

**I. The Widow's Oil**

- A. Welcome to Camp Neighborhood, here on beautiful Campfire Hill. One of my favorite times at summer camp was going up to Campfire Hill at night. We sat under a canopy of clouds up in Wisconsin. Once, we even saw the Northern Lights.
- B. There'd be a big roaring fire, and sometimes we'd roast corn or hot dogs, or slice up watermelon. But all the time somebody would tell us a story. One of the great stories of the Bible. David and Goliath. Noah and the Ark. The parting of the Red Sea.
- C. Some of those story-tellers made those stories come to life.
  1. We could feel the rumble of Egyptian chariots bearing down on the Jews at the Red Sea.
  2. We could picture the rough staff of Moses, and hear him shout the people to stand still.
  3. We could smell the dust of the whirlwind that protected the people of God, and feel the spray of the water as God parted the sea.
    - a) They made those stories come to life.
- D. That was an awesome privilege and an amazing heritage. I'm so grateful for it.
- E. A lot of us grew up hearing the great stories of the Bible. Sunday school. Church. Vacation Bible School. Camp.
- F. I can't take that for granted. I know a lot of us did not hear those stories growing up. So that's what we're doing here all summer long. Transporting you to summer camp, so you can hear Campfire stories.
- G. Today's story comes from the Old Testament, and the life of a prophet named Elisha.
- H. And I'm going to tell it bit by bit as we listen to God's voice in the Bible today.
- I. Let's get right into it.

**II. The Story**

- A. *A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves." 2 Kings 4:1*
  1. What is this?
  2. It's a giant blob of pain machine.
  3. This fallen world is a morally broken pain machine, and this woman right now is getting chewed up and spit out.
    - a) She's lost her husband to death.
    - b) And she's about to lose her two sons to slavery.
  4. This is the setting, the background, the backdrop to the miracle of grace God is about to do.
  5. God made the world beautiful and good. But we brought in sin, and when sin came in, death came in, and every misery and pain.
  6. Nobody can escape the pain machine. We all have trials. We all have heartbreaks and suffering and loss. Everybody. Nobody gets a hall pass. The people who look the happiest, the people who have it all together on Instagram and Facebook, the popular people in the news... everybody's hurting, because everybody's stuck in the morally broken pain machine called planet earth.
  7. *The question is not how to get out of it, but how to handle it.*
  8. There are a lot of ways to think about this, but let's look at three ways of being... three ways of dealing with the giant pain machine.
  9. Three ways of Handling the Pain Machine
  10. The Human Heart:
    - a) *Spirit... the higher part of your nature, that connects with God and his truth.*
    - b) *The Flesh... the lower, twisted part of your nature, that wants stuff God doesn't want, and if you're a church person, you keep hidden.*
      - (1) The world is a giant pain machine.
      - (2) And there's a little pain machine inside you too. When the world fell, you fell too. That's why you hurt people.
        - (a) And that's why there are three ways people handle the pain machine.
          - i) *The Way of the Weakling*
            - (1) Passive, Coward, Uncreative, Victim, Sneaky, Deceptive, Phony, Entitled, Spineless, Manipulative, Failure to Launch.
          - ii) *The way of the Bully*
            - (1) Aggressive, Tyrant, Uncreative, Victimizer, Dirty, Blatant, Violent, Abusive, Rebellious, Exploitative, Failure to Thrive.
          - iii) *The Way of Your Noble Self*
            - (1) Love, Relationship, Family, Art, Music, Beauty, Value, Business, Jobs, Goods, Obstacles to Evil, Humor, Happiness, Joy, Faith, Hope, On-ramps to the Grace Pathway (God saves, blesses, grows, and uses you).
              - (a) You are partnering with God, joining in co-creation with him.
    11. Here we have this widow. She is desperate, and who can blame her. She's lost everything. She's widowed, she's bankrupt, and she's about to be childless.
    12. She runs to Elisha. He is a prophet. Last summer, we did a series called GRIT... and that was about another prophet, named Elijah. Different guys. Elijah was Elisha's mentor.
    13. And now Elisha is mentoring other prophets. He runs a seminary. The students are called the Sons of the Prophets. These leaders go around teaching the Word of God, and preaching the gospel of grace.
    14. The widow's late husband was a student in Elisha's seminary. So she turns to Elisha.
    15. I do not know where her heart is at right now. We can't really tell. She's either in her Weakling self, or she's in her Noble Self, but has just run out of options. There's no way to tell.
    16. But what we can tell is that Elisha is calling her upstairs. He is calling her to not be a victim, but to rise above what the pain machine is throwing at her. He is calling her to totally activate her Noble Self and stay there.

