

The Widow of Zarephath: The Leap of Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *1 Kings 17; Job 38; 42:5, 6; Luke 4:24–28; Heb. 11:1; Rev. 1:17.*

Memory Text: “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (*Philippians 1:6, NKJV*).

She was no stranger to death. She had seen her husband die. And now she watched, helplessly, as everything around her died. The grass dried up, the trees dropped their leaves, the cows were gaunt skeletons, and the goats bleated pitifully. Every day she scanned the cloudless sky, hoping against hope for a cloud and rain. She had been rationing the flour and the oil in an attempt to make it stretch until the end of the drought. The little round, flat daily loaf was unevenly divided. Her son needed all the nourishment she could give him. It pained her to see the lad so thin and without energy. But her sacrifice seemed pointless, for she feared that both would soon starve to death. There was enough for one final meal. Holding her son’s hand, the widow leaves the dusty town of Zarephath to scrounge for firewood in order to cook their final meal. And here the unnamed woman steps into the biblical narrative and into sacred history, where her story teaches us lessons that we can, thousands of years later, apply to ourselves. This week we see the great controversy between God and Satan played out in miniature in the life of an unnamed widow who chooses God and is led step by step into a journey of faith.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 11.*

To Zarephath

Although our story begins with God's command to the great prophet Elijah to go to Zarephath, we must remember what led to this command. The kingdom of Israel had fallen into idolatry. Baal worship had become the official state religion. God dramatically had "challenged" the storm god by declaring through His prophet Elijah that there would be no more dew or rain (*1 Kings 17:1*).

What irony is found in the idea that God tells a kingdom that was worshipping the storm god that there would be no rain? What does this tell us about God's power in our world in contrast to every other power? See also *Ps. 86:8, Jer. 10:6, Heb. 1:1–3, and Job 38*.

Elijah had been hiding at the brook Cherith (*1 Kings 17:3*) while the country of Israel withered under a devastating drought. The brook finally ran dry, and God commanded the prophet to leave and go to Zarephath (*1 Kings 17:1–9*).

God commands Elijah to leave Israel and go to a foreign land. Zarephath is located on the Mediterranean coast between Tyre and Sidon. It is within the territory of Phoenicia, which is where the terrible queen Jezebel comes from. One of the important Phoenician national deities is Baal, and Jezebel, as King Ahab's queen, actively imported Baal worship to Israel from Phoenicia. In the ancient world, gods were normally thought of as belonging to a specific city or region. Zarephath, situated outside of Israel in a foreign country, is supposedly far removed from the Lord's area of influence. The people of this heathen nation also should be far out of God's reach. But no one ever is out of His reach. Right in the very center of Baal worship, God is going to make His presence and power known.

It's important to note that God uses the prophet's need to reach out to a woman in far-off Zarephath. As believers in Jesus, we do not have to project a perfect front to all those around us. We do not have to cover up our problems or pretend that we have no needs, because, as we all know, that's just not true. As Christians, we still suffer, we still hurt, we still need at times the solace and help of others who, in fact, might not be of our faith or of any faith at all.

What's wrong with the attitude that says we show a lack of faith when we seek help from others? What are ways that we might, through our needs, reveal to others the goodness and character of God?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Kings 17:13, 14*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe the circumstances that brought Elijah to ask for help from a pagan, widowed mother in a foreign land.

Feel: Empathize with the conflicting feelings that a starving mother must have had when a stranger from another religion asked for her last bit of food.

Do: Step out in faith when God calls you to act, even though you may not know all the details.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: At the Bottom

A The widow was at the end of her resources, and so was Elijah when God brought them together. How did they serve each other, and how did this affect the growth of their faith?

II. Feel: Enough Faith to Be Generous

A Though faced with death, the widow still was generous enough to share with a stranger what she believed was the last meal she was able to provide for her son and herself. What assurance did Elijah give along with his request for her food?

B How does God assure us when He asks us to act on His requests?

III. Do: Acting in Faith

A What has God asked you to do that requires stepping into unknown and potentially life-threatening territory?

B What assurances of God's care do you rest on?

► **Summary:** The widow of Zarephath cared for Elijah's needs, through faith, even though she was at the end of her resources; and God richly blessed her, her son, and Elijah.

An Unusual Instrument *(1 Kings 17:7–12)*

The widow, out gathering firewood to make a last meal for herself and her son, immediately recognizes Elijah as a believer in God. The text doesn't say what it was, but something let her know that Elijah was a worshiper of the Lord.

Read carefully verse 12. The woman acknowledges that God exists, but what does that, at this point, mean to her? Dwell on her phrase “that we may eat it, and die.” What does it imply?

What similarities can you detect between 1 Kings 17:3, 4 and 17:8, 9?

