

Elisha Helps A Poor Widow

2 Kings 4:1-7

MEMORY VERSE

2 KINGS 4:7

“Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Five or six different types of glass or metal containers from home and a pencil.

Enough “Paper Vessel” templates for each child in your class, several different colors of tissue paper cut into 1” squares, scissors and glue.

Small slips of paper and pencils for each child in your class.

“Pouring Promises” template, red butcher paper, scissors, stapler, ruler, markers or crayons.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

How Many Jars?

Bring from home as many different and unique containers as you can find. These will represent the different jars that the widow collected. You will want to pick out about 5 or 6 and probably choose small ones and use glass or metal containers to get a musical tone when tapped.

Show the class the different kinds of containers that you have. Next put different amounts of water in each “vessel.” Then using a pencil or something similar, tap the different vessels. Each vessel will make a different sound. Perhaps with the different tones you can come up with a tune. If you would like, allow the children to take turns playing your vessel instruments.

Explain to the children that we are vessels of the Lord. Each one of us is different in the body of Christ. But when we use the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given us we can make something wonderful (like music) that can honor the Lord.

LESSON TIME!

In God's eyes, one measure of how great we are is the willingness to serve the poor as well as the powerful. With this in mind, if you look at the life and ministry of Elisha the prophet, he is a great man. As the successor of Elijah, Elisha continued the awesome ministry that God had entrusted him with.

Both Elijah and Elisha concentrated their efforts on the needs of the people around them. The fiery Elijah confronted and exposed idolatry, helping to create an atmosphere where people could freely and publicly worship God. Now that Elijah was gone, Elisha moved in to demonstrate God's powerful, yet caring, nature to all who came to Him for help. **God provides for all who come to Him for help.** He spent less time in conflict with evil and more in compassionate care of people.

Elisha experienced an intimate relationship with the Lord as Elijah did, and because of it, others were drawn to him. He had an exciting ministry of helping others, allowing them to see the power of God working through him. The miracles that occurred during Elisha's ministry put people in touch with the personal and all-powerful God.

We can learn a lot from such a wonderful man of God, because he was a man after God's own heart. Do you have a heart like Elisha's? There are a lot of needy people who need someone to reach out to them with the love of Christ. Jesus can be seen through the ministry of our life, if we would only respond in faith, to be used by the Lord as Elisha was. Let's look at what happened to a widow and her sons when they went to Elisha for help.

2 KINGS 4:1

A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves."

When reading the Old Testament, it is easy to focus on God's judgment of those who are rebellious and minimize His tender care for those who love and serve Him. In our lesson today we see Him at work in the life of a widow in desperate need of God's help for herself and her sons. It's God's mercy that leads us to repentance, covered by His love to meet our needs. **God provides for all who come to Him for help.**

Those who live in poverty have a very hard life. Hopelessness and despair can overwhelm you everyday. Simple necessities of clothing and food can be a matter of life or death. Her troubles were multiplied when her husband died leaving her with a great debt, which she could not pay off. To make matters worse, this woman was a widow, without means to provide for herself. She cried out to Elisha for help. Something had to be done right away.

She appealed to Elisha on the basis that her husband had been fruitful to the Lord as a prophet. He was a man who lived in reverence and devotion to God. Now his creditor wanted what was owed him, but the widow had no money to pay him. The taking of her sons as slaves would be payment for the debts she owed. First, she lost her husband, now she would lose her sons to be left all alone, struggling to survive.

Poor people and debtors were allowed to pay their debts by selling themselves or their children as slaves. God had ordered rich people and creditors not to take advantage of those people during their time of extreme need (Deuteronomy 15:1-18). This woman's creditor was not acting in the spirit of God's law. Elisha would not turn her away.

2 KINGS 4:2-4

So Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil."

Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors; empty vessels; do not gather just a few.

"And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones."

Elisha eagerly wants to help the widow. He soon learns that she has nothing of value except a jar of olive oil, which was used for food and fuel. The sons of the prophets were poor. Their hearts were concerned about heavenly things, not the things of this world. Those in her community would have insignificant means to help her. Elisha therefore inquired what she had to make money with and found she had nothing to sell but one jar of oil. She was truly in a hopeless situation.

Elisha instructs her to collect empty jars from her neighbors. This might have been a foolish thing to do considering the circumstances. Why gather jars? What will I say when my neighbors ask about my request? Many thoughts must have overwhelmed this woman as she obeyed Elisha, but she was faithful to carry out his request.

Sometimes God wants us to step out in faith, just as this woman did. When we look at our resources and abilities we might shrink away from such an act of faith to believe that God will somehow meet our need or use us to meet a need in someone else's life, even when we have nothing to offer in and of ourselves. We must believe in God's divine power and goodness and respond in obedience.

The widow's faith can be measured by the number of jars she collected in response to the prophet's instructions. She could have brought only a small number back, but instead, she and her sons gathered many. It's so easy to put limitations on God, because we depend on our own resources and abilities. How many jars would you have collected?

