

The Widow

1 Kings 17:8-24

Elijah is a man “with a nature like ours”. He is both weak and strong. He is both failing and triumphant. He is both timid and trusting. Yet the LORD uses this man like us to turn a nation back to the LORD. And Elijah brings revival to this people using resources that are accessible to each one of us.

In other words, this is not a story of an extraordinary man who had special talents and special powers. **This is a story of an ordinary man who simply walks with God and God uses him.** None of the power of Elijah’s miraculous impact lies in the man Elijah. All the power to bring restoration is found in Elijah’s God.

God uses Elijah because Elijah believes God. If you and I believe, the LORD is willing to use us too. We obtain such faith by asking the Holy Spirit to soften our hearts that we might receive this most precious of gifts. We cannot create such faith, but we can ask for the LORD to grant us faith. Only our sin and selfishness will stand in the way of the LORD granting such a request. The LORD delights to grant faith to those who ask Him for it and then to strengthen faith in those who have it.

The story in 1 Kings 17 teaches us that God strengthens our faith in strange and difficult places. God ordains for the Brook Cherith and for the Gentile city of Zarephath to be places where He grows Elijah’s faith. Elijah would not have been able to stand on Mt Carmel were it not for God’s strengthening of Elijah’s faith in Cherith and Zarephath.

Main Idea: God’s providences are always sufficient for our needs. God’s providences often appear as frowns, but we can trust the LORD to abundantly care for us.

Six Providences of God in Faltering Times

Providence #1: Depleted brooks.

“And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.” (1 Kings 17:7 [ESV](#))

Remember that on a practical level Elijah was in a very bad spot . . . he obeyed the LORD by going to wicked King Ahab with the message that Yahweh, not Baal, is

the “God of Israel”. Yahweh, not Baal, is the living God. Elijah told this powerful monarch that God is going to send a drought upon Israel and that Baal, the god of rain, would be powerless to stop this judgment of the LORD. He even told Ahab that as God’s prophet, the LORD would not send any rain until he, Elijah, asks the LORD to send rain.

Well, the murderous King Ahab is furious with Elijah. Remember that Ahab’s wife Jezebel had already killed many of the LORD’s prophets in Israel for standing against Baal worship.

Truth: Obedience to God often places us in extreme danger. In such times, know that the LORD who is alive is with every person who obeys Him.

God sovereignly provides a hiding place for Elijah where he will be safe from the king’s fury and protected from the famine and drought that God sends upon this rebellious nation. Here at the Brook Cherith God nourishes Elijah with meat that the Uber Eats ravens bring to him and with fresh water that the brook Cherith delivers to him.

What a joy for Elijah as each day Yahweh refreshes and restores him with daily food and drink! No cares. No concerns. Just peace. But then . . .

“After a while” . . . We are not sure how long God keeps Elijah by the Brook Cherith, but I imagine it is long enough for Elijah to begin to rely on the ravens and on the brook to keep him alive.

Is not that how our life unfolds? We experience some insurmountable need. We pray and God answers. But then we are tempted to rely upon that specific means rather than upon the LORD.

“And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.” (1 Kings 17:7 [ESV](#))

Notice that the brook dries up because there is no rain in the land. There is no rain because Elijah is praying for it not to rain and the LORD is answering Elijah’s prayers. **In other words, this drought is not Satan’s doing, it is the LORD’s doing. God’s providence is clearly the cause of Elijah’s distress.**

How many of you have been without employment and then you pray and God grants you provision through a new job? But then after some years, that job that you thought would last a lifetime “dries up” and you experience fear again . . .

forgetting that the LORD who provided you that job is the same LORD who stands by you today!

Truth: There is a big difference between trusting the LORD's means and trusting the LORD. We discover that difference when the LORD in providence removes a specific means that He has used to provide for us.

Pastor F. B. Meyer asks us to think about Elijah as he daily notices this life-giving brook slowing in its flow. Each day, Elijah sees the water level dropping and the flow waning. Elijah begins to imagine a future when the brook dries completely.

