

Natalie W. Bell
October 30, 2022

Giving in Uncertain Times
I Kings 17:8-16

*Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying,*⁹ “Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there, for I have **commanded a widow there to feed you.**”¹⁰ So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.”¹¹ As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.”¹² But she said, “As the Lord your God lives, **I have nothing baked**, only a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, **that we may eat it and die.**”¹³ Elijah said to her, “**Do not be afraid**; 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.¹⁴ **For thus says the Lord** the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.”¹⁵ She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate **for many days.**¹⁶ The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

Do you realize what a **difference YOU make** in this world?

Sometimes we forget that even our **smallest actions** have a ripple effect....

Thomas S. Monson said, “**the gate of history turns on small hinges, and so do people’s lives**”

Isn’t that so true?

Do you think the **widow** of Zarephath knew that her choice to give what she had to Elijah, would affect people for the next 3000 years?
Do you think that **Elijah** really understood the impact of his faith?

They were **ordinary** people making some **extraordinary choices**—choices that changed the lives of people all around them, and continue to change our lives today with examples of **trust and generosity.**

Because both Elijah and the widow **trusted God**—
To provide them with **more than enough**, right?

And at the time, she was at the *end of her rope*,
And yet she *gave, even in uncertain times*.

Isn't it amazing how *God uses hard times to teach us so much?*
Just when we feel like we have nothing...*God provides*.
And not just enough, but *more* than enough.
Enough to *share*, enough to *give*.

Just before this story *Elijah predicted* a huge drought for the Israelites because of
the actions of their evil king Ahab—
After this prediction he left town *to hide out*.
And he struggled with plenty of *fear and anxiety, and depression*.
The Bible is very honest about this.

But *God provides for Elijah---*
Right in the middle of the drought,
God sends him to live beside a little brook to sustain him....Until it dries up.
And there he was—*at rock bottom*.

So God told him to get up and go to the foreign land of Sidon,
(where the evil king's in laws live), to the town of Zarephath,
for I have commanded a WIDOW there to feed you.

Hmm, this did not sound like such a brilliant idea....
Why would he want to call upon the resources of a widow---
Widows had nothing, they *were* nothing!
And this was a widow in a *foreign* land!

It *didn't make any sense* at all! (Isn't that just like God?)
Here was Elijah in a very difficult time,
Being told by God to get up and go get help from someone
Who was also facing hard times!

And sure enough, he meets a widow who seems ready for death.
It's a *poignant* scene between Elijah and the poor single mom, isn't it?
Not only does she not have any extra food or water,
but she's actually preparing a last supper for her and her son.
I'm getting ready for us to die she says.

And that's when it dawns on Elijah.

God has promised to provide . . .

So, Elijah puts aside his anxiety and fear, and *acts* in faith.
He *boldly tells* the woman Do not be afraid.
And your little jar of oil
and jug of flour will not run dry until the day rain falls again.
(And remember they are in a drought!)

Now you can only imagine what she was thinking...

Are you kidding me?

Let's stop right there for a minute--
what do *YOU do* when you feel like you have nothing?
What *DO we do*?
Do we *turn to God's promises* to provide?

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6, that we *do not need to worry*---
because God knows what we need, and *God will provide!*
But do we *believe* that?

Remember that *Jesus took 5 loaves and 2 fish*, enough to feed a few people,
And tells his disciples to feed a crowd of 5,000 with it!
Then he blesses and breaks it---and there are 12 baskets leftover
after all are fed!

Somehow this woman *believed Elijah*, and
She *acted* in faith—by *giving* what little she had—first--to Elijah.
She had faith in Elijah's promise of God's provision.
And she *didn't even know* God (yet)!

So, what about us?

Do we hear the *promises* of God---and act in faith?
Do we believe that God's provision means we can give—*even in uncertain times*?
Do we trust that God will provide?
Not just enough, but more than enough?
Enough to give? To share?
The way the widow gave to Elijah?
And listen to this: the Bible says she *fed him FIRST*, first!
Then she fed herself and her son.
And the oil and flour did not run dry.
God provided more than enough....enough for her to *give!*

Wow.

