

Widow of Zarephath...

A Hopeless Predicament

Lesson 8
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Introduction

In 1 Kings 17, the chapter opens with the words of Elijah to King Ahab, “*As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years except at my word.*” And so a great famine fell over all of the land. It is during this time, that we are introduced to the Widow Of Zarephath.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines hopeless as “*having no expectation of good or incapable of redemption.*” The hard bouts in life can often leave us feeling this way; feeling as if our hopeless situation can’t be redeemed. But we serve a God who *is* the great Redeemer. The One who draws near to broken hearts, who can use the weak and the foolish things of this world, such as a Gentile widow with no more than a bit of flour and oil left to her name. He sees her and chooses her. The widow who seemed to be beyond the verge of hope now becomes the object of His very special grace.

Study and Personal Questions

Read 1 Kings 17:8-16

1. In verse 9, what did the Lord command Elijah to do? Who would provide for Elijah when he arrived?
2. Looking at verse 10, who was at the gate of the city and what was she doing?
3. Elijah called to the widow and asked her for what two things (see verses 10 and 11)?
4. Summarize the widow’s response in verse 12.

Looking back at verse 9, the Lord said He “*commanded a widow*” to provide for Elijah, yet nowhere in this passage do we find Him directly speaking to this woman. She does not seem to be aware of the plans the Lord had to use her. She was simply out gathering sticks so she could build one last fire to cook her and her son’s one last meal.

5. Describe a time when you exhausted all your options or when it seemed you reached the end of your rope.

It is pertinent to note that though the widow was unaware of the Lord’s workings, the Lord was still very much at work. Without her even realizing it, He had prepared her and made her available for His service.

6. What do the following verses tell us about God’s directing in our lives?
Proverbs 16:9

Philippians 2:13

7. In 1 Kings 17:13, Elijah told the widow to not fear and to do what?

8. What did the Lord promise in verse 14?

In James 2:18 we are told “*But someone may well say, ‘You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works,’*” (NASB). It is important for us to understand that genuine faith is *demonstrated* by our works. Elijah asked the widow to not only use her last remaining ingredients, but to also actively bake and serve him with the last piece of bread. She would not see the unending supply of flour and oil until she actively demonstrated her faith by sacrificing the only thing she had left.

9. Think of a time when the Lord specifically asked you to step out in faith, beyond all reason. What type of fear, if any, did you experience?

10. How did the widow respond to the Lord's promise in verse 14 (see verse 15)?

11. What was the result of her obedience (see verse 16)?

It is wise for us to take note that in order for the flour and oil to be replenished, it first had to be used. To receive the promise, the widow had to faithfully make meals for Elijah, herself, and her son, using each bit of flour and oil provided each day. As Matthew Henry put it, "*The meal and the oil multiplied, not in the hoarding, but in the spending.*"¹

12. Read Matthew 6:33, 34. What does it mean to "seek first His kingdom"?

Personal: How are you handling God's daily supply? Consider the time you are given and the provisions or resources you have available.

13. Continuing in 1 Kings 17:17, what came about after these things?

14. How did the widow respond in verse 18?

When the pains of life hit us suddenly, we crave the why answers. The widow concluded that Elijah's presence in her home had beckoned God's attention to her sin and, as punishment, God had taken her son.

15. Read John 9:1-3. Why had the man been born blind?

¹ Henry, Matthew. The Matthew Henry Study Bible. Hendrickson Marketing, LLC, 1997.

Personal: Many times in our lives we make decisions that do yield painful consequences. But there are other times when no blame can be given. *“It is neither this man nor his parents who have sinned.”* Was there ever a time when sadness or pain caused you to wonder if somehow your sin was the cause?

16. Look up and record Psalm 103:12. How does this verse encourage you?

17. Elijah took the widow’s son to his room. He then asked the Lord what? (1 Kings 17:20)

Personal: Describe a time you found yourself in a similar spiritual struggle, questioning the goodness of God.

