

## Nameless: Stories of Grace for the Brokenhearted

The Woman Who Was in Debt / 2 Kings 4:1-7

Jeff Kennedy / May 5th 2019

**Intro:** Mental health professionals are dealing with what has been termed “A Crisis of Loneliness” in our culture. One researcher spoke of the crisis to be just as “dire as obesity, or substance abuse, or opioid addiction.” “Socially isolated people are more than twice as likely to die of heart disease. They’re also more stressed, less creative, have lower self-esteem, and feel less in control of their lives than non-lonely people” (Beaton; *The Solution to Millennial loneliness*).

We live in a culture where we are more connected through technology than ever before. Social media allows us to carefully curate and portray a version of ourselves to other people. Sure people can look at our pictures on Instagram or read our thoughts on Facebook—**but are we really known?**

### Some have come up with unique and creative solutions to the dilemma:

- Loneliness is believed to affect 9 million people in the U.K. British Prime Minister Theresa May created the first "minister for loneliness" in recent days launched the government's first loneliness strategy.
- Millennials have been dubbed “The loneliest generation on earth”—and sociologists are mainly looking at the hours spent in front of screens and accessing the world through the internet rather than accessing real relationships. Millennials cite that their greatest fear is a life of insignificance and to be unknown—the fear of walking through life and being truly nameless.

**Transition:** The irony of social media is that a person can have millions of followers on their youtube channel and still be a shadow who isn’t known, and whose real needs go unmet. I want to introduce you to another one...she lived over 800 years before Jesus. It’s right here in

### 2 Kings 4:1-7

The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.”

<sup>2</sup> Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?”

“Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a small jar of olive oil.”

<sup>3</sup> Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. <sup>4</sup> Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.”

<sup>5</sup> She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. <sup>6</sup> When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.”

But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.

<sup>7</sup> She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”

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Let's draw out some principles from the story to help us understand how God often meets our needs...

### 1. God cares about the unknown.

Today we're looking at a woman whose story is located (I think strategically) right between two groups of prominent people. Elisha had a high-profile ministry. Indeed, there were other prophets, a community of prophets in service to Elijah and Elisha who remain to this day unnamed. But they were faithful to declare and preach God's word. Elisha has the distinction of being a more famous, well-known figure who had inherited Elijah's Mantel and his method. His calling and his way of life. And he prophesies before Kings—and after the story we read today, he prophesies and hobnobs with prominent families in Israel. And the widow's story is right in between these famous folks of the day because it shows us that God cares about the unnamed, and the obscure and the unrenowned people of the world.

The widow—she was married to a man who was a member of the company of prophets. The “sons” of the prophets. The man was a servant of Elisha and he revered the Lord God.

**Jesus: It reminds me that Jesus spent most of his time with the riff raff in his day.** Most of his time was spent with the commoners and peasants and those who lived unremarkable lives. The Pharisees even accused him of being far too friendly with these people.

**But I think in particular of the dying thief on a cross right next to Jesus in Luke 23:32-43.** In that passage there are two thieves actually. They are likely slaves and being crucified as common thieves or rebels. Rebels in Jesus' day would have stolen, not so much to provide for their families as to disrupt the Roman economy, especially the all-important trade routes that ran right through Israel.

Jesus is suffering the worst punishment you can imagine. And one of the thieves begins to mock Jesus “Save yourself, and save us—if you are really the Messiah.” But the other bandit spoke up “Do you not fear God—we are under the same sentence and accused justly—but this man has done no wrong.”

Then he simply asks to be remembered when Jesus comes into his Kingdom. And Jesus, who is dying a horrific death—every breath is work, every word spoken is painful—and Jesus says, “I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

**The promise is not to just be remembered. But to be alive—not to just be commemorated but to be translated from the Kingdom of death to life.**

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### **2. Everyone has a deficit somewhere in their life.**

“He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Mt. 5:45

**Her Debt**—creditors are coming to take her children. Now, indebtedness was common in the ancient world and could result in the **loss of property, houses, family members in order to pay it off**. The Torah carefully regulated what is called “debt-slavery”: these are people who have had to become indentured servants in order to pay creditors back. As a regulatory check on this practice, Moses’ commands in this regard are clear:

- They must release the indentured every 6 years in the year of Jubilee (Ex. 21)
- They must not harshly treat anyone who had to temporarily enter this state (Lev. 25)
- The slaver was to set people free on the 7<sup>th</sup> year with enough provisions so that they never had to sell themselves as a debt-slave again.
- They must allow people and family members to be redeemed.

**Redemption came through a Kinsman redeemer**—a relative who could pay the debt and take the family (women and children) into his own home. Or pay off their debts and set them free. But the Kinsman redeemer could also adopt a family in need as well. The idea of ransom or redemption goes way back in the Old Testament.

**(1) We all have a deficit and debt of sin that needed to be paid. Here’s how Paul tells us that Jesus has become our Kinsman Redeemer...**

**Colossians 2:13-14** “God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup> having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.”

**(2) Beyond that, we may face all kinds of material, emotional, or relational deficits.**

What I like about the widow is that she doesn’t hesitate to make her needs known to God, to ask for assistance.

### 3. God wants to meet your needs.

Mt. 6:25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup> **Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.** Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

- **God wants us to use what we have.** God’s provision for you may involve some sweat equity. The prophet asks “**what do you have?**” And she answers “**just this one jar of oil.**”
  - God may provide the miracle, but he often does require sweat equity.
  - God asks **Moses** “What is that in your hand?”
  - **Jesus asked his disciples “How many loaves do you have?”** “seven, and a few small fish”—and Jesus multiplied it. Seven loaves turned into seven basketfuls of bread.
  - **He will pay the temple taxes but commands Peter to go catch fish**—because the tax coin is in the mouth of the fish. He will save multitudes by his power and his Gospel, but requires his disciples to tirelessly proclaim, warn, and plead with people to repent and believe in Jesus. God is the one who makes the seed of the Gospel message grow—but, as Paul said, we actually have to do the work of planting, watering and tending to that crop.
  - **My God shall supply all of your needs—but my God shall also put you and I to work.**
- **The prophet instructs her to borrow jars from neighbors**, as many as she can possibly find, filling every square inch of the floor of her home with these jars. She must borrow prudently from neighbors—God will supply all she needs by enlarging her capacity, and sometimes in order to realize the promise of your potential we must borrow more capacity.
- **She must do the work of pouring from the original jar.**
- **She must do the work of selling the oil in the marketplace.**

It is God who supplies all she needed—and it is God who answers her prayer with a miracle that gets her to work and sets her into motion.

God starts with what you brought him, and then he can multiply it and meet your needs.

**Illus. Years ago when I was finishing college I had to take a year off—and some friends saw that I was not able to cross the finish line. They believed** in my potential and gave me all the money I needed to finish school. No strings attached, they just wanted me to know that they believed in my potential—but I had to borrow capacity.

**Lately, Kerri and I have experienced the overwhelming generosity of this church.** She has been in a long battle with breast cancer, undergoing many grueling months of treatment

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This obscure woman tells us who she is by her actions and God's response. Her name is provision. For God has provided for her needs.

Whoever you are, whatever your situation...

- God knows you. Hear me: YOU ARE KNOWN.
- God cares about the issues of your life: If it's spiritual, he wants to forgive you and welcome you into his eternal Kingdom. If it's emotional he wants to fill you up, relational? **You may be the loneliest person on earth, feeling like you are truly a walking ghost**—He wants to connect you with other believers who walk through life with you.