God directs and guides His prophet Elijah in order to save his life. First He tells him to hide by the brook Cherith. Ravens are commanded to feed him. Following this, God commands again and sends Elijah to Zarephath, where he has “commanded a widow” (*vs. 9*) to feed him.

She seems an unusual instrument for God. She is a non-Israelite. She is a widow with no social standing and no influence or power. She herself is on the brink of starvation.

What an incredible lesson can be learned from observing this divine strategy. More often than not God chooses us—not for a particular strength that we may have—but rather in spite of our weaknesses (*2 Cor. 12:9*).

Yesterday we saw that God is not limited geographically. Today we see that God is not limited by human limitations. God is the One who orders in this story. Throughout this narrative it is clear that God is in control, a point that also is very important in the larger context of Elijah's ministry in the great battle between the Lord and Baal. Nothing and no one can stand in the way of God's ultimate will. Later in the story we will see that even death cannot interfere with God's purposes. Even though things and events that are hurtful or detrimental to our lives will be thrown at us, God's purposes for us always are good (*Jer. 29:11*), although we may not see this immediately. We need to learn to trust Him in all situations, both the good and the bad, for we will inevitably find ourselves at some point in both.

How has the Lord been able to use you despite your weaknesses? How much more could you do were you, through His power, able to overcome those weaknesses?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God today is as intent to design for us a leap in faith in our journey heavenward as He was for the widow of Zarephath.

Just for Teachers: Use the story below to remind class members that while God designs for us to take a leap in faith in our heavenward journey, we must be careful not to mistake faith for presumption.

An author wrote a biography. The subject of the biography planned a book tour in order to promote the book's release. However, she lacked the necessary means of travel to take her from place to place.

The woman gave her dilemma some thought and finally settled on a unique approach for seeking divine guidance in the matter. After obtaining what she believed was an answer, she approached the author and revealed her method for arriving at a solution. "When I closed my eyes and opened my Bible, my finger landed on the phrase 'go down to Egypt.' So, since the message indicates travel, I need you to take me around to camp meeting speaking appointments and book signings this summer," she concluded.

The author, however, resisted this fortune-cookie approach to seeking guidance from the Bible. Such an approach might have caught the author off guard had she not been able, biblically, to detect presumption in the request.

Consider This: Let us consider for a moment that the widow of Zarephath may have been caught off guard by the seemingly audacious request for food in a time of famine. Elijah's request was likewise presented as coming "from above," as was the request made to the author. What was the key difference between the two requests? How was the widow able to differentiate a request made in faith from one made in presumption? What guidance does this story offer us in discerning between presumption and what is truly God's leading?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: How do we know that the widow's response to

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Total Surrender *(1 Kings 17:13–16)*

Read 1 Kings 17:13–16. What’s the first thing Elijah says to the widow, and why? What great leap of faith is Elijah taking in asking her to do this?

Widows were marginal characters in the biblical world at the best of times. Especially if they had no grown children to take care of them, they easily were victimized and had limited legal recourse. A widow in the time of a great drought was even worse off. Each family was fighting for survival, and there would be no handouts to poor widows. This woman is now asked to feed the prophet. She is really the most unlikely candidate, when we consider her social and economic reality. Only a handful of flour and a little oil stands between this poor woman and starvation.

Whom does he tell her to feed first? What kind of thoughts must have gone through her mind when she heard that? What kind of faith was required on her part?

In many of our cultures it is more appropriate to offer to others before taking for ourselves. However, to add insult to injury, the prophet not only wants to take from a person who cannot afford to give, but he wants to be served first.

Remember that throughout this story the prophet really is standing in as a representative of God. By asking the woman for her last bread, the prophet is inviting her to take a leap of faith, to surrender all she has.

What other examples can you find in the Bible in which the Lord asks for complete surrender? *See, for instance, Genesis 22.*

When we give God everything we have, we always gain in the end. The woman originally had enough for only one meal. In giving that meal to the prophet first, this pagan woman reached out in raw faith, trusting in what she could not see or understand. In a sense, isn’t that what faith is all about (*see Heb. 11:1*)—trusting in a God we can’t see and in promises we don’t fully understand? What’s amazing, too, is that this isn’t even an Israelite woman but a woman from a pagan land who practiced a degrading form of worship. And yet God somehow communicated with her (*see vs. 9*), and she responded in faith, doing what she had been commanded to despite how foolish, from a worldly perspective, her actions might have seemed.

When was the last time you had to reach out in raw, naked faith, trusting in what you could not see or did not understand? What lessons did you learn about what it means for us, as fallen beings, to live by faith?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

the promise was budding faith and not presumption?

Bible Commentary

I. God Leads His Children Into Faith (*Read 1 Kings 17:9, 12, 14 with your class.*)

True, the widow lived at ground zero of Baal worship (Phoenicia). But even before the arrival of Elijah, “she was a believer in the true God and had walked in all the light that was shining on her pathway.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 129. To paraphrase, the widow was in heathenism, but not of heathenism (see Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 195).

