Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

The Prophet of Abundant Life

Preface

These messages were originally given in a slightly modified form to the **Timothy School** students in North Africa over a 2-week period. The students were all believers from a Muslim background. But like many BMBs they struggled with how to interpret the Old Testament since, at first reading, it seems so 'anti-Arab'!

The purpose of the Timothy School was leadership development. One to the vital keys to understanding Scripture is to know that New Testament principles – often taught in a typical linear, logical, western way – can also be taught through Old Testament stories. Storytelling is often the very best way to teach Biblical truth in a non-western way.

Originally I told the story – i.e. the text you will read. Then the students broke up into discussion groups for about an hour. Each group had an animated discussion as to how to apply the truths they had learned from the story into their lives and their situation in North Africa. It was a privilege to see how the Spirit of God gave them insight into God's plans and purposes for them in their own culture and situation in North Africa.

These messages were later given to workers in various parts of the Muslim World - usually during annual retreats. These retreats are of varying lengths from a weekend to a week, so the maximum number of messages given at a retreat was usually seven. They would be selected from this library of seventeen messages.

I have repeatedly been asked to type them up and make them available to those who originally heard the messages. Here they are!

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

Introduction

Phil Parshall, in addition to writing about 'New Paths in Muslim Evangelism', contextualisation, Folk Islam and 'Bridges to the Sufis' etc. has challenged workers among Muslims to recognise the importance of their **spirituality**. He did a survey of the spirituality of workers among Muslims ~ 1990 and published the results in EMQ (Evangelical Missions Quarterly). Sadly our spirituality was woefully low!

In his book **The Cross and the Crescent** [subtitled Reflections on Christian-Muslim Spirituality] Parshall says, **"Is it too much to pray that these considerations will lead us Christians to hunger more for holiness and therefore cause us to become more powerful and effective witnesses to Muslims on behalf of Christ."**

Somehow in the early 21st century in all our discussions on methodology in evangelism and church planting, we have lost the emphasis on 'the beauty' of holiness.

In these talks on Elisha I will try and redress this imbalance. Where people see us living 'an abundant life'; where they see we have a 'crown of beauty instead of ashes' and 'a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair', then the splendour of the Lord will be seen in us!

So this series of talks is about ministering in the power of an 'abundant life'. In speaking to Muslims I have discovered the power of stories. People in the Muslim World love stories, remember stories and know the art of interpreting and applying stories into their own lives. In the life of Elisha there are eighteen stories. I will seek to unpack these stories in the context of ministering in the power of an 'abundant life'.

Curiously Muslim Fundamentalism promises Muslims abundance instead of poverty provided they live in submission to the Sunnah and the Shariah. Theirs is really a prosperity doctrine. But what they promise is a counterfeit of the real thing promised by Jesus in John 10:10.

1. Why study Elisha?

His days were vastly different from our days. Elisha lived in the mid-ninth century BC. We live at the beginning of the 21st century after Christ – a gap of nearly 3,000 years!

But Scripture says these stories are written:

- For our **instruction** and our **encouragement** (Rom. 15:4). They are not just stories and they are not just history. In many ways they are **parables**.
- As **a warning** (1 Cor. 10:6-13) – They show the consequences of doing what we should not:
  - Desiring evil
  - Being idolaters
  - Indulging in immorality
  - Grumbling and putting the Lord to the test

Even if nearly 3,000 years separate us from Elisha's time, the basics of life haven't changed. Life is the same, death is the same, love is the same, greed is the same and sin is the same.

Elisha was called to minister to the People of God in the Northern Kingdom. In the Northern Kingdom there was:

- **Widespread idolatry**: Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal who became King of Sidon by murdering his predecessor and who combined royalty with being chief priest of Astarte, was introducing the worship of Baal into the Northern Kingdom. She was doing this with a fanaticism, a firmness and a fierceness that was astonishing. Queen Jezebel hated the worship of the true God and was doing her utmost to uproot His worship from the land.

Baal was essentially an agricultural God who gave them rain. This led to good crops that, in turn, made them rich. In most rural communities in the Muslim World, 'Allah' is worshipped for the same reason.

- **Widespread materialism**: Archaeologists tell us that the ninth century BC was a period of prosperity in the Northern Kingdom. For most people the goal of life was wealth, power and prestige – i.e. they wanted success!

  Are we living in a very different day? Communism stated: **all there is, is matter**. Secular materialists say that **all that matters is matter**. So the People of God were idolatrous and materialistic.

- **Widespread immorality**: Cultic immorality encouraged a rapid degradation of society.

