). After placing the boy's body in Elisha's upper room, she went straight to Elisha. Her actions help us know how to appropriately trust God during tragic circumstances.

- She refused to listen to the naysayers. When she told her husband that she was going to see Elisha because of the death of their son, his response was apathetic at best and indifferent at worst: "Why go to him today? It's not a New Moon or a Sabbath" (v. 23). She went anyway.

In today's world, you don't have to look hard or far to find a critic. We've made it easy for people to voice their disapproval, their criticism, and their negativity.

- She abandoned the cultural norms that were separating her from Elisha. When Gehazi went out to her as she was approaching, which was the acceptable thing to do, she blew past him and continued her journey to Elisha. The urgency of the situation gave her permission to set aside cultural norms and expectations.

## THE POINT: GOD BLESSES AS WE SERVE OTHERS.

Sometimes trusting God during difficult times will cause us to do the same. When we follow Jesus instead of following our own desires, we're setting aside cultural expectations. When our hopes are set on treasures in heaven instead of treasures here on earth, we're bucking the societal norm.

- She told Elisha her need. It's instructive that she didn't tell Elisha what he should do. She didn't tell Elisha what she wanted. She simply let him know that the son God gave her was now dead. For us today, trusting God in its simplest form is telling God our needs and letting Him do the rest.

In this instance, God responded to the Shunammite woman's faith by resuscitating her son through Elisha. The Shunammite woman came into the room and, seeing her son alive, fell at Elisha's feet, bowed to the ground, picked up her son, and left.

Because of the Shunammite woman's service to Elisha, God blessed her through miraculous activity. We can count on God's goodness when we meet the needs of others.

### WHEN HAVE YOU TRUSTED GOD TO ACT IN WHAT SEEMED TO BE IMPOSSIBLE CIRCUMSTANCES?

### DID YOU KNOW?

According to one report, 33% of Christian households engage in spiritual practices and spiritual conversations but do not practice hospitality.<sup>13</sup> Spiritual practices were defined as praying daily and reading the Bible weekly while spiritual conversations meant talking about God and faith weekly. While the faith report defined hospitality as welcoming non-family guests regularly or several times monthly, the Greek word for hospitality means "love of strangers." Overall, the statistic is alarming because hospitality for the believer has its roots in Old Testament foundations as evidenced in the life of the Shunammite woman. Her practice of hospitality simply reflected the cultural norm of ancient Israel. Jesus wants his modern followers to practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13) which means it is a biblical expectation and not just a biblical concept.

**Biblical Truth:** We reflect Christ by the way we treat others.

**How will you demonstrate hospitality on a regular basis representing God's hand in meeting the needs of others?**

## LIVE IT

### How can you intentionally use your gifts to be a blessing to others?

God's Word tells us there is joy to be found through blessing others. When we are blessed, we must remember it is not for our own benefit. Our blessings are intended to overflow into the lives of others. Choose the actions below to begin a life of joy and blessing.

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- **Motivation.** Remember circumstances when others met your needs and blessed you. Review the emotions you experienced: relief, love, hope, joy, etc. Thank God for His provision and for those who helped you.
- **Investigation.** Spend some time investigating the needs of those around you. Pray and ask God to help you see the needs of others. Make a list and plan ways to meet those needs.
- **Implementation.** Determine who you need to assist and plan. Depending on the circumstances, you may want to involve others in the process, maybe this could become a group project.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. WHAT'S IN IT FOR . . . ? // PHILIPPIANS 2:3-5

WIIFM (pronounced “wiffum”) is an acronym for “What’s in It for Me?” Too often we evaluate opportunities, make decisions, explore possibilities and consider options based on the answer to this question. We might not ask it exactly like that, but we do want to know how we will benefit before moving forward. However, for God’s children, the better question is “What’s in It for someone else?” Instead of always focusing on our own needs and desires, we can leave them with God through faith-filled prayer, then look for ways God can use us to benefit someone else. That leaves us with plenty of opportunity to seek a blessing for someone else.

**God uses His children to bless His children.**

## 2. EXPECTATIONS // PHILIPPIANS 4:19

When you pray to God to meet a need that you have, what do you expect to happen? Are you certain that He will meet that need, or is there a bit of doubt buried in your heart? Do you develop a Plan B just in case God doesn’t come through? If you are certain that God will meet your need, what do you do to prepare for the anticipated provision? God delights in providing for His children. He knows our needs before we even ask. We need only to believe He will come through, then wait, no matter how long.

**Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for—believe that you have received it and it will be yours (Mark 11:24).**

## 3. A GIVING HEART // 2 KINGS 4:8-10

Cheryl quietly searched her purse for a dollar bill. It was offering time at the evening worship service, and congregants would soon be called pew by pew to proceed to the front of the church to drop offerings in the plate. Then Cheryl remembered that she had spent her last dollar earlier that day. Tonight, she had nothing, not even a quarter, in her purse. She looked up and saw a hand in front of her face. In it were two dollar bills. Her sister in

Christ, sitting at the end of her pew, saw Cheryl rummaging and gave her a gift to give back to God. Cheryl’s humbled heart filled with overwhelming appreciation as she cheerfully came to give her offering to God.

**Don’t neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices (Heb. 13:16).**

## 4. DIVINE TRANSFORMATION // 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

Actor Letitia Wright is known for playing the role of Shuri in Marvel’s 2018 groundbreaking film Black Panther. Early in her career, after enjoying critical success, Letitia suffered a deep depression and, as she describes it, lost her values.<sup>14</sup> She sought consolation through drinking, partying, and work, but nothing helped. When a friend took her to a Bible Study class, her transformation began. Through new faith in Jesus Christ, Letitia recovered from depression and ceased unhealthy activities. God inspired her to launch a film production company, which she named Threesixteen Productions after John 3:16. “I had to find what worked for me,” she says, “and I found that Jesus worked for me.”<sup>15</sup> No matter your struggles, Jesus can work for you, too, forgiving your past and shaping your transformation.

**God is able to bring about an amazing change in our lives.**

## 5. OUR MIGHTY GOD AT WORK // 1 PETER 5:6-7,10

Lennie served as a pastor for most of his adult life. In retirement, Lennie developed a back condition, which rendered him unable to walk. The church prayed for his healing, but he ended up having major back surgery. Recovery was long and difficult. Eventually, Lennie was able to return to church in a wheelchair. In time, he moved to using a walker, then eventually a cane. One Sunday, Lennie stood at the back of the church. In a loud voice, he praised God, then dropped his cane and walked unaided to the altar. The church erupted in shouts of praise to a healing God.

**The Lord is Jehovah-Rapha, the God who heals.**