Meyer comments, *"Ah, it is hard to sit beside a drying brook – much harder than to face the prophets of Baal on Carmel."* Meyer then describes different kinds of drying brooks that we might experience:

- The drying brook of popularity, ebbing away as from John the Baptist.*
- The drying brook of health, sinking under a creeping paralysis or a slow consumption.*
- The drying brook of money, slowly dwindling before the demands of sickness, bad debts or other people's extravagance.*
- The drying brook of friendship, which for long has been diminishing, and threatens soon to cease.*

Why does God let them dry? He wants to teach us not to trust in His gifts, but in Himself. F B Meyer

"Because of our proneness to look at the bucket and forget the fountain God has frequently to change His means of supply to keep our eyes fixed on the source."
Watchman Nee

Do you have any drying brook in your life right now? How are you responding to this providence of the LORD?

Providence #2: Trustworthy word.

"Then the word of the LORD came to him," (1 Kings 17:8 [ESV](#))

The most important gift the LORD gives to Elijah is His Word. Without God's Word, there is no hope, no life, no promise, no direction, no good news, no reconciliation, no grace, no mercy, no salvation.

"Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. . . ." (1Ki 17:9 ESV)

This is a really strange instruction. Remember the earlier mention of Sidon?

"And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him." (1 Kings 16:31 [ESV](#))

Zarephath is a Gentile city where Baal is revered and the LORD/Yahweh is despised. Safety for Elijah seems to be AWAY from Sidon and not towards it. Elijah has to travel 90 miles through enemy territory to get to Zarephath. Yet this command is the Word of the LORD and Elijah relies upon the Word of the Lord for direction.

Friends, we have God's Word as surely as Elijah did in his day. In our day, God has chosen to give His word to us through the scriptures.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2Ti 3:16-17 ESV)

Two applications:

1. Let us learn to study the Bible so that we too can hear God's voice direct our lives! **If we wish to discover the will of God for our lives, the Word of God must consume our minds!**
2. Let us learn to trust EVERYTHING we read in God's Book! This Book will often contradict our most confident opinions, our most assured feelings, our most valued assertions. **If we wish to benefit from the will of God in our lives, the Word of God must consume our hearts!**

"Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." (Jeremiah 6:16 [ESV](#))

Providence #3: Surprising sources.

“Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” (1 Kings 17:9 [ESV](#))

How humbling! A widow? Really? A widow? **I would have expected God to say, “I have a wealthy merchant in Zarephath and he is going to provide for you.”** But no, I have a widow there. A poor widow would have been the first to suffer in the time of a drought and famine. **How is she going to provide for Elijah?**

God intended to humble Elijah through the means by which He provided for him. If God had sent Elijah to a wealthy merchant’s home, he might have become proud because of his high associations!

How strange the provision of God so often is. Let us be careful that we do not push God’s provision away from us simply because the vessel that He sends it in is so plain and humble. In times of drought and famine in our lives, let us be content to let God choose the means of His provision for us, even though it humbles us.

So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” (1 Kings 17:10–11 [ESV](#))

Some hear this story and protest, “Why did God ask a widow to feed Elijah? This seems a contradiction to caring for the poor. Elijah should have been the one to give the widow food and not the other way around. This providence of God seems almost cruel!

Yes. From a human perspective it does seem cruel. But listen to Jesus’ profound take on this story.

But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.” (Luke 4:25–26 [ESV](#))

Jesus teaches that Elijah’s request to the widow is an offer of God’s favor TO HER and NOT a request for a favor FROM HER. This is a story of God sovereignly choosing a Gentile widow to receive His lavish mercy and provision. Many

widows lived in Israel and not one of the Jewish widows were chosen to be so blessed by God. God chose a Gentile woman as an act of His free grace.

What did the people in Jesus' day think of this teaching about God's sovereign choice of a Gentile woman for salvation?

When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff." (Luke 4:28–29 [ESV](#))

Few doctrines excite the hatred of the natural man's independent heart than the doctrine of God's freedom to have mercy on those whom He chooses to have mercy.