17. So for the rest of our time, let's talk about Staying Noble When Life is Hard.

- B. So Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil." (2 Kings 4:2)
1. He asks her two questions:
  2. Question 1: "What shall I do for you?"
    - (1) At first, it reads as if Elisha is being heartless—in a "bother someone else with your problems" sort of way. But no way. There are several times in the Bible when you get this kind of question:
      - (a) David wants to bless an ancient tribe, so he says, "What do you want me to do for you?" (2 Sam 21:3)
      - (b) A blind man comes to Jesus, and he says, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Matt 20:32).
      - (c) And now Elisha asks the widow the same thing. What does it mean?
        - i) 2 Sam 21:3, 2 Ki 2:9, Ru 3:11, Mt 20:32, Mk 10:51
        - (1) 1. If you want to stay noble when life is hard, you have to NAME THE BLESSING YOU SEEK.
    - (2) This is not easy. It's not easy to dig through superficial desires to the deep ones. What do you want? What do you really want? What do you really, really want?
    - (3) It's a great question. You might have asked your spouse, or someone you love, and they say, I don't know. You are the sovereign of your life. A prince or princess before God. It's okay to know your wants and want your wants, even if you never get them.
      - (a) Elisha asks what she wants, and doesn't even wait for an answer.
        - i) Maybe she gave him "the look." The wifely eye-roll or something. Can't say.
    - (4) Question 2: "What do you have in the house?"
      - (a) 2. If you want to stay noble when life is hard, you have NAME THE BLESSING YOU ALREADY HAVE.
    - (5) You have resources. You have blessings in your life already. Sometimes, you forget, or take them for granted, or pretend they aren't there.
    - (6) The second you forget what you already have, you activate the flesh, and make yourself a weakling or a bully.
      - (a) When you look at the giants staring you down, or when you think of dreams you want to pursue, God has already set the table. He's already prepped for this moment. He has already given the raw materials.
      - (b) What do you have in your house?
    - (7) This question ranks up there with Jesus' question to his disciples when they needed to feed five thousand, "How many loaves do you have?" (Mark 6:38) and God's question to Moses when he needed to face Pharaoh, "What is that in your hand?" (Exodus 4:2).
    - (8) The widow had one measly flask of oil. And don't you know that God can work wonders with the little we have?
- C. "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones" (2 Kings 4:3, 4).
1. This is nuts.
  2. If I'm that widow, I'm getting in Elisha's face with...
    - a) "You listen to me, Professor, Doctor, Holy Man. You call yourself a follower of Yahweh! [Wag finger] Fine seminary president you are, you heartless snake-oil salesman! [Hands on hips] Spewing out some harebrained nonsense about filling vessels from a measly flask of oil. You should be ashamed of yourself. I need money. I'm losing my sons. And you give me words—insane words..." [Throw hands up in the air / storms away]
  3. That's what I would say. I'd probably say worse, though it's best I not say that stuff out loud. I would go right down into my flesh. I would not stay in my noble self, especially if my wife or kids were involved.
- D. How Many Doors Would You Knock On?
1. During my early high school years, a very persuasive friend talked me into joining a multi-level marketing business as his underling. He got a cut from whatever I sold. But that was fine, because if I recruited more salespeople, I'd get a cut from whatever they sold. It seemed fair to me.
  2. Except for one little problem.
  3. I hate sales. I've met people who thrive on sales. They love it. They're convinced their product wafted down from heaven and will satisfy the soul's deepest longing. Those natural salespeople have me forking over my credit card with religious fervor, just for a box of detergent. I admire them, when they're sincere.
  4. But I can't do what they do. Especially the knocking on doors part. I find that brutally humiliating. As a young Christian, I knocked on doors to initiate conversations about Jesus. In some ways, I'm glad I did it, because I pushed myself out of my comfort zone. But I found the task so humiliating, I wanted to cram myself into a Hefty bag, and set myself on the curb.
  5. Yet there I was, knocking on doors to sell cleaning products. Oh, the humanity!
    - a) So I viscerally relate to the widow's perplexity at how many doors she should knock on in obedience to Elisha's ridiculous instructions.
  6. How many doors would you knock on?
    - a) What's this going to sound like?
    - b) Knock-knock. "Hello, I'm your neighbor, [insert your name here], and I was wondering if I could borrow your pots. Oh, um, all of them. Do you have any of those big ones, like stockpots, or the kind you make spaghetti in? Umm, how long? Just a week or so. I'll bring them back, I promise. Yes, absolutely, spic and span... Down the block, around the corner... Right, that's me, the widow... Yes, yes, yes, it's legal. Totally legal... Um why? Well, there's this commodities thing I've got going..."
  7. The thought makes me cringe. Especially since Elisha's instructions were so urgent: Go borrow vessels, he urged...
    - a) From everywhere
    - b) From all your neighbors