Guide your class in a discussion of how God gently, step by step, built up the widow’s faith to prepare her for Elijah’s arrival and request. Evident talking points:

Verse 9: God, as well as Elijah later on, gave the widow a command. For her to get a directive straight from Israel’s God likely would have told her that God was real and was working in her life.

Verse 12: Just as Elijah, by divine guidance, recognized the widow, she recognized Elijah in her greeting: “As the Lord thy God liveth.”


Verse 14: Before handing over her last morsel of food, she received Elijah’s promise from God that if she complied, the supplies would not fail.

It was enough. After she had received a command from God Himself, followed by divine insight to recognize her guest, the way was paved for her not to reject, without at least testing, the third step—the promise.

Consider This: “God will never remove every occasion for doubt. He gives sufficient evidence on which to base faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 432. Discuss whether the widow acted on presumption or budding faith.

II. Keeping Faith Warm (*Compare 1 Kings 17:12 and 24.*)

What happened, in just 12 verses, that the widow now has to conclude

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Remembering My Sins *(1 Kings 17:17, 18)*

The widow gave her last loaf of bread, and God performed a miracle. She and her son miraculously escaped starvation and had a constant source of food. It's hard to imagine the astonishment she must have felt to see this incredible miracle happen, not just once but day by day.

What is the natural human response to contact with God? *See Job 42:5, 6; Isa. 6:5; Dan. 10:8; Luke 5:8; Rev. 1:17.* **Why do you think that reaction is so common?**

Through the prophet Elijah, the widow came into contact with God. As we come into contact with a holy God, our sins become more apparent. And then, when something terrible happens, we may feel that the Lord is punishing us. In 1 Kings 17:18, the widow blames God's prophet for being there and consequently bringing her to God's notice.

Look at her reasoning (*vs. 18*). **Why might she have thought the way she did?**

Perhaps she saw the kind of faithful and holy life that Elijah lived, and she felt convicted in his presence when she contrasted herself to him. Or, living day by day with such a miracle, perhaps she felt the presence of God and His holiness as never before and thus felt her sinfulness more than ever before. Thus, in that context, she saw her sins as the cause of this tragedy.

In many ways this is such a common reaction. We often blame ourselves and our sins for the tragedies that hurt us or our loved ones. What did I do that caused my child to get sick? What sin has caused this calamity in my life? Though it is true that many times pain and suffering result directly from the sinful choices we make, it's also true that tragedies come for which we see no apparent reason and certainly through no fault of our own. Remember the story of Job. Even God admitted he was a righteous man, and look what happened to him. We need to be very careful in how we seek to explain the cause of tragedy in our lives. What's more important is how we respond to those tragedies, and fixating on the supposed cause most likely won't help.

We all face unexpected and inexplicable tragedy, don't we? It's part of what it means to be fallen beings in a fallen world. How can you learn to trust and love God, even amid painful times?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

all over again, “*Now I know who you are*”? Because we know the narrative from beginning to end, it is easy for us to ask, After the miracle of the ever-flowing oil, how could any doubt possibly have set in?

Possibly she’d begun taking the nonstop oil for granted and required something to jolt her faith again. Or perhaps discouragement had set in from lack of self-worth. If this was the case, two possible reasons for that lack could be her social position or guilt and self-recrimination.

First, widows had next-to-zero status in society. Her name is not mentioned in 1 Kings. Yet, she appears in Luke 4:26 as Jesus’ first recorded sermon illustration! (What other widow—often called the greatest fund-raiser throughout the ages that the church has ever had—went unnamed? *Read Mark 12:42–44.*)

Second, the widow blamed herself for her son’s death. Blame is an easy and dangerous trap to fall into. Though we all are guilty in one way or another, we always must remember that Jesus bore our guilt at the cross.

Consider This: “The nearer we come to Jesus, the more clearly we behold the purity and greatness of His character, the less we shall feel like exalting self. The contrast between our characters and His will lead to humiliation of soul and deep heart searching.”—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 46. Can even forgiven sins be later realized in a clearer light? Was this David’s “post-forgiven” experience in Psalm 51?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: **Evaluating our faith is introspective. Am I recognizing life experiences (heart-wrenching tests, comforting assurances, answers to prayer) as steps of spiritual growth?**

Thought Question:

We often face two kinds of “tests” regarding faith. The first kind is the kind in which we really have no choice. Perhaps you go to the doctor and are given bad news. This isn’t a challenge you have chosen. It was thrust upon you.

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Testing Faith

How was the faith of both the widow and Elijah tested here? *1 Kings 17:17–24*.

Notice the struggle that Elijah himself had with the death of the boy. It doesn't seem as if he knows for sure that the Lord will raise him. His prayer seems to reflect some of the attitude of the woman herself, blaming God for the death. What this shows is that even prophets can struggle with understanding things that happen (*Matt. 11:1–3*).

