

2 Kings 4:1-7 WHEN YOU REACH THE END OF YOUR ROPE

Intro: Ill. James Dobson tells the true story of a little toddler named Frankie. He was a handful to say the least. One day he pulled a chair over to the front window of his house, and carefully placed it inside the drapes. He was standing there staring out at the world when his mother came looking for him. She spied his little white legs protruding beneath the drapes, and quietly slipped in behind him to see what he was doing. She got there just to hear him say to himself in very somber terms, ***“I’ve GOT to get out of here!”***

Do you every feel trapped? Have you ever felt like you were at the end of your rope? What do you do when you reach that point? The realist would say, ***“Just tie a knot and hang on.”*** The pessimist would say, ***“You might as well let go; it’s only going to get worse.”*** The optimist might say, ***“Just tie another knot and keep on climbing.”*** Each of those has its merits but, in reality, what can you do?

Some are in that very place today! You are at the end of your rope and there is a long drop beneath you and you do not know what to do.

- What do you do when you are facing problems with your children that you cannot solve?
- What do you do when your marriage is on the rocks and the crashing waves of hopelessness are unrelenting?
- What do you do when there are problems at work and it seems that there is no way out?
- What do you do when you have too much month left at the end of your money?
- What do you do when you have followed a loved one’s body to the graveyard and you cannot escape the loneliness, the grief and the pain?
- What do you do when your heart is broken, your dreams are shattered and your hopes have been dashed to bits on the cruel rocks of reality?
- What do you do when you are walking through a spiritual wasteland and there seems to be no way out?

I don’t think anyone but the Lord has the answers to all those questions. Yet, there may be some help in the verses we have read today. This passage tells us about a poor, widow woman who was at the end of her rope. She did not know what to do or where to turn. In her pain and her poverty she did the only thing that she knew she could do: she turned to the Lord. When she did that, God came through for her in a very big way!

This passage teaches us the glorious truth that God has a plan for our problem. These verses show us that just as God took care of this widow, He will take care of you. This passage lets us know that when we reach the end of our rope, there is help and there is hope. I want to take these verses and share a few ***lessons*** that should be of comfort ***When You Reach The End Of Your Rope.***

A. **There Was Despair In Her Family** – The word “*cried*” means “*to moan; to weep uncontrollably; to shriek out of grief.*” This word identifies the sound of a broken heart. This woman comes to the man of God at the lowest moment of her life. She is in desperate straits! (Ill. Have you ever been there?)

B. **There Was Death In Her Family** – She was married to one of the “*sons of the prophets*”. These were the men who were in training under Elisha to be the prophets and preachers in Israel. Her husband, her lover, her friend, her provider, her protector, had been taken away from here in death. She is broken because a loved one has been taken away. (Ill. Have you ever been there?)

C. **There Was Debt In Her Family** – Since her husband is dead she cannot pay her bills. As a result, her creditors are coming to take her sons away as slaves so they can work off the debt. This was allowed under the Jewish Law, **Lev. 25:39**. She has been deprived of her husband, now she is about to lose her sons as well. She is over her head in debt and she doesn’t see how she can make it. (Ill. Have you ever been there?)

D. **There Was Devotion In Her Family** – In spite of all her problems, she is still held firm in the grip of faith! She needs help, but she does not turn to her family or her friends. She does not try to find someone to loan her more money. In her desperation she turns to the man of God for help. Elisha was God’s representative on earth and he was her best hope. She reminds Elisha that her husband “*did fear the Lord.*”

Her life has been a life of devotion to the Lord and in her trouble, she still trusts Him and turns to Him for the things she needs! In spite of her pain, her problems and her lack of possibilities, she still looked up to God for the help she needed! Even though she couldn’t see a way out, she knew that she couldn’t see everything. Even though she didn’t understand everything she was facing, she still believed that God cared and that He could do something about her situation, so she cried out to Him in faith!

(Note: There are some lessons in this verse that we do not want to miss today.

- At some point, every person in this room is going to arrive at that low point of life. There will come a day when you will reach the end of your rope. Some have already been through it and can testify about it. Others are there right now and are looking for some help. Others will arrive there someday. We will all have our days of trouble and trial, **Job 14:1; John 16:33**.
- When you reach that point, the world, the flesh and the devil are all going to tell you that God doesn’t see and that He doesn’t care. The fact is, He does see, **Pro. 15:3; 2 Chr. 16:9**. He sees everything you are facing. Not a single thing is hidden from His view. And, He does care, **Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 5:7**. He cares more than you know about what you are facing.
- These verses are designed to teach us that our problems, while they may appear to be insurmountable in our eyes, are really just God’s opportunities in disguise. Therefore, no matter what you are called on to face in this life, learn to turn to the Lord first for the help you need. He cares! He is able! He will work in your need!)