- c) Empty vessels
- d) Not just a few
- 8. QUESTION: What would set the upper limit on that blessing?
  - a) ANSWER: Only the number of vessels she gathered.
  - b) *3. If you want to stay noble when life is hard, you have to EXPAND CAPACITY TO EXPERIENCE THE GRACE THAT'S ALREADY YOURS.*
- 9. Being able to handle a difficult life starts with CAPACITY.
  - a) It's not about getting God to bless you, it's about experiencing the blessings you already have. Feeling them. Realizing them. Understanding them. Seeing them.
  - b) Being thankful for them.
  - c) Your Christian life is not about you working, striving, gathering vessels to make God bless you. He blesses you because you are in Christ, and Christ is the Blessed One. His blessings are yours. All his treasures have your name on them.
  - d) Experience your blessings.
  - e) But this takes capacity.
  - f) And...
    - (1) *4. If you want to stay noble when life is hard, EXPAND YOUR CAPACITY THROUGH SPIRITUAL GROWTH.*
  - g) Elisha stokes the fires of urgency. Get all the pots you can.
  - h) The only limit would be the number and size of vessels she gathered.
    - (1) Her job was to create capacity. This is a function of faith. And faith is a function of growth (muscle). Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Know God's promises. Believe God's promises. Follow the Directions. Enjoy God's blessings.
    - (2) Your job is to create capacity.
  - i) God's job is to fill it.
  - j) And capacity = faith.
    - (1) So trust him for great and mighty things. He is able to do infinitely more than you can ask or think.
    - (2) Be bold with God.
- 10. Here is this woman. Go gather vessels and fill them with oil.
- E. *So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out. Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel... (2 Kings 4:5, 6).*
  - 1. How does that go down?
  - 2. One room house. Dirt floor. Fire in the corner. One woman. Two boys. And let's say 276 vessels.
  - 3. And one little bottle of oil.
  - 4. I think I'd start with the smallest pot. Maybe one that's smaller than the vial of oil. So I could say, "Look kids! Oil! Isn't God faithful?"
  - 5. So there she is. She gulps. The son brings her the first vessel. She tips her vial of oil, and pours it in.
  - 6. Slowly, slowly, a steady stream... and what?
  - 7. The oil kept coming!
    - a) This is a noble woman.
      - (1) She did not go weakling and just give up. She did not get passive and wait for somebody else to take care of her.
      - (2) And she didn't become a bully and steal what she needed. She didn't become a brat and force it out of people.
      - (3) She stayed noble and trusted God.
        - (a) Faith when faith makes no sense is the mightiest faith of all. And you can have that kind of faith.
        - (b) And the oil kept coming.
  - 8. Son number two sets it down.
  - 9. Son number one brings the next one.
  - 10. Pour, pour, pour. Oil, oil, oil.
  - 11. Thank you God. Thank you Father. Wow! Praise the Lord.
    - a) MOM: "Joey, get your face away from the oil."
    - b) JOEY: "But, Mom, I want to see inside."
    - c) MOM: "You'll put your eye out."
      - (1) *5. If you want to stay noble with life is hard... YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE THAT WHAT GOD SAYS IS TRUE ENOUGH TO ACT LIKE IT.*
        - (a) If he says hold your staff over the Red Sea, what do you do?
        - (b) If he says stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, what do you do?
        - (c) If he says get vessels and pour the oil in, what do you do?
        - (d) If he says believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, what do you do?
  - 12. Because God knows how to bless his children, even when death has come knocking and the creditor is coming.
  - 13. Just like the widow. But there's a complication.
  - F. *Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another vessel." So the oil ceased (2 Kings 4:5,6).*
    - 1. When I started my sales business, I kept it simple. I charmed my family into buying enough soap to wash three generations of my family tree. I was young, they were proud of my initiative, it was simple. "I'm going to be rich," I thought. "I'm going to be one of those people they showed on the training video, zipping around in a Lamborghini and luxuriating in my seaside villa. Sales is awesome."
    - 2. Then something horrible happened.