No question, for quite a while both the widow and Elijah were living in the presence of a miracle—the continual supply of flour and oil—which should have been more than enough to keep their faith strong. And yet, even with something as dramatic as that, their faith was put to the test.

How often, too, we might have had some incredible experience with God, something that really touched us in a powerful way, only to question Him later when events unfold that we don't like. That's why, though miracles can have a role in the building of faith, they shouldn't be the center of it.

How does Elijah refer to the Lord? What does that tell us about his relationship with God?

Elijah has a very intimate relationship with God; he calls God “my God.” Having a close relationship with God does not mean that one has all the answers. Elijah cannot understand why God has permitted the child to die. But it is when we have an intimate relationship with God that we best can experience the power of God in our lives. The miracle does not occur by a special magic formula or even the attempt of the prophet to keep the boy warm. The writer of the account makes it clear that it is God who resurrects the boy.

Elijah himself is thrilled at the results. “Look, your son is alive!” he probably shouted to the widow. No doubt, whatever this incident did for the faith of the woman, it surely helped Elijah, as well.

The widow's response ends in a faith statement. She now knows that the God of Israel is able to sustain life and also give life.

Read Luke 4:24–26, where this widow is mentioned again. How do Christ's words here help us better understand this story as a whole? What lessons might we draw from it for ourselves, and who are part of a privileged group?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

In contrast, perhaps you are offered a dream job, the job you always wanted. Everything is all set until you hear the words, “You will have to work on some Saturdays.”

What are the differences in these scenarios, and what role does faith play in them both?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Impress upon members that faith is not just an abstract, “out-there-somewhere” word. The faith visibly rewarded and proven in this report from Phoenicia can happen in (name of home city), as well.

Example: Moments before the opening night of an evangelistic series, the electricity was cut, leaving the church in total darkness. The head deacon watched a tiny residue of fuel oil in the nearly empty, hastily borrowed generator to keep the lights, laptop, and projector going. He was praying harder than ever when the meeting ran a half hour over. At the last amen, the lights went out.

The oil (food or fuel) still flows! Without the widow’s story, why might we tend to view such reports as mere hype?

Activity: Reread the memory text. In response to the following prompts, invite members to share voluntarily a *one-word* emotional descriptor (spanning from spiritual birth until present time) of how they felt/feel their Christian experience has begun.

My first awareness that “Jesus loves me”: _____

The day of my baptism: _____

Most memorable forgiveness experience: _____

Teacher’s concluding prayer: “Jesus, thank You for our memory text in Sabbath’s lesson. We know, absolutely, that You didn’t bring us this far to let us go now!”

Last, invite class members to repeat aloud the prayer together, each inserting their own name:

“Jesus, I know, absolutely, that You didn’t bring [_____] this far to let [_____] go now. Selah.”

Further Study: “ ‘And He said, verily I say unto you, No prophet is acceptable in his own country. But of a truth I say unto you, There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and unto none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman, the Syrian.’ Luke 4:23–27, R.V.

“By this relation of events in the lives of the prophets, Jesus met the questionings of His hearers. The servants whom God had chosen for a special work were not allowed to labor for a hardhearted and unbelieving people. But those who had hearts to feel and faith to believe were especially favored with evidences of His power through the prophets. In the days of Elijah, Israel had departed from God. They clung to their sins, and rejected the warnings of the Spirit through the Lord’s messengers. Thus they cut themselves off from the channel by which God’s blessing could come to them. The Lord passed by the homes of Israel, and found a refuge for His servant in a heathen land, with a woman who did not belong to the chosen people. But this woman was favored because she had followed the light she had received, and her heart was open to the greater light that God sent her through His prophet.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 238.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What is the connection between sin and suffering? The widow of Zarephath thought that her sin caused her son’s death. In the New Testament the disciples thought that being blind was the result of the individual’s or his or her parents’ sins (*John 9:2, 3*). Should we relate differently to people who are suffering as the result of their own sins as opposed to those who seem to be suffering through no cause of their own? Or should we not even make that judgment call? Defend your answer.
- ② A child is born with a rare genetic disorder, and the mother feels that God is punishing her for her rebellious youth. What advice and comfort can you as a class offer her?
- ③ Ask if anyone in class ever witnessed a miracle, something that could have come only from God. What was the person’s reaction? How has the impact of the miracle in the person’s life changed over time? Did he or she ever struggle with doubt again, despite having witnessed something so amazing? What lessons can we learn from these experiences about what it means to live by faith?

Gehazi: Missing the Mark



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 39:4–6; 2 Kings 4; 5; 8:1–6; Jer. 9:23, 24; John 13:1–17; 1 Tim. 6:10.*

Memory Text: “It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him” (*Deuteronomy 13:4, NIV*).

