

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

SONS OF THE PROPHETS' WIDOW LESSON TEN

by Sandy Harber

"Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." II Kings 4:7

After the widow had fully obeyed Elisha's instructions then she went back to him to report her progress and receive further instructions. One lesson we can learn from this widow is the benefit of full obedience. She borrowed many ("not a few") vessels from her neighbors as instructed. It showed the breadth of her faith that she borrowed enough empty jars and pots to satisfy her debt and fund her family's future. She also shut the door before she began the work of filling each vessel with oil just as Elisha directed. And she filled every vessel in the house, not stopping until she had completed her task. God wants our complete obedience. Partial obedience is really disobedience.

The prophet then told her to sell the oil that God had given her. Sharing what she had received from God benefitted others as well as herself. What good would it have done her to keep all that oil for herself? Yes, oil had many useful purposes but the quantity she received exceeded her household needs. It would have been wasteful to hoard the oil. Only by letting others benefit from her God-given gift did the widow maximize her own blessing.

Peter instructed believers to share their abilities, talents, and spiritual gifts with fellow believers (I Peter 4:10). The Church as a whole benefitted from the exercising of individual spiritual gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit. The sharing of their gifts was "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). By sharing the personal blessings received from God with others the Church grew in members and spiritual strength.

Even the tragedies in our lives may produce beneficial outcomes for us and those with whom we have shared our experiences. How? What we have suffered and overcome may serve as an encouragement to others. The lessons we learned from our trials may help others to navigate their own time of testing. And, sharing our feelings of grief and loss can unburden our hearts and ease the pain. In addition, our time of pain and weakness provides our brothers and sisters in Christ with opportunities to give aid and comfort, thereby storing up treasures in heaven for themselves.

The widow had gone to the man of God with her problem. By following his instructions she had worked through her problem. Her faith in God was rewarded by miraculous means. Once again she put feet to her faith by taking the vessels of oil out of her house and selling the oil to others. The Bible doesn't give us details about how she did this. Perhaps she went back to her neighbors and sold them the oil stored in the very containers they had loaned her. Or, she may have set up a stand in the local marketplace. She could have pedaled her wares by the city gate where business was often transacted. However she went about it the result was the same: she was able to pay her husband's debt!

But God gave more than the widow asked for. Not only could she pay the debt but there was money left over for her to live on. This was a great benefit in a culture where a woman's ability to earn money was very limited. God had provided for the widow and her sons so that they could be independent. God also does more for us than we could ever ask or think (Eph 3:20). As Jesus pointed out, we flawed humans give good gifts to our own children so imagine how much more generous our sinless heavenly Father will be with His children (Mt. 7:11).

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." James 1:17