Are there parallels with your situation? Is the state promoting and supporting a false truth? Is there strong opposition to the preaching of the truth? Is there political and physical harassment of faithful believers?

Into this rebellious society God sent His servant Elisha. We might think that God would only be concerned with the 'purer' Southern Kingdom, Judah, and would wash His hands of the depraved, separated Northern Kingdom. But no! He kept on sending His servants: Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea and others to the People of God in the North. Why?

In his book, **Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners**, John Bunyan has this marvellous statement about his own conversion, **"I turned to see Him and I saw Him pursuing me with a pardon in His hand."**

God pursues us to give us His great grace and mercy. He sends His prophets with a message of mercy and restoration and abundant life. In the Old Testament Elisha stands out as the Prophet of Abundant Life.

2. Abundant Life

This is the life that knows God's personal blessing. It knows victory over sin and, in turn, it reproduces blessing and life in others. Remember the promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:2: ***"I will bless you and you will be a blessing …."*** This is a life lived through the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

Please note:

- Abundant life is possible for every believer who believes: ***"I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly."*** (Jn. 10:10)
- Every provision has been made for us to have abundant life: ***"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him …."*** (2 Pet. 1:3)

  What has been provided?

  - God has given us His Son: ***"He who did not spare His Own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"*** (Rom. 8:32)
  - God has given us His Spirit: ***"And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us."*** (Rom. 5:5)
  - God has given us His Word: ***"For everything that was written was to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have <u>hope</u>."*** (Rom. 15:4)

The tragedy in the Muslim World is that many workers fail to live this abundant life! There is:

- Fear and frustration
- Defeat and depression
- Bitterness and breakdown
- Burnout and melt down

But praise God! There is **an awareness** that we are living below the level promised in Scripture. That is why we have retreats!

In Eph. 4:17-32 there is an outline of the various ways a believer may fail to live the 'abundant life'. One of the commands in this passage is, ***"Be made new in the attitude of your minds".***

So be determined to **be made new** in your mind and thus enabled to live the 'abundant life'.

3. The life and ministry of Elisha illustrate what it means to live the 'abundant life'

Elisha was Elijah's successor. For nine years he assisted Elijah until God entrusted him with the full responsibility of the task He had committed to him.

These two great men are alike in some respects. Both did great miracles, both lived in a time of apostacy and both ministered in the Northern Kingdom. Both were channels of blessing to needy people. There are also marked differences between these two men and their ministries.

Elijah is shown to us as a stern, lonely, rugged prophet of fire. Elisha is shown to us as the prophet of gentleness, winsomeness and vision. Elijah is suddenly brought before us and we know little of his background and his preparation for the great ministry God had called him to. Elisha is introduced in a very different way:

- Before his call he was busy in the fields with 12 yoke of oxen. (1 Kings 19:19)
- He asked Elijah for a double portion of Elijah's spirit – power to fully represent his risen master after his ascension.
- When he purified the water at Jericho it was permanently sweetened. (2 Kings 2:19-22)
- When the three armies were dying of thirst in the desert, Elisha dealt with the situation and there was an abundance of water.
- The poor widow in terrible distress had her needs met and "all the pots were full".
- The son of the woman of Shunem was restored to life.
- The students who faced "death in the pot" experienced a wonderful, palatable and nourishing meal due to Elisha's intervention.
- In obedience to the prophet's command a leprous Syrian general was cleansed and, ***"His flesh came again like the flesh of a little child and he was clean***".
- The grief-stricken student who lost his cutting edge had it restored.
- The eyes of the terrified servant were opened in an hour of fear and, ***"Behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha"***.
- Elisha prophesied an abundance of food in a time of horrible famine.

These are some of the stories we will look at in detail. Elisha lived a life of many difficulties, problems and harassments but there was no insufficiency, no inadequacy and no inferiority. 2 Kings 8:4 summarizes ***"All the great things that Elisha did"*** and around all these stories is the note of abundance – abundant life!

Today we are faced with most of the counterparts of the problems faced in these stories. I hope that our study will give us a glorious assurance that the power of God is sufficient to solve every baffling situation and to meet every need.

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to the power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever Amen."

Summary: The purpose of these studies is:

1. To look at the life and ministry of Elisha and to understand the vital secret of his effective ministry – the power of resurrection life overcoming death and blight.
2. To apply the principles of Elisha's life to our own.
3. To bring to others a conscious appropriation of the risen life of Christ so that they too can live an abundant life.