Gehazi was a servant. Not just any servant but the servant of one of the greatest prophets in Israel's history: Elisha. Elisha had been called by the Lord to minister to the prophet Elijah, in preparation for Elisha's own prophetic ministry (*1 Kings 19:16*). For many years Elisha served Elijah and listened, observed, and thus understood what it meant to be a prophet. When Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind of fire (*2 Kings 2:11*), Elisha's time had come. His ministry was not as fiery and glamorous as Elijah's, but he exerted a far-reaching influence.

Thus, Gehazi had a wonderful opportunity to be closely associated with someone as blessed of God as Elisha. It's hard to imagine all that he could have learned and seen in the years that he worked with the prophet.

Yet, as we will see this week, despite so much potential and so many great opportunities, Gehazi became a miserable failure. His story serves as an example of someone who gets sidetracked and becomes unable to distinguish the important from the peripheral. How crucial it is for us to learn from his mistakes!

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 18.*

Write a brief job description of a servant, based on the following verses: *Gen. 24:2–4; 39:4–6; Luke 14:17; 17:7, 8; Acts 2:18.*

Being a servant means primarily that one puts aside one's own wants, wishes, and comfort and involves oneself totally in someone else's life. A servant is there to assist the master in carrying out the master's plans, wishes, and activities. Sometimes being a servant involves carrying messages, accompanying someone, acting for the person, and doing menial jobs that need to be done. At other times it involves managing finances and households, but always the servant acts not to further his own ends but to further his master's.

Gehazi was the servant of prophet Elisha. Being a servant to a prophet was a unique privilege. It involved more than menial labor. It was a type of apprenticeship. Elisha himself had served as Elijah's servant (*1 Kings 19:19–21*). Although the job of prophet depended on a divine call, it would seem that this special time of serving together helped the would-be prophet develop his faith and trust in God. By serving his master Elijah, Elisha would be learning to put himself aside and serve others. This would prove to be the best qualification for any future ministry. We have no record of Gehazi's calling, but we will see the opportunities that he was given.

This servant idea is by no means restricted to Old Testament times. Jesus said that the willingness to be a servant was a prerequisite for any leadership position in the church (*Mark 9:35*).

Read John 13:1–17. How does this passage show the link between leadership and servanthood?

The disciples have been with Jesus for three years. They have learned from His teachings, they have even shared in His healing ministry, and yet they are not ready to go out as God's ambassadors. They were ready to learn in theory and enjoyed the association with Jesus, but they still were not prepared to put themselves aside and humbly serve one another.

How do we get the humility and the death to self needed in order to serve others? How do we learn to serve others with an attitude of seeking nothing back for ourselves?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *2 Kings 5:26, 27*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Identify Gehazi's great opportunities to learn ministry and his failures to do so.

Feel: Sense the disappointment and loss to the cause of God when a potential leader, such as Gehazi, turns to self-seeking.

Do: Resolve to accept and improve upon every opportunity to learn ministry and serve God's people.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Chance of Many Lifetimes

A Imagine the opportunity to serve as an apprentice to the prophet Elisha. What extraordinary experiences and lessons of faith did Gehazi have in his service to Elisha? How did he fail to benefit from these opportunities?

B What was the price Gehazi paid for his selfishness? Why was this sentence fair?

II. Feel: Lost Opportunities

A Despite Elisha's examples of selfless service, Gehazi never learned to give up his own interests in order to serve God's purposes. How did Gehazi's greed detract from the lessons about God that Elisha was attempting to impress on Naaman?

III. Do: Resolution to Serve

A We have more opportunities and models to learn servant leadership now than at any other time in earth's history. How can we improve upon the opportunities we've been given, especially considering our apprenticeship to Christ Himself, the greatest of teachers and role models?

B How can faith help us meet the temptation to be self-serving?

► **Summary:** Gehazi had many opportunities to witness selfless service and learn to minister; yet, he chose to serve his own interests.

Learning Firsthand

A good teacher teaches by example and gives plenty of opportunities for the student to apply what he or she is learning. Elisha was this type of teacher.

Read 2 Kings 4:8–17. What is Gehazi’s role in the narration? What opportunities is Elisha giving Gehazi?

The story of the woman of Shunem follows another miracle involving a woman. In 2 Kings 4:1–7, Elisha helps a widow clear her debts and keep her two sons from being sold into slavery. And now Elisha is on his way to Shunem. Given the general status of women in biblical times, it is strange that the narrator gives a married woman such status. Her husband’s name is not given. All we know is that he is consulted about the building of the guest room and that he is old, even though he still seems to be fit enough to supervise the harvesting of his fields. In the first part of the story Elisha actively involves Gehazi. He sends him to call the woman and includes Gehazi in his expression of thanks. He asks Gehazi’s opinion and acts on Gehazi’s suggestion. Gehazi rises to the occasion by being observant and showing sensitivity to the woman’s real needs. Elisha gives Gehazi the opportunity to initiate a miracle. Within a year the miracle child is born.