In *this woman*, we see sacrificial giving!
 We see an incredible example of trust and faith,
 Even in uncertain times—you might say *in the worst of times!*

*What does this say to us,
 About our giving?*

Are we giving to God---out of trust and **faith**?
 Are we giving to God—**first**?
 Are we believing in the provision of God?

The graphs of our giving in the church show that most are giving small pledges,
 and *just a few are giving larger* ones.
 How could we turn that *upside down*?
 How can we give out of faith—even in these uncertain times?

Elijah **trusted** and spoke God's promise.
 She trusted, and **gave**....
 And look what happened....
 They had enough. *More than enough*. Enough to share, enough to give.

It *didn't make sense*, it wasn't what anyone would have expected.
 I'm sure they often stood in the kitchen and stared
 at that little jar of oil and jug of flour, just shaking their heads in *disbelief*.

She probably had many days when she wondered...
why am I still feeding this strange prophet?
 Why am I not keeping what I have for myself and my son?
 But she *continued to give*—out of faith.

When I was a teenager, my pastor would say at offering time,
"I will not give that which costs me nothing."
 That always stuck with me.

Over the years I came to understand what he was saying
 as I hit hard times financially, and *I struggled* while giving to the church.

It *costs this widow* to trust God and feed Elijah, right?
 But she trusted God enough to give what she had....

And God turned it into more than enough.

Do you believe God can do that **FOR YOU?**

When I think of this widow, ***I am convicted about my life, about how I give.***
 I realize that it's ***not a leap of faith*** to give just what is leftover,
 Or from a surplus—or something that is never missed.
 God asks us to give that which ***costs*** us something.

God wants us to give ***when we have to trust God*** to provide for our needs,
 just like this widow, and Elijah.
 Sometimes God even calls us to give
 when we don't think we have anything to give!

In Luke 12:2 Jesus saw a ***widow putting in two small coins*** into the temple
 offering box—and Jesus said she gave more than anyone else.
 Did you ever think of what it meant that she gave **TWO** small coins?
 In other words, she had a ***choice***.
 She had TWO coins, not just one.
 Now, I don't know about you, but if I had just 2 coins in all the world,
 I would probably just give ONE to God, not both.
 To be real honest I would be worried about giving any of it to God!
What about you?

But here in this story, and in so many others,
 we see the ***POWER of giving***. The life-changing power!
 Not giving what's extra,
 But giving that which costs us something.
 That's giving out of ***faith and trust*** in God!
 And it changes your life—and the lives of those around you!
 History turns on small hinges!
 What we do always has a ripple effect!

So the question is, will we give what ***costs*** us something?
 How will we give to God—right now, and in a new year?

I'm always convicted when I hear of how ***generous people in poverty*** are.

It's a fact that people with less money
give higher percentages of their income than those with more.

And I firmly believe that's because they know that *God is the provider*.
They know they must rely upon God.

When we have *extra* we tend to *hold onto it* even more.
We think that we earned it, it's ours, and we need to keep it.

But that's *not the kind of God we believe* in, is it?
Think about the *character of God*.
God is a GIVER.

Generosity is a character trait of God, and of the *kingdom* of God!
Which makes sense when we think about it:

God *gave us* creation,
God gave us humankind,
God gave us the creatures that populate this earth.
God gave us love and care,
God gave us his only son Jesus.
Jesus gave us his ministry, his life, his death, and his resurrection...
do you get the idea?

Our God is a giver. The kingdom of God is about generosity!
That's why we're called to give, it's transforming, it's life-giving!
It brings *joy!*

And you know what I think?
I think we *learn* that our jar of oil and jug of flour won't run dry
When we give.
And we really learn this lesson, when running out is a real *possibility*.
Which is very hard.

We really learn the power of a few loaves and fish
when *that's all we have* to feed a crowd!
We don't really know the value of what we have until we are faced a *choice*, right?