Let us settle it in our minds that, whether we like it or not, the sovereignty of God is a doctrine clearly revealed in the Bible, and a fact clearly to be seen in the world. Upon no other principle can we ever explain why some members of a family are converted, and others live and die in sin,—why some quarters of the earth are enlightened by Christianity, and others remain buried in heathenism. One account only can be given of all this: all is ordered by the sovereign hand of God. Let us pray for humility in respect of this deep thing. Let us remember that our life is but a vapour, and that our best knowledge, compared to that of God, is perfect folly. Let us be thankful for such light as we enjoy ourselves, and use it diligently while we have it.

J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, [Expository Thoughts on the Gospels](#). Accordance electronic ed. (London: Wertheim, Macintosh, & Hunt, 1858), paragraph 4108.

"And she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die."" (1 Kings 17:12 [ESV](#))

Remember that this woman KNOWS that Elijah is not just any person walking into her village. This widow knows that Elijah represents Yahweh the God of Israel. Remember that all her life she has been indoctrinated in the worship of Baal. But **God's Word comes to her.** We know that because of **verse 9 where** God says, "I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."

The Bible is a dangerous book. It can change a person's life! That is what happened to this widow. This widow hears God's Word and believes. The widow **heart is sustained by the unchanging Word of Him who cannot lie.** Her heart rests on the truth that the Lord God is the Almighty One and all things are possible with Him.

Principle: When God asks us to do what seems impossible, we must remember the character and nature of the One who gives us the command. He is faithful and just and wise and good. He will not ask us to do anything that will ruin our lives, but only that which will revive our souls.

Notice that she begins by affirming her faith in Yahweh. “As the LORD your God lives.” She knows that Baal is a dead, lifeless deity and that the LORD is the One who reigns on the throne of heaven.” But she points to her human resources. A handful of flour and a little oil. **God loves to use the little we have to demonstrate his power and his provision.** This miracle immediately pushes my mind to the five loaves and two small fish that the little boy offered to Jesus before Jesus fed the 5000 men along with women and children.

God did not need the widow’s oil or flour in order to feed Elijah. But the widow needed to give her oil and flour in order to receive God’s blessing. Obedience always precedes blessing.

And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’” (1 Kings 17:13–14 [ESV](#))

Elijah urges the widow to faith in God. Elijah knows that this precious widow will be blessed by the LORD as she believes in Yahweh.

“And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days.” (1 Kings 17:15 [ESV](#))

Truth: God’s providence often comes to us through surprising sources, yet is not dependent on any human supply.

I love reading Christian biographies and one of my favorites is about George Muller, a Christian who loved to share the Gospel and who loved to care for orphans in England in the early 1800’s. He was a man of deep faith who saw God provide for him and the orphans over and over again. One day the matron of one of orphanages came to him and said, “I hate to bother you, Mr. Muller, but... the children are all ready for breakfast and there is not a thing in the house to eat. What shall I tell them?”

George stood up. "I'll take care of it."... [He] reached down and took [a little girl's hand] hand. "Abigail, come and see what God will do," he said. Inside they found three hundred children standing in neat rows behind their chairs. Set on the table in front of each child were a plate, a mug... and spoon. But there was no food whatsoever to be seen....

"...where's the food?" Abigail asked in a whisper.

"God will supply," George told her quietly, before he turned to address the children. "There's not much time. I don't want any of you to be late for school, so let us pray," he announced.

As the children bowed their heads, George simply prayed, "Dear God, we thank you for what you are going to give us to eat. Amen."

George looked up and smiled at the children. "You may be seated," he said. He had no idea at all where the food he had just prayed for would come from or how it would get to the orphanage. He just knew God would not fail the children. A thunderous din filled the room as three hundred chairs were scuffed across the wooden floor. Soon all three hundred children sat obediently in front of their empty plates.

No sooner had the noise in the dining room subsided than there was a knock at the door. George walked over and opened the door. In the doorway stood the baker, holding a huge tray of delicious-smelling bread.