Read 2 Kings 4:18–31. What change in attitude do we see here in Gehazi as compared to what we saw in the previous story?

The miracle child is now a young boy. Gehazi is still Elisha’s servant, but something of the sensitivity he once had seems to be gone. When the woman arrives and brushes past him to grab hold of the feet of Elisha, Gehazi tries to push her away. He sees only the “rudeness” of the Shunammite woman, who oversteps any type of social convention in her action (*vss.* 25–27). He does not seem to be able to see her deep distress as does Elisha.

It sometimes is easy to be so self-centered and self-absorbed that we become insensitive to the feelings and needs of others. Who hasn’t been on both ends of that equation? How can you learn to be more sensitive to the feelings and needs of others? Also, how can you learn to bear gracefully the insensitivity of others toward you?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God calls us to be servants guided not by earthly enticements but by spiritual commitment to God and others.

Rabbinic tradition suggests that the lepers at the gate of Samaria who discovered the mysterious rout of Ben-hadad (*see 2 Kings 7:3–8*) were Gehazi and his sons. Even if inaccurate, the tradition illustrates the spiritual descent of Gehazi. Leprosy was understood as judgment from God, spiritual or physical punishment for moral failure. While Gehazi's story begins favorably, with his being portrayed as Elisha's faithful associate and somewhat overzealous protector (*2 Kings 4:27*), avarice overtakes him, rendering him a symbol of greed for succeeding generations. One simple character flaw destroyed what appeared to be unlimited future promise. What might have been? Elisha faithfully served Elijah, eventually succeeding him with decades of his own prophetic ministry. Might Gehazi, if faithful, have become Elisha's successor? Might the prophetic mantle have fallen on his shoulders? History records not mere speculations but what actually happened. Instead, Gehazi is remembered only for deceit, moneygrubbing, and receiving the curse of Naaman's leprosy. Opportunities for Christian servanthood are still being compromised today. If anything, materialism has strengthened, not weakened. What opportunities might we forfeit for the attraction of earthly enticements? Which embellishments are we embracing while sacrificing spiritual values?

Opening Activity: Many states have banned the use of cellular phones by motorists while driving because of safety considerations. What philosophy undergirds these restrictions? Discuss how driving distractions compromise safety, endangering pedestrians and other motorists. Make a spiritual application of your discussion. Analyze aspects of contemporary culture. Which ones interfere with our spiritual vision? Which serve as distractions to our divine assignments? Which distort our spiritual focus on service? How can Christians keep earthly enticements from sidetracking their spiritual development and servant focus? What consequences result from failing to serve?

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A Question of Faith

Read 2 Kings 5:1–19 and answer the following questions:

• Why did the king of Israel react as he did? Was his reaction reasonable or unreasonable? What did he really fear was going on?

• Why did Naaman react as he did to Elisha's command to him? What good reasons did he have for his reaction? In what ways did his reaction reflect the king of Israel's toward the letter?

• Read verse 12. What kind of logic is the captain using there? What mistake is he making?

• How does Naaman refer to himself before Elisha after the miracle happened? What does that say about him?

• Why do you think Elisha refused to take any money from the captain? Why would it be important that he not take any?

• Read carefully verses 17–19. What is going on here? How do we understand Naaman's request and Elisha's response to it?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 2—Explore****Bible Commentary****I. Learning Firsthand** (*Review 2 Kings 4:8–31 with your class.*)

Gehazi was uniquely privileged as Elisha’s prophetic associate. Very few individuals, according to the scriptural record, experienced resurrections firsthand. Gehazi, as Elisha’s trusted assistant, was one who personally witnessed divine resurrection power. Strange that he could experience divine authority in such close proximity but later commit the crimes he did. Common sense should have told Gehazi that the all-powerful God who conquered the grave was likewise all-knowing regarding his deceitfulness. Nevertheless, we must recognize Gehazi’s admirable qualities. He seems sensitive about the woman’s needs, and Elisha treats him as a trusted consultant.

However, later in the narrative, his attitude undergoes a subtle shift. His insensitivity toward the same woman, now distressed by her child’s death, is perhaps the initial sign of Gehazi’s self-centered nature.

Consider This: Which admirable qualities does Gehazi exhibit? How does self-centeredness usher in insensitivity?