There are some churches in the northeastern Indian state of *Mizoram* who have a
beautiful phrase to express giving to God—"*Buhfai Tham*."
Which means "one handful of rice at a time."
At every meal a family sets aside a portion of rice---for God.
When they collect enough rice, they donate it to their church.
The church then sells the rice, and one church collected \$1.5 million
Used to support 1,800 missionaries, in addition to their local ministries.

One church leader said,
There are many ways of serving the Lord.
Some people do great things.
Some people contribute lots and lots of money.
But when we talk about this 'Handful of Rice,' it is very humble.
This service is done in the corner of the kitchen where nobody sees,
but God knows and God blesses it.
 Another church member said, "It is not our richness or our poverty that make us serve the Lord, but our willingness".

So we say, '***As long as we have something to EAT every day, we have something to GIVE to God every day.***'"

Paul Pastor, "Giving Is Global," Leadership Journal (Spring 2013). *This story can be seen at:*
vimeo.com/16288195#

Wow. 'As long as we have something to eat every day, we have something to GIVE to God every day.'

What if that was our attitude?

Well, it can be!

We see in the Bible that ***God meets us***

Wherever we are...even when we're at rock bottom,
 And that's ***exactly when*** God says--Trust me, and be generous,
 because you will always have enough.

More than enough. Enough to share! Enough to give!

What Elijah said and the widow did goes against our ***human nature***.

We are hardwired to keep, to store, and to survive.

When our jar is low, we want to make it last!

Isn't it ***only human*** to believe that if I don't have much—
 how on earth could I possibly give?

So, ***What would it take for you to....***

Trust God to provide for YOU?

What would it take for you to trust God so much that you can ***GIVE?***

And give GENEROUSLY!

What would it mean for you to ***know***,
 that somehow there is always more than enough?

The same God who fed 5,000 people with a little boy's lunchbox of fish and bread,
Is the God who does amazing things to bless **US today**.

Friends, we *really learn to trust* in God,
In *uncertain times*.

Times like these—when inflation is high, costs are skyrocketing,
And people are struggling.

But—God is still God—and God provides. More than enough. Enough to give.
It's *counterintuitive*, but it's the way of **God's kingdom**.

And it's the way of *life, and joy!*

As the widow gives,

She learns that our God is a God of abundance!

That's why **WE** are asked to *give*, even if we feel like we can't.

Because that giving—reveals the *abundance of God!*

And it brings the joy of generosity!

Time and again even secular people have discovered that

Givers are the most joyful people on earth. Givers have real purpose.

The Atlantic magazine ran an article in 2013 called: *Career Advice: Give*.

And they cited study after study of how givers—those who give of what they have
and who they are, have not only the most professional success, but the most
satisfaction and peace in life. They separated people into three groups-- **Givers**
who focus on others, **takers** who focus on themselves, and **matchers** who care
most about fairness. It was the **givers** whose lives were most meaningful.

What they found was that while our natural instinct under stress is to be a **taker**...

But, becoming a **giver** is what *takes away our stress!*

*Although being a giver takes time away from yourself for someone else, and that
would seem to increase stress, it actually alleviates it!*

The Atlantic, Emily Esfahani Smith Apr 30 2013

I can attest to that—nothing helps me out of a slump like *helping someone else*.

Giving ...is not actually taking anything away from me...

it's actually just sharing the abundance of God.

How has God given the *joy of giving*---to you?

Trusting enough to give---that lesson is not just for each one of us,

It's a lesson for our **whole church**.

There are times that we doubt that God will provide.

But the truth is that we are *all here* because of God's provision!
And when we trust God, there will always be more than enough!
Enough to share, enough to give!

Loaves and fishes are *real*—my friends.

So, hear the *Good News of the Gospel*.
When we trust God to provide---our lives are transformed!
And there is always more than enough...
enough to share, enough to give--*Even in the uncertain times*.
So let's give and live in the joy of generosity!
For this, all God's people can say together: Amen.