

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ZAREPHATH WIDOW LESSON NINE

by Sandy Harber

"And as she was going to fetch it...." I Kings 17:11a

The widow was gathering sticks by the city gate when a complete stranger came up to her and asked for a drink of water. Now, she did not have a pitcher of water with her (never mind the city was experiencing a drought). She had to go somewhere to get the water (assuming she had access to water in the drought) and fetch a vessel to pour the liquid into. So, she likely had to go home to get a cup to hold the water. Hopefully, she had a little water at home; otherwise, she would have to make a second stop at the city well (again, assuming it was not dry).

Notice how willing she was to comply with Elijah's request. Why? Did she recognize him as someone of importance? Perhaps she identified him as a prophet of Israel's God, Jehovah. Or, maybe she was simply the type of woman who treated all strangers with respect and hospitality. Maybe the Spirit of God prompted her to accommodate Elijah. Whatever her reason, she did indeed respond immediately, abandoning her task of gathering sticks.

How would you have responded in her place? I might have said that I would get the water as soon as I finished gathering sticks. Considering the urgency of her task - gathering sticks with which to cook her next - and last- meal, it seems reasonable to assume her focus was on her own plight and that of her son. But she put Elijah's need ahead of her own.

On the other hand, perhaps Elijah introduced a welcome interruption to her grim plans. She may have been in a hurry to cook that last meal. It is possible that she saw in this oddly dressed prophet a spark of hope. Could this stranger help her?

We have no way of knowing what was in the mind of the widow of Zarephath at that time. We only know that she responded immediately to Elijah's request.

How do you respond to someone who has interrupted you at a task and asked you to change direction? I'm sure that I would be annoyed. I'm focused on my task. Don't interrupt me. Of course, the source of the interruption colors our response. If it was my boss asking me to drop what I was doing and fetch something for him, I'd do it. But a stranger? I think I'd be more likely to bargain with him. Let me finish my task first and then I'll do what you want.

The widow's actions reflect a selfless character. Perhaps this is why God sent Elijah to her when there were so many other widows about. Her willingness to accommodate the prophet saved her life and that of her son, as well.

Life often interrupts us in unexpected ways. We have plans. And we are focused on the tasks needed to accomplish those plans. But, before we reach our goal, life throws us a curve ball. Suddenly, we are heading down a different path. Sometimes that life interruption results in a permanent change - like the death of my husband. It changed the entire direction of my life forever. Sometimes the interruption is temporary, such as the loss of employment. Life changes direction as a new job is sought and obtained. The change could be good. You may like the new job better than the old one.

The key is being flexible. The widow did not stubbornly cling to her task. A tree that will not bend with the wind will break. Do not fight against those life interruptions and refuse to change. Do not rail against the unfairness of it all. You will be stuck in a path that never moves forward. Accepting change is part of life. If you are stuck, ask God to help you accept what you cannot change.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." James 1:5