II. Gehazi’s Fall (*Review 2 Kings 5:20–27 with your class.*)

Gehazi’s thoughts may be paraphrased, *This wealthy heathen felt obligated, and Elisha foolishly refused payment. A bright fellow like me shouldn’t allow golden opportunities to escape. There’s still time to catch Naaman, concoct a story that explains “Elisha’s change of heart,” and cash in.* Following his wicked instincts, Gehazi pursues Naaman’s party. Naaman’s heart still overflows with gratitude, and his generosity doubles Gehazi’s greedy request! The gift is large enough to require two servants to transport it. Fearing discovery, Gehazi immediately hides his ill-gotten gain. Hiding from the Lord proves futile. Elisha exposes the fraud, and Gehazi’s punishment is immediate.

Consider This: How does greed and financial gain influence the church and its membership today? What dangers are inherent in the belief that divine blessings and powers can be purchased with money? (Note also the story of Simon in Acts 8:12–24.) How may trusting our financial investments dilute

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Gehazi's Fall

It's hard, at least from our perspective today, to understand why characters in the Bible did what they did at times, especially in the face of so many miraculous events. The incredible healing of Naaman happened right before Gehazi. He saw not only the power of God but the actions of his master, who refused to take any money from the captain. One would think that would have been more than enough to humble him before God and man, but apparently it didn't.

Read 2 Kings 5:20–27. How did Gehazi, at least at first, rationalize his actions? What little bit of nationalism, or ethnic prejudice, is hinted at in Gehazi's thoughts?

The Bible is full of warnings against the love of money and the dangers of earthly possessions. These warnings are directed not only toward the wealthy. It is not the amount of material possessions that we have that is the problem but rather our attitude toward what we have. The battle against greed requires constant attention. We continually have to adjust our thoughts toward our possessions and surrender them to God. We can keep our perspective by consistently giving not only material possessions but also time. The love of material things blinds us to our true mission and purpose in life and in the end can cause our eternal ruin if we are not careful.

It is strange that Gehazi swears to himself by the living God and then goes off to deceive. Does he think that the living God does not see him? What a powerful testimony to the power of our own corrupt hearts to deceive us!

Naaman, meanwhile, is very generous about giving Gehazi the gifts, but he probably goes away with some questions, especially when his two servants return and report Gehazi's strange behavior. Gehazi has let his greed interfere with the witness that Elisha wants to give to this new convert.

Of course, in the end the same God who performed miracles revealed the truth to Elisha about what Gehazi did, and, just like that, his ministry and life were ruined.

It's very easy to underestimate the incredible hold that the love of money (*1 Tim. 6:10*) can have on us. What examples, from either biblical or nonbiblical history, can you think of in which money led to someone's ruin? How can we learn to protect ourselves from what can be a very dangerous temptation?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

our need to trust God? Why do some Christians today believe that they can keep their actions hidden from God?

III. Living on Leftovers *(Review 2 Kings 8:1–6 with your class.)*

Years have passed since Gehazi served the prophet Elisha. Remarkably, we find him conversing with the king. Apparently, Gehazi was not badly disfigured, or this audience with the royal court likely would not have occurred. His storytelling reaches back to the resurrection narrative involving the Shunammite woman's deceased son. This final encounter with Gehazi leaves a bittersweet taste. Happily, he remembers those life-transforming experiences that shaped the religious foundation of Israel. Sadly, he must also have remembered the grand opportunity he forfeited, all for the dubious increase of earthly riches.

Consider This: How valuable will earthly wealth seem during our twilight years if opportunities for faithful service have slipped through our fingers? What should we do daily to fortify ourselves against the temptation to exchange eternal principles for temporal advantages, or birthrights for porridge?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Within every heart, battles are waged between self-centeredness and spiritual commitment. Whenever commitment vanquishes that selfishness, the natural result is selfless service. Neither religious piety nor charismatic fervor makes an adequate substitute for Christian servanthood.

Activity: Read the following Jewish tale and discuss the connection between spirituality and service.

“In a small Jewish town in Russia, there is a rabbi who disappears each Friday morning for several hours. His devoted disciples boast that during those hours their rabbi goes up to heaven and talks to God.

“A stranger moves into town, and he's skeptical about all this, so he decides to check things out. He hides and watches. The rabbi gets up in the morning, says his prayers, and then dresses in peasant clothes. He grabs an axe, goes off into the woods, and cuts some firewood, which he then hauls to a shack on the outskirts of the village. There an old

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Living on Leftovers

We last hear of Gehazi in 2 Kings 8:1–6. What do we find the ex-servant of Elisha doing?

Many years have passed since the great miracle of the raising of the Shunammite's son. Gehazi's skin disease must not be too disfiguring, for we now find him in the royal court. Gehazi, Elisha's "ex-servant," is talking about what has been. He is bragging about Elisha and his miracles, and in doing so he is most likely reflecting on his own importance by his connection to Elisha.