"Mr. Muller," began the baker, "I couldn't sleep last night. I kept thinking that somehow you would need bread this morning and that I was supposed to get up and bake it for you. So I got up at two o'clock and made three batches for you. I hope you can use it."

George smiled broadly. "God has blessed us through you this morning," he said as he took the tray....

"There's two more trays out in the cart," said the baker. "I'll fetch them." Within minutes, the children were all eating freshly baked bread.

As they were enjoying it there was a second knock at the door. This time it was the milkman, who took off his hat and addressed George. "I'm needing a little

help, if you could, sir. The wheel on my cart has been broken, right outside your establishment. I'll have to lighten my load before I can fix it. There's ten full cans of milk on it. Could you use them?" Then looking at the orphans sitting in neat rows, he added. "Free of charge, of course...." [pp. 166-168]

Providence #4: Sufficient provision.

"The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah." (1 Kings 17:16 [ESV](#))

God's supply is ALWAYS enough. The Sidonian widow puts her life in the hands of the God of Israel and He provides for her. Yahweh remains true to His promises. Every time.

Notice how Elijah bolstered her faith so that she could overcome her fears. In verse 13-14 Elijah says "Do not fear . . . for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel." Elijah reminds the woman of God's promises. "The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth."

Principle: When we are fighting with the temptation to disobey God, we need to remind ourselves of God's promises. Psalm 119:50, "Your promise preserves my life." God gave her a promise to rest upon and she took it and cherished it and built her life upon it.

What would have happened if this widow had not trusted and obeyed God? She and her son would have died. **Unbelief and death are inseparable friends.**

Application: Let us trust in God in such a way that if God were not faithful to His promises, then our lives would be ruined. That is what this widow did. **She had no Plan B. Her Plan A was to trust God and obey Him.**

Providence #5: Excruciating losses.

"After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him." (1 Kings 17:17 [ESV](#))

We sometimes think that God's people are protected from the dark calamities of this fallen and mutable world. But we are not. Sickness and death may enter the homes of the obedient at any time. Faith and obedience does not exempt us

from earthly calamities. God does not promise us liberation from the pain of this realm, not in this life.

That first two words of verse 17 is very significant. "After this." The NASB renders this more literally, Now it came about after these things, (1Ki 17:17 NAS)

The writer wants us to consider the sovereign hand of God that has been at work up to this point. He wants us to remember how God sovereignly controlled each detail up to this point in the story. **The detail** of the ravens bringing bread to Elijah by the brook Cherith. **The detail** of the drought. **The detail** of sending Elijah to Zarephath, a city in the heart of Baal country 90 miles away from his home in the desert. **The detail** of God commanding a widow in Zarephath to care for Elijah even before he arrived in that strange, new place. **The detail** of supernaturally refilling the jar of oil and the bin of flour each day so that the widow, her son and Elijah would have daily bread.

What truth do all these details teach? God controls everything. Baal is not in control. Chance or luck are not in control.

God sovereignly orchestrates everything that takes place to fulfill His plan. God directs human events to fulfill His good design and plan. This is the Bible's clear teaching.

Psalm 135:6 The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.

Isaiah 46:9-10 Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

God controls not only of the good things that happen, but also the things which are excruciating for us.

Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come? (Lam 3:37-38 NIV)

Elijah himself acknowledges God's sovereign hand in the death of this boy in his prayer:

And he cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" (1Ki 17:20-21 ESV)

Elijah knows that God is in control of this calamity. **God is never the author of evil, nor He does not let evil forces rule this world.**

We do not always understand the ways of God in our sufferings, but we do acknowledge Him and His kind purposes in them.

Truth: In the darkness of our deepest losses, we can draw near to God with the confidence. He is not absent. He is not without good purpose. He is not without unending love for us. He is not without infinite power. We can trust Him.

“And she said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!”” (1 Kings 17:18 [ESV](#))

The widow struggles in her faith. She wonders about the LORD’s mercy, the LORD’s love, the LORD’s kindness.