II. v. 2-4 **GOD RELEASES OUR POTENTIAL**

(III. It would have been easy for Elisha to have said, *“Okay sister, you have suffered enough. The Lord is going to meet your need. Just go home and wait for Him to work.”* Instead of taking that course, the Lord chose to involve this widow in her own miracle. First **God erased her faith** by forcing her to admit what she didn’t have. Then, **God expanded her faith** by teaching her trust, humility and obedience. He does the very same things in your life and mine!)

A. v. 2a **How God Erases Our Faith** – The Lord erased the widow’s faith through two questions asked by Elisha. 1.) **What do you need?** 2.) **What do you have?** By those two questions, this woman was made to see the size of her need and the smallness of her own resources. She needed everything and she had very little. She needed much, but she could not possibly meet her own needs.

Often God will use the trials, heartaches and burdens of life to bring us to the place where we can honestly see our need and our own inability to meet it. Think about it, as long as we think we can handle things, why should we look to the Lord? If we have all the answers, why should we turn to Him with our questions?

But, when we stop and honestly answer those two questions, we will realize that we need more than we will ever be able to supply by ourselves. God does this to erase our faith. He isn’t trying to erase our faith in Him; He is trying to erase our faith in ourselves. As long as we think we can, He won’t!

(III. This is clearly seen in the battle over little Ai, **Josh. 7**. Israel had just come off a great victory at Jericho and they were feeling confident in their own abilities. They failed to look to the Lord for the help they needed and a little village that should have been an easy victory turned into a humiliating defeat. When Israel got their priorities in order and put God first, they were allowed to enjoy the victory, **Josh. 8**.)

B. v. 2b-5 **How God Expands Our Faith** – After God erased her faith in herself and her own abilities, He began the process of expanding her faith in the power of the Lord to meet her need. Again, He does the same thing in your life and mine.)

1. v. 2b **He Expands Our Faith Personally** – Elisha’s second question: *“What hast thou in the house?”* was designed to teach this widow that it may not have looked like she had much, but in reality, she already had everything she needed to obtain what she wanted. She couldn’t see it, but God had already given her the very thing He would use to meet her need.

Her answer to Elisha is to tell him that all she has is *“a pot of oil”*. The word *“pot”* refers to *“a flask”*. This oil was probably a small amount of anointing oil, used by the prophets to anoint the men of God. This little flask of oil had sat in the house unused since her husband died. That little, insignificant flask of oil would be the answer to her prayers.

What we fail to realize is that God has already given us everything we need to get our need met. That widow said that the only thing of value she had was a pot of oil. Yet, you have I have so much more than a mere pot of oil!

Think about it! If you are saved, you are a child of God! He has promised to hear your prayers, **Jer. 33:3**. He has promised to answer your prayers, **Matt. 7:7-11**. He has promised to meet all your needs, **Phil. 4:19; Matt. 6:25-34**.

We look at our problems and they look so large. We look at our possessions and they seem so small. Yet, we always fail to factor God into the equation! So, He places us in situations where our faith in Him must be expanded!

2. v. 3 **He Expands Our Faith Publically** – The widow is told to go to all her neighbors and borrow all the empty vessels that she can get her hands on. That is a strange command! How do you suppose she explained this to her neighbors? Did she say, *“That crazy preacher told me to do this”*? Did she say, *“Don’t ask me why, but I want to borrow some empty jars, pots and pans”*? Did she say, *“I am flat broke, but God is about to meet my need! I don’t know how He is going to do it, but the man of God said go borrow some pots. I don’t understand it, but I know God is going to make a way.”* It may have been that God used her to speak to her neighbors! They might have thought she had lost her mind as she went door to door collecting those vessels. But, what a witness it would have been when the Lord met her need! God used her as a living, breathing sermon to her neighbors.

He does the same thing in your life and mine! We talk about how we love the Lord and its just words until the Lord sends us into the valleys of life. When we are there, and He comes through for us in a big way, it speaks volumes to those who are watching us! You never know who the Lord is using your life to speak to! Let Him have His way in you. You are a work in progress! Your life is a billboard advertising the grace, blessing and power of God to a lost world, **Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 3:1-3.**)

3. v. 4-5 **He Expands Our Faith Privately** – Faith moved in that widow’s heart. She obeyed the Lord; she borrowed the vessels and she and her sons shut themselves up in the house and trusted God to do what He had promised to do.

Can you imagine the scene in that little home that day? There is that mother with her sons and all those empty vessels sitting all over that house. She picks up that flask of oil and one of those boys says, *“Mom, what are you doing with that oil? Why did you have us borrow all those vessels from the neighbors?”* And she says *“Boys, I don’t have all the answers, but I believe the Lord is about to do something great in our home. Your daddy didn’t leave us much, but he did leave us this little flask of oil. The man of God said that we were to get us all the vessels we could get. Boys, God is going to fill every one of these vessels out of this little flask.”* With that, they hand her the first vessel and she fills it up. She fills up one after the other and oil just keeps pouring out of that little bottle until every vessel was filled.