We never may have heard of this storytelling session had it not been for the timing of this event. The biblical author tells us that at the precise time that Gehazi was telling about the miracle of the Shunammite's son being brought back to life, the Shunammite appears before the king. God in His providence uses Gehazi's bragging to help the woman of Shunem. The woman of Shunem is by now most probably a widow, as no mention is made of her husband, and it is unusual that a woman would appear before the king on such business instead of her husband. She is most likely in charge of her family until her son becomes of age. She has been out of the country for seven years during a severe drought. Having the right relationships and knowing the right people may be important and seen as advantageous from a human point of view, but God views things differently.

What relationship really counts, and why? *See Jer. 9:23, 24.*

And so Gehazi fades from history. The sad part of the story is the fact that Gehazi could have been doing God's work. He could have learned from Elisha. He could have been the next major prophet or perhaps a leader and teacher in the schools of the prophets. Now all he can do is speak about the good old days when he worked with the prophet. Gehazi could have been making history; now all he can do is live in the past.

We need to recount and remember God's dealing with us in the past. But at the same time, we need to be careful about dwelling on what happened in the past, at the expense of living correctly in the present. How do we strike a right balance here? How can dwelling too much on the past negatively influence our walk with the Lord today?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

woman and her sick son live. He leaves them the wood, enough for a week, and then sneaks back home.

“Having observed the rabbi’s actions, the newcomer stays on in the village and becomes his disciple. And whenever he hears one of the villagers say, ‘On Friday morning our rabbi ascends all the way to heaven,’ the newcomer quietly adds, ‘If not higher.’”—*Perfect Illustrations for Every Topic and Occasion* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002), p. 249.

Questions: Why does the newcomer not expose the fallacy of the “heavenly journey”? What attracted him to discipleship? What can we learn from the secrecy of the rabbi’s service? What were the rabbi’s followers trying to communicate through the boast that their rabbi spoke directly with God? How does serving others place us in intimate fellowship with our Redeemer? How does the figure of peasant’s clothing illustrate the servanthood of Christ? (*Hint: Compare Phil. 2:1–8.*) What does Matthew 25:31–46 say to those who desire the intimate fellowship with God illustrated in the parable of the rabbi?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Whether or not Gehazi would have been called into prophetic office is subject to speculation. Nevertheless, there was clearly a call to servanthood. This calling itself, apart from the specific prophetic calling, offered multiple opportunities for intimacy with God. Those opportunities remain open for Christians today who, likewise, have been called into spiritual service. Perhaps we have not witnessed bodily resurrections or experienced miracles that match Elisha’s; nevertheless, there exists abundant evidence for divine power in the daily sunrise, children’s laughter, the expansive universe, and discoveries through microscope and telescope. Gehazi witnessed firsthand miraculous wonders, including a bodily resurrection, but exchanged intimate fellowship with God for silver and clothing. How ridiculous these enticements appear when we remember that God Himself creates wealth and clothes the fields!

Activity 1: Read Matthew 6:24–34 together. Invite class members to provide illustrations from nature that reinforce the concept of a loving Eternal Provider. Discuss how fellowship with God resolves human worries regarding daily necessities.

Activity 2: Using the divine provision of manna as another talking point, connect God’s daily watchcare for Israel with the object lessons from nature, suggested by the class. Considering these things together, ask the class how we can learn to trust in God to provide for us, no matter how difficult our circumstances might be.

Further Study: “Solemn are the lessons taught by this experience of one to whom had been given high and holy privileges. The course of Gehazi was such as to place a stumbling block in the pathway of Naaman, upon whose mind had broken a wonderful light, and who was favorably disposed toward the service of the living God. For the deception practiced by Gehazi there could be pleaded no excuse. To the day of his death he remained a leper, cursed of God and shunned by his fellow men.

“ ‘A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.’ Proverbs 19:5. Men may think to hide their evil deeds from human eyes, but they cannot deceive God. ‘All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.’ Heb. 4:13. Gehazi thought to deceive Elisha, but God revealed to His prophet the words that Gehazi had spoken to Naaman, and every detail of the scene between the two men.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 252.

Discussion Questions:

① What are some of the warning signs that money or the pursuit of it is taking the place of God in our lives? How can we learn to use money and not let it use us? What role do tithing and giving offerings play in connection with the whole question of the influence and power of money over our lives?

② As a class, go over your response to the last question in Thursday’s study. What are the things that really matter in life, and why is it so easy to lose track of what really matters?

③ What reasons might have led Gehazi to think that he could get away with his deception? He knew God existed; he had seen miracles take place, some quite incredible, in fact. Yet, despite all this, he tried to deceive his master. Perhaps he had done similar things before and gotten away with it. Perhaps in his own mind he truly rationalized his actions. We don’t know. What we do know, however, is that it’s not that hard to deceive ourselves. What are ways we can learn to protect ourselves from falling into the same self-deception?

④ Go back to 2 Kings 5:17–19. What lessons should or should we not draw from Naaman’s request to Elisha about bowing down in the house of Rimmon?

⑤ What are some practical ways you can serve others?