So what does Elijah do? He calls out to his God in faith and confidence. He knows that God is good and does good.

Providence #6: Miraculous resurrection.

Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, let this child’s life come into him again.”” (1 Kings 17:21 [ESV](#))

What a prayer! Elijah prays because he believes in God’s good providence.

Principle: All prayer depends upon the truth that God controls all things and that God wills for good in all His divine dealings. So with boldness, we pray for good.

Five qualities of biblical prayer:

1. Personal.
2. Spirited.
3. Unrelenting.
4. Specific.
5. Believing

Notice that this prayer is PERSONAL.

Elijah cries to the Lord. “O Lord, **my God.**” **Elijah has a personal relationship with the living God.** The Lord is not merely God to Elijah, but He is “My God.” Prayer is made possible through personal relationship with God. We are brought into personal relationship with our Creator through faith in Jesus. Jesus is our access into God’s family and into personal relationship with the Lord. **Do you know God personally? (Gospel)**

Notice that this prayer is SPIRITED.

Elijah cried with energy. “Let this child live!” This was not a rote, lifeless, boring prayer. **STORY:** Prayer for Kimberly in Colorado. “Oh God save her.”

Notice that this prayer is UNRELENTING. He prays once. Then twice. And then three times. He keeps going back to the Lord.

Notice that this prayer is SPECIFIC. Elijah is very clear about what he is asking God to do.

Notice that this prayer is BELIEVING. Elijah acts in a way that would be foolish if God did not accomplish the miraculous.

Friends, let us take notice of Elijah’s praying and let us not be afraid to follow him in it. I fear that our prayers lack power because we fail to follow the Bible’s teaching regarding prayer.

And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives.”” (1 Kings 17:22–23 [ESV](#))

What joy must have filled the widow’s heart as Elijah gave her the happy news!! Her son was lost, but now he is home again.

PRINCIPLE: The tears that flow from trials will one day be turned into songs of joy. This is ALWAYS true for God’s people. JOY WILL COME IN THE MORNING.

Say to yourself when you go through a time of deep sorrow: “This not the last word.” God will one day have His say and when He does, we will rejoice again.

God's story ALWAYS ends in triumph. The grave and sin never have the last word.

Do you have some obstacle to joy that seems impossible to move? Do not let hopelessness invade your soul. You have a God who loves you and will not let your story end on a bitter note. Let us not despair. Let us not doubt God's tender mercy. **Let us lean on Him and trust Him. The final chapter in our lives is not yet written.**

Before we lose hope, let us wait for the story that God is writing to come to a joyful culmination. **Our storyline is moving in the direction of unending joy. Let us hold on to that truth and walk with God today.**

"And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."" (1 Kings 17:24 [ESV](#))

Conclusion:

Do you trust in God's providence for all things? The only way we can trust the providence of God is to know the God of providence. The Bible does not ask us to believe first in doctrines and then in a Person. The Bible calls us to believe in a Person and then in doctrines. Do you believe that Yahweh is the one true and living God? Do you believe that Jesus is God's Son who died on the cross and rose the third day to deliver you from your sins?

Believe!!

Illustration: Carol Altorfer. "Pray that I will trust the Lord in order to live. And pray that I will trust God in order to die." Sang, "Jesus love me this I know".

*Jesus loves me, this I know,
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong;
they are weak, but he is strong.*

*Refrain:
Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.*

*Jesus loves me he who died
heaven's gate to open wide.*

*He will wash away my sin,
let his little child come in. [Refrain]*

Main Idea: God's providences are always sufficient for our needs. God's providences often place us often appear as frowns, but we can trust the LORD to abundantly care for us.

For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." (Romans 14:7–9 [ESV](#))

Six Providences of God in Faltering Times

Providence #1: Depleted brooks.

Providence #2: Trustworthy word.

Providence #3: Surprising sources.

Providence #4: Sufficient provision.

Providence #5: Excruciating losses.

Providence #6: Miraculous resurrection.