

I Need My People

2 Kings 4:1-7
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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Today, we find ourselves in a powerful and vivid story of desperation and hope from the book of 2 Kings—an account where the miraculous provision of God turns a moment of crisis into one of abundance. In this passage, we witness not just the desperate cry of a widow, but a profound message about God's care for us in times of need, the power of stepping out in faith, the need for community, and how God's provision often exceeds our expectations.

But before we dive into the text, I want to ask you to take a moment and think about your own life. Have you ever found yourself in a desperate situation or a time of crisis where it seemed like there was simply no way out? Where the resources, the time, or the strength you needed just weren't there? Maybe you've faced financial difficulties, health challenges, or family struggles that seemed insurmountable. This widow's story speaks directly to us in those moments. It reminds us that **God is able to turn our scarcity and lack into abundance, but the key lies in how we respond to God's invitation to participate in that provision.**

Let's set the scene. We're introduced to a widow who has lost her husband. Not only is she grieving the loss of her spouse, but she's also facing an enormous amount of debt. In the ancient world, debt could quickly lead to a very desperate situation. And worse still, the law allowed creditors to take children as slaves, like indentured servants, in payment for a debt. Her world is crumbling.

What's important here is the widow's first response: she cries out to the prophet Elisha. She could have remained silent in her despair, hidden her shame, or even given up. But instead, she speaks up. She reaches out to God through the prophet. She chooses to do the one thing that seems counterintuitive when we're drowning in need—she voices her need instead of isolating herself. This widow teaches us an important lesson: **When we're facing hard times, it's good to cry out to God.** Too often, we try to handle everything ourselves or simply retreat into hopelessness. But God invites us into the story, to bring our struggles before God. No matter how dire the situation may seem, God hears our cries.

After hearing her plea, Elisha asks her a seemingly strange question: "What do you have in your house?" The widow responds, "Nothing at all, except a small jar of oil." Notice the emphasis on "nothing." She sees only emptiness, no hope, no resources. She is convinced that she has nothing left to give. And yet, Elisha's question invites her to look inward and recognize that even in the most barren circumstances, **God can work with what we have.** God often asks us to bring forward what seems insignificant. The widow has only a small jar of oil. It's easy to dismiss this as too little to matter. But God doesn't need abundance to work what some might call a miracle—God only needs a willing heart and what we already have, no matter how small.

How many times do we look at our lives and say, "I have nothing left. I don't have the resources. I'm too far gone"? But God can work with the smallest of things. Scripture tells us it's in our weakness God's strength is made perfect.

Elisha then instructs the widow to gather as many empty jars as possible from her neighbors, and to pour the oil into them. The command is specific: "Don't ask for just a few." She doesn't know how the oil will multiply, but she trusts and acts. Imagine the faith it must have taken to gather empty jars, to go door-to-door in the midst of her distress, knowing she had only a tiny amount of oil. Yet, her obedience to the word of the prophet is a powerful reminder that **God often asks us to act and be willing to step out in faith, even when we don't understand the outcome.** What we discern we should do may not always make sense at first. It can feel risky, uncomfortable, or even foolish. The widow didn't hesitate; she didn't question; she simply took action.

However, another element necessary for this miracle to occur is that it required the compassion of her neighbors. **It required participation of the community. We learn that God chooses to use God's people to answer prayers and realize miracles.** The woman needed the help of her people. It often takes any of us a lot of courage to ask others for the help we need. We often feel embarrassed to ask for help. But we learn that it's **often part of the solution to answered prayer. We must learn to speak up when we are in need.** So let me ask. Who are your neighbors, your family, your chosen family, your community? **Find people who can support and help you.**

We can also put ourselves in the role of the neighbors who helped the woman in need. Perhaps, out of our abundance, thanks to the grace of God, we can offer others some of our time, talents, and/or resources. **Compassion creates space for God to manifest God's grace.** It also **connects us** with God and our own humanity. Compassion also **builds community** by making people feel connected to each other. It is compassion for one another that helps build community here at College Hill.

As the widow begins to pour the oil into the jars, something extraordinary happens: the oil keeps flowing. With every jar that is filled, the miracle continues. The small jar of oil does not run out. It's as though the more she poured, the more God provided. This part of the story is deeply significant. It speaks to **the endless nature of God's provision.** The oil only stopped flowing when there were no more empty jars to fill. God's provision doesn't run out. As long as we make room, God is ready to fill. This story reveals that **God is a God of abundance. God doesn't just give us enough; God gives us overflowing blessing.**

After all the jars are filled, Elisha tells the widow to sell the oil, pay off her debt, and live off the rest. Her immediate need is met, and then some. The story doesn't just end with the woman's survival; it ends with a reminder that **God's provision is not just for the present moment—it's for our future as well.** There's something deeply meaningful about the fact that God provided not just enough to pay her debts but also enough for her to live on. God's provision is not limited by our circumstances—it's driven by God's grace and love.

What can we take away from this important story?

1. **Cry Out to God in Your Need:** God hears you in your distress. God invites you to bring your burdens before God.
2. **Recognize What You Have:** Even when you feel like you have nothing, God can work with the smallest of things. What you have—your time, your gifts, your heart—matters to God.

3. **Step Out in Faith:** Even when you don't understand how things will work out, trust that God is faithful and that stepping out in faith is a pathway to seeing God's provision.
4. **Reach out to your community of support.** God often works through those who care for you.
5. **Expect Overflowing Abundance:** God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine. This story reveals God's provision is not limited by our circumstances but by our willingness to trust.

Today, I encourage you to take stock of your own life. What are the "empty jars" that God is asking you to fill with faith and action? What small acts of trust might be the key to unlocking a blessing beyond measure? Let us, then, thank God for community and for God's abundance in our lives.

Amen.

Resources:

Just Like Me, VBS Curriculum, Reconciling Ministries Network, 2025.

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