Paper Vessel

Use the "Paper Vessel" template to make your paper vessel. Using colored tissue paper, cut out several 1" squares of assorted colors. Give each child a copy of the template. Allow them to glue the squares of tissue to the vessel in order to make it beautiful. They can make stripes or other designs if they like. Allow them to glue over the lines. When filled in with colorful tissue paper, cut out the shape of the vessel. Allow the children to write the name on the back.

As an option you can put magnetic strips on the back to allow the vessel to hang on a metal surface. Encourage the children to take the vessel home as a reminder of the widow's faith in our story today.

2 KINGS 4:5-6

So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out.

Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another vessel." So the oil ceased.

Shutting the door behind her and her sons, she now had the privacy to pour the oil. She and her sons would be undistracted in witnessing this glorious miracle to take place as the oil was to be multiplied in the pouring. Together they could have an opportunity for prayer and praise to God as He miraculously provides for their needs. **God provides for all who come to Him for help.**

God provided oil enough to fill all the jars the woman had collected, all she felt she needed. God was faithful to meet her need. But what if she had refused to do as Elisha had told her? What if she had felt foolish, having doubts about God's concern for her? Her faith in God was evident. Firmly believing in God's power and goodness, she obeyed, and as a result she was blessed.

What a beautiful picture of God's provision in our lives. His power and goodness never ceases. The oil would still be flowing if more jars were there to be filled. May we never limit God in what He can do through us and for us. Elisha didn't limit the capabilities of God to meet the widows need, and as a result the life of the widow was spared suffering and hardship.

May we be as Elisha, living each day as a loving extension of God's caring and compassionate hand to others, if only we would live by faith to give as well as receive. People with a heart for God have a heart for people.

Take It to the Lord!

In Bible times, vessels were used for many different things. Most were made out of clay. Today we use many different types of containers; plastic, metal, clay. The Bible says that we should be vessels of honor. We should be filled with the Holy Spirit and carry the Word of God to those who don't know Jesus. We should also be a blessing to one another.

One of the ways that we can bless one another is by praying for one another. We can bring each other's needs to the Lord.

On a small piece of paper have the children write one or two prayer needs. For the younger children you can write the requests down for them. Tell the children not to write their names. Using one of the "unusual" vessels that you brought for the Attention Grabber, place all of the pieces of paper into it (make sure it is dry from the Attention Grabber activity). Mix up the papers and have everyone pull one out of the container. Then gather in a circle and prayer for one another's needs.

2 KINGS 4:7

Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest."

God provides for all who come to Him for help, and as always, He is faithful. The widow returns to Elisha with the wonderful news of the miracle. He quickly instructs her to use the oil to pay off her debt. She now had the means to free herself from the financial obligation from her husband's creditors, allowing her sons to maintain their freedom. There would be enough money left over for her and her sons to live on after all her financial obligations had been met.

Since God makes nothing but the best, she would have no problem selling the oil. It was important for her to get out from under the bondage of debt. The creditor must get his money so her family wouldn't have to go into bondage. Elisha, the man of God, instructs her well.

Trusting in God can turn a trial into a triumph. The Bible is filled with demonstrations of a caring and loving God for those who call upon Him for help. Widows were always vulnerable and this widow of a prophet would have been even needier than most. Yet God miraculously cared for this faithful, dependant believer, and He will care for you. **God provides for all who come to Him for help.**

What a joy it must have been for Elisha, as he is used by God, to be involved as a blessing for this family. Because of his love and concern for others, they were drawn to him as God's power worked through him to help them. Maybe we can be as Elisha, allowing God to work through us to be a blessing to others. If we truly love God, then we will love others, and be there for them, taking the opportunity to allow God to work through us to help them.