When that day ended, there was a mother and some boys who had learned a valuable lesson. There in the privacy of that home, they learned that God was all-powerful and able to meet every need. The neighbors would hear what God had done, and they would know it on an intellectual level. However, this family would know what God had done. It was a public miracle that was done in the privacy of their hearts.

Again, when the Lord shuts us up in a place of total dependence, His people will see Him come through for them time after time. This was Elijah's experience, **1 Kings 17**. This was Daniel's experience, **Dan. 6**. This was Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's experience, **Dan. 3**. This was the widow of Zarephath's experience, **1 Kings 18**. This was the experience of the 5,000 who were fed with the loaves and fishes, **John 6**. This was the experience of the disciples on the stormy Sea of Galilee, **Mark 6**.

This is the experience of every child of God who is placed in a position of total trust and dependence. When the Lord comes through for His people, the work He does might be widely known, but the greatest work is in the heart of His child. When the Lord moves in power, the child of God receives a lesson in faith that can never be taken away from them. Their faith is expanded and they will never be the same again.

III. Paul – He went from “*Who art thou Lord?*” (**Acts 9:5**); to “*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*” (**Eph. 3:20-21**) What made the difference? Paul's faith had been expanded on numerous occasions by the trials of life and the power of God. That is what the Lord is up to in your life and mine!

III. v. 5-7 GOD GIVES OUR PROVISION

(III. The woman and her sons filled one vessel after another until every vessel they had borrowed was full. She began that day with nothing, she ended it with everything! That is what our God can do.)

A. v. 5 The Lesson Of God's Provision – One of the lessons we can learn from this episode is that God will do exactly what He has promised to do. Elisha promised that the Lord would fill the vessels, **v. 4**, and He did!

He will keep all of His promises to you too! Not a single word in a single promise will fall to the ground unfulfilled! God will do everything He had promised to do. (III. **Heb. 6:18; Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Psa. 138:2; John 10:35**) He meant everything He said! He will do everything He has promised.

B. v. 6 The Limit Of God's Provision – The oil flowed until the vessels ran out. When the day was done, every vessel was filled to the full. There was no limit on the amount of oil. The only limit was on the amount of vessels. God's provision knew no limits in the widow's case and it knows no limits in your case! God is able to meet every need, move every mountain, and solve every problem. His provision is limited by nothing but our faith. God stands ready to give all that you make room for in your life, no more and no less!

If we can trust Him to take care of us and if we can get our vessels under the flow of His oil, there is nothing He can't do, **Eph. 3:20; Jer. 32:17; 27; Gen. 18:14**.

(III. Two men went down to a lake one morning to do some trout fishing, and they stayed there all day. But one man had a strange habit. Every time he would catch a trout he would pull out a little ruler and measure it. If the trout measured larger than the ruler he would throw it back. So strangely enough he kept all of the little trout that he caught, but he threw back all the big ones.

Well his partner watched that all day long, and as they prepared to leave he looked at him and said, ***“I can’t stand this any longer. I have never seen a man fish like you in my life.”*** He said, ***“You’ve kept all of the small trout and thrown back all of the big ones.”*** The man said, ***“Sure did.”*** He said, ***“Why did you do that?”*** The man said, ***“Because I only have an eight-inch frying pan.”***

Now think about that. Rather than get a bigger skillet, he was settling for smaller fish. I believe so often God wants to give us twelve-inch blessings, but all we have is eight-inch faith.)

C. v. 7 **The Largeness Of God’s Provision** – When the day was done, there was enough oil in those borrowed vessels to settle her debts, meet her desires and supply her dependents! God’s supply was far more than sufficient! That is the kind of ability our Father possesses. He is able to do more than you can imagine, if you give Him the opportunity! Get your vessels to Him and watch Him fill them all.

Conc: A construction crew was building a new road through a rural area, knocking down trees as it progressed. A superintendent noticed that one tree had a nest of birds who couldn’t yet fly and he marked the tree so that it would not be cut down.

Several weeks later, the superintendent came back to the tree. He got into a bucket truck and was lifted up so that he could look into the nest. To his surprise, he discovered that the fledglings were gone. They had obviously learned to fly. The superintendent then ordered the tree to be cut down.

As the tree crashed to the ground, the nest fell clear and some of the material that the birds had gathered to make the nest was scattered about. Part of it was a scrap torn from a Sunday school pamphlet. On the scrap of paper were these words: ***“He careth for You!”***

Are you at the end of your rope today? I just want you to know that He careth for you! Bring your vessels; let Him amaze you with what He can do with your situation.