3. I ran out of family. Everybody already bought soap. To make it worse, our company's soap was *concentrated* so repeat sales were a long way off. It was time to take the step I dreaded most.
4. It was time to knock on doors.
  - a) I gathered some samples, rehearsed my lines, and set off to make my fortune.
  - b) Hi, my name is Bill, and I'm an introvert.
  - c) My palms produced mini oil-slicks. My tongue felt fat, like it was injected with Novocain. My heart beat so hard I could count my pulse just by listening.
  - d) I coerced wobbly legs to walk up my neighbor's sidewalk. I commanded my finger to ring the doorbell.
5. Mrs. Christiansen answered with a smile. She eyed my sample box with suspicion. "Hi Billy, how are you?"
6. I heard myself talking gibberish, but was powerless to fix it.
  - a) Sfwimmy mmsolala vrgrimish some soap?
7. I made a deer in the headlights look confident.
8. Mrs. Christiansen looked alarmed.
9. Two houses and zero sales later, I quit forever. No more sales for me.
10. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I'd stuck with it. I could have worked through my fears, honed my spiel, recruited my minions, and become an successful salesman. But no. I stopped after three houses.
11. I wonder how many houses the widow stopped after. She has probably poured out barrels of oil. Her sons keep bringing her vessels. Laughing. Celebrating. Thank you, Jesus-ing.
12. Then...
  - a) MOM: "Woo-hooooo! Bring me another vessel! Thank you, Lord!"
  - b) JOEY: "That's it, Mom. We're all out. But woo-hooooo anyway!"
  - c) MOM: "WHAT? Huh? WHAT? Check again."
  - d) JIMMY: "He's right, Mom. They're all full."
  - e) MOM: (screeching) "I SAID CHECK AGAIN!"
  - f) JOEY: "Mom, take a breath. We're fine. We have way more oil than we need."
  - g) MOM: (slumping) "I knew we should have crossed Lake Street."
13. I have a suspicion that, when we stand before Jesus for final evaluation, he will show us piles of blessings with our name on them that we never opened. Because we never developed the capacity and maturity along the Grace Pathway that we could have. We stopped short of the full grace that we could have known.
  - a) 6. *If you want to stay noble when life is hard, you have to...*  
*BELIEVE THE ONLY LIMIT ON THE BLESSING IS YOUR FAITH-CAPACITY TO RECEIVE IT.*
14. The second worst sentence in the Bible: "There is not another vessel."
15. The worst sentence in the Bible: "So the oil ceased."
  - a) Not because God was mean.
  - b) But because that's all the vessels she bothered to get.
  - c) THIS IS NOT name it and claim it. It is not positive thinking. It is the faith that comes from spiritual growth only. Being strong in the Lord, and growing muscle over time.
16. It's not the size of your portfolio but the quality of your soul that matters most.
17. Can you imagine the feeling when they ran out of vessels?
18. I imagine she felt regret above all. I should have collected more vessels. I should have knocked on more doors. I should have borrowed Vinnie's pickup truck. I knew I should have crossed Lake Street.
19. The only way to live without regret is to give God the greatest capacity you can, so he can fill it. I want to show you how to blow the lid off your capacity for grace.

### III. Amazing Grace

- A. *Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest" (2 Kings 4:7).*
  1. This story starts with slavery, it ends with liberty.
  2. It starts with death, and ends with life ("live on the rest").
  3. It starts with bankruptcy; it ends with riches.
  4. And in between, it's all about expanding capacity for God's grace.
    - a) 7. *If you want to stay noble when life is hard... REMIND YOURSELF GOD IS FAITHFUL AND NO TRUE FAITH GOES UNREWARDED.*
  5. When the widow tells Elisha about the oil, he makes two comments.
  6. "Go, sell the oil, and pay your debt." That's grace. That resolves the issue that drives the story—the issue of debt. Grace paid a debt she couldn't pay. Grace got her out of a hole and up to ground zero. Then, Elisha kicks it up a notch.
  7. He added, "You and your sons live on the rest." That's amazing grace. It indicates an endowment for as long as she needs. Grace brought her from negative to zero. Amazing grace brought her from zero to a lifetime of positives.
  8. Grace pursues faith like a heat-seeking missile.
  9. Inventors like Tesla, and Westinghouse, and Edison brought electricity to the streets and buildings of the world.
  10. Question: was there more electricity in the world before they harnessed it or after they harnessed it?
  11. Trick question: answer is there was no difference. It was always there, and always flowing. We just needed to tap into it.
  12. Just like God's grace.
  13. It's always there, and always flowing. And faith is how you tap into it. And strong faith is how you keep the connection strong even when life is hard.
  14. Let's grow a strong faith.