Pouring Promises

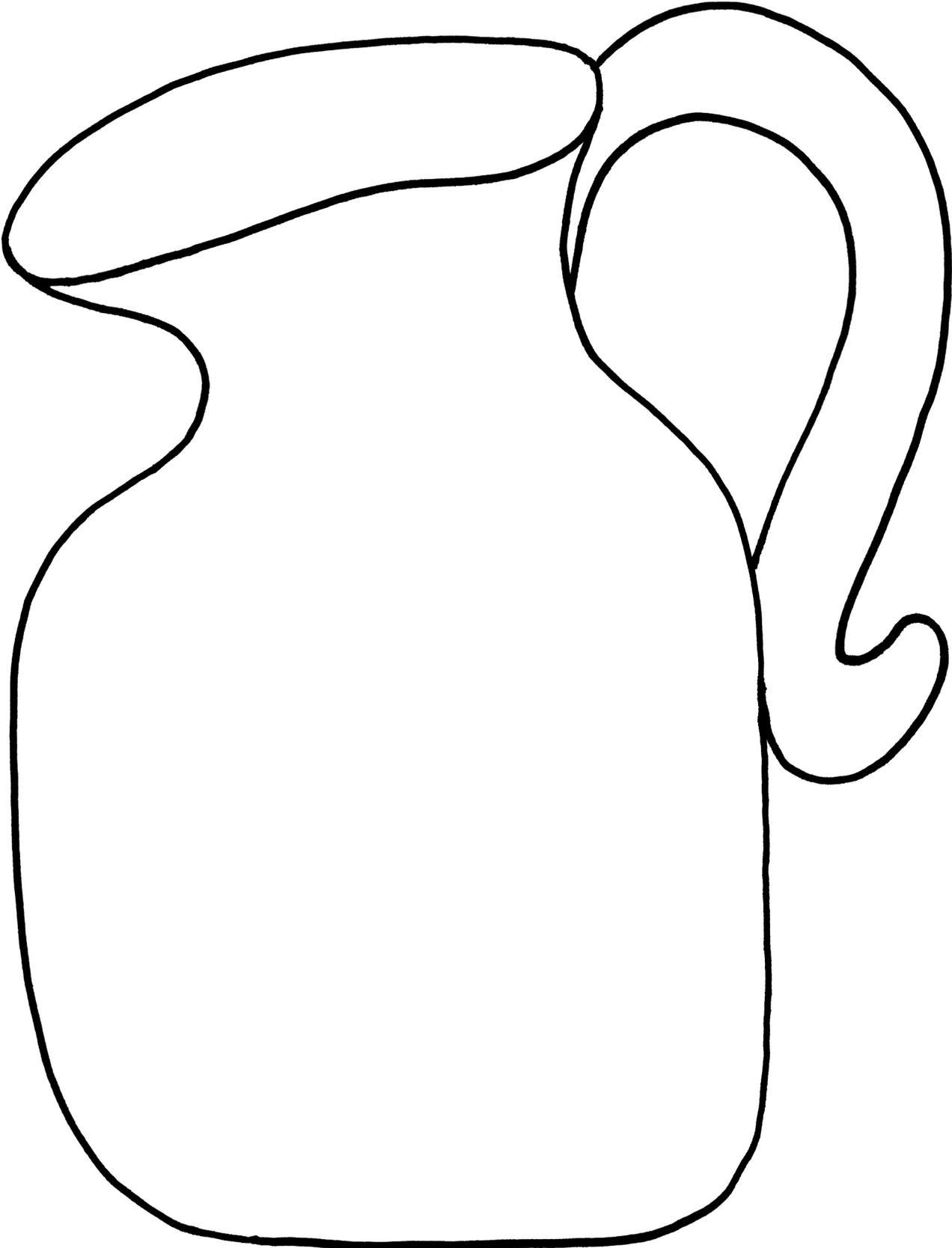
This can be a class project to place on the bulletin board. Using red butcher paper cut out a large heart (approximately 2' x 2'). Cut out the Bible, the spout and the handle from the "Pouring Promises" template. On the heart draw lines, one for each child in your class. Ask each child what promise in the Bible do they have hidden in their heart. If they have a hard time thinking of one, help them.

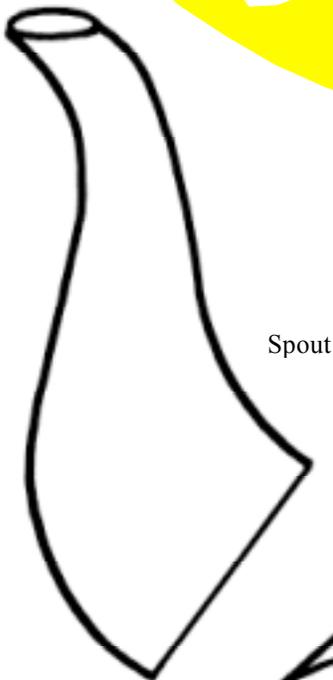
Write down their names and their promises on the heart. You can split the class into teams. Some can work on cutting, others on coloring the spout, handle and Bible, and others who can write on the heart. Staple the heart to the class bulletin board and then staple the handle and spout to either side of the Bible. Next staple the Bible over the heart to represent God's Word being poured into our hearts.

Explain to the children that we need to hide God's promises in our hearts.

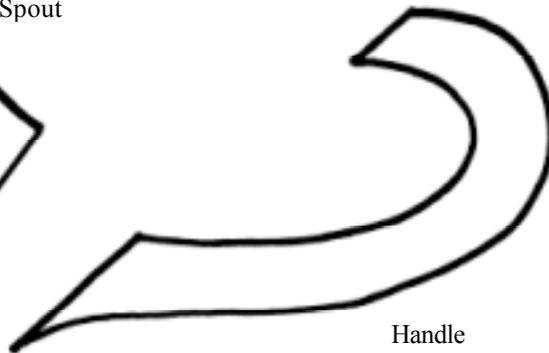
PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord in providing for our every need. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.





Spout



Handle

"For all the promises
of God in Him are
Yes, and in Him
Amen, to the glory
of God through us."
2 Corinthians 1:20

"Through the Lord's
mercies we are not
consumed, because
His compassions fail
not. They are new
every morning;
Great is Your
faithfulness."
Lamentations 3:22-23