18. What does Elijah do next (see verse 21)?

“When your heart is like a boiling geyser, let it steam aloft in pillars of prayer.”
Charles Spurgeon²

Personal: The best course of action we can take when lack of understanding and heartbreak abound, is to come to Him in quiet places and pray. Bring the questions, hurt, anger and tears to Him. What do you need to bring before the Lord today?

19. Read Luke 18:1-8. According to verse 1, how often are we to pray?

² Spurgeon, Charles H., “Concerning Prayer,” Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No. 2053. *The Complete Works of C.H. Spurgeon*. Delmarva Publications, 2013.

20. Why would it be easy to lose heart in the midst of unanswered prayer?

21. Read Psalm 34:17-19. How does that encourage you?

22. Back in 1 Kings 17:22, how did the Lord respond to Elijah?

This really was a beautiful testimony of Elijah's faith in the Lord. Up to this point in Scripture, there is no record of someone being raised from the dead. Though it never happened before, it did not stop Elijah from asking and believing that He was able and could do such a miraculous work.

23. Is there a seemingly impossible situation in front of you right now? How can you practically commit it to prayer today? Be specific. For example, write it down in a journal or on the mirror of your bathroom and commit to praying about it every morning before you start your day for the next 7 days.

24. Elijah took the child and brought him to the widow. What did Elijah say to her?

25. What was the widow's response?

The Widow of Zarephath was given a taste of God's unending provision with the daily supply of the flour and oil. But it wasn't until she *experienced* His loving-kindness, in the midst of her suffering, when she was able to wholeheartedly declare, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth."

"In some way or other we will have to learn the difference between trusting in the gift and trusting in the Giver. The gift may be good for awhile, but the Giver is the Eternal Love."
F.B. Meyer³

³ Cowman, Chas. E., *Streams in the Desert*. Los Angeles: Cowman Publishing Company, 1950.

Discovering Jesus in the Story

The entire Old Testament points toward Jesus as Savior. If we miss that we miss the entire point of the Scriptures.

1. According to the Bible verses we've studied this week, what promise or revelation points to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ?

Reflection

2. Write a short paragraph explaining how the life of the Widow of Zarephath has impacted your life, challenged you or corrected you concerning your choices.

A Hero's Vignette

Edith Schaeffer⁴

I was given a book a few years ago titled *What is a Family* by Edith Schaeffer. It has become a treasure because it is filled with such honest, golden nuggets of wisdom. And at the time, I did not go any further investigating who this wonderful author was. It turns out Edith Schaeffer was the pioneering mentor in homemaking. Just as I felt so encouraged and challenged in my role as a wife and mother by her beautiful words, so have hundreds and thousands of women over many years.

Edith was born November 3, 1914 to her missionary parents, George and Jessie Seville, who were at the time living in Wenchow, China, serving at the China Inland Mission. Later in life she met her soon-to-be husband, Francis Schaeffer, marrying in 1935.

Francis and Edith grew in their knowledge and love for the Lord together and in 1948 an opportunity arose to go to Switzerland and it was there that the Lord would open doors to share the gospel in ways they had never imagined. In 1955 they began the work of L'Abri (the French word for shelter). Francis and Edith yearned to provide a place people could not only escape to, but a place to learn and discuss theological and philosophical issues. With secularism on the rise, they hoped to provide a space where no question was off the table and people could experience authentic Christian care. "From the beginning, they used their home where my mother's gift as a cook and a 'welcomer' made it possible for communities to grow."⁵ Today, L'Abri organization has "study centers" in the United States, Canada, South Korea, Australia, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, and Switzerland.

Edith Schaeffer also went on to become a beloved author of many books, many of which focus on her love of hospitality.

1. How does Edith's life encourage you, challenge you?

Challenge Question:

2. Are there any Bible verses that come to mind after reading about her life?

⁴ Schaeffer, Edith, *The Tapestry*. World Books Publisher, Waco, TX, 1981.

⁵ Macaulay, Susan Schaeffer, *Edith Schaeffer: 1915-2013, A Very Special Heritage*. June 2013, <http://www.labri.org/inl/pdf/2013/summer-int2013.pdf>.