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

1. Elisha's Call to Service - 1 Kings 19:15-21

A. The call to be a servant

1. Elisha was an unlikely person for God to call.
2. Elisha's call was clear, definite and unmistakable and it came through Elijah.
3. It was a call to follow **a person**.
4. The vision, plan and programme were gradually revealed later.
5. Elisha received his call while working faithfully. How did God prepare Elisha?
   - Godly parents
   - Good training – farming
     - ✓ hard work
     - ✓ varied work
     - ✓ team work
     - ✓ accountable work
6. Elisha didn't attempt to enter into God's work until God called him.
7. What really constitutes the call of God?
   - The need isn't a sufficient reason
   - The opportunity is not a call
   - The ability is not a call
   - The desire is not a call
   - Invitation by man is not a call

B. The cost of being a servant

1. Elisha's response to God's call:
   - Speed
   - Determination
   - Devotion
2. Elisha was called to a difficult job
3. Elisha recognised the cost
4. The cost was represented by:
   - The killing of the oxen and the burning of the plough
   - The feast

C. The commitment to be a servant

1. It was a commitment to follow fully
2. It was a commitment to serve faithfully

D. The compensation in being a servant

1. The presence of his master
2. The power of the Holy Spirit
3. The performance of miracles to the blessing of many

Conclusion

identified – inspired - involved

1. Elisha's Call to Service - 1 Kings 19:15-21

Introduction

A key quality in Elisha is that he was **a servant** leader.

"Elisha ... is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah". (2 Kings 3:11)

He is a model of what we are called to be in our ministry in the Muslim World.
To live out an abundant life you need to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

We will look at four different aspects of the call of God to a life of service:

1. The call to be a servant
2. The cost
3. The commitment
4. The compensation

A. The call to be a servant

I would like you to notice several points:

1. **Elisha was an unlikely person for God to call into service**. Look at verses 15-16. Notice who Elisha was and what he was doing when the call of God came to him (v. 19). Elijah's successor was a ploughman!

   An unlikely successor? Yes, but this is God's pattern!

   Moses (Ex. 3:1) an 80 year old shepherd
   Gideon (Judges 6:11) a frightened, angry young man threshing wheat
   David (Ps. 78:70) a young multi-talented shepherd boy
   Amos (Amos 7:14) another shepherd

   Paul summarized God's choices in 1 Cor. 1:26-29:

   "Brothers think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things – the things that are not – to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before Him."

   The truth is that God's call comes unexpectedly and to unlikely people. This is illustrated throughout the Bible and is the experience of God's people in every generation. It is the experience of all in our company.

   Notice Elisha didn't do anything to merit him being called! It starts in the mind of God. Elijah is sent a long way to find Elisha. Abel-melo-lah is in the Jordan valley at the edge of the hills of Gilead. It is a long way from Horeb (~ 350 miles), but not so far from Tishbe where Elijah came from. The message about his successor was given to the lonely, frightened Elijah on Horeb after his great collapse.

   Elisha is **privileged to be called. He didn't seek; he was sought!** So are we. But notice that God always works with people. The call is **always identified with a person**. And we are called to identify with **another Person**. We are never called just to a task or a place.

   Oswald Chambers wrote, **"The end and aim of all discipleship is a personal and passionate devotion to Jesus Christ."** The call of the Lord Jesus is very clear: ***"Follow Me"***. John Calvin said, **"I gave up all for Christ and what have I found? I have found everything in Christ!"**

Mark 3:11 gives a clear order – first love and devotion to Jesus **then** ministry.

"He ordained twelve that they should be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach."

2. **Elisha's call was clear, definite and unmistakable and it came to him through Elijah.**

   We need to recognise that God, who Himself is the Director of all His work, chooses, selects and commissions men and women for His service. He does this definitely and clearly. He does it in answer to prayer (Mt. 9:38) and in the context of prayer – as in this case and also in Acts 13:1-4.

   However the call often comes indirectly as it did to Elisha who received his commission **through** Elijah. It may come indirectly through a preacher or through a book etc. How do you know that God has called you?

   - **A continuing thought**: The Holy Spirit will **continuously** bring this "calling" to a place or to a ministry to mind. If it is a transient thought, it might not be from God.
   - **A convicting word**: The thought needs to be substantiated by Scripture. God will speak to you through His Word reinforcing that thought.
   - **A confirming of circumstances**: by your gifts and abilities and your health, but also, importantly, your church leaders and other mature Christians who know you well will confirm the call.

3. **It was a call to follow a person.**

   Notice the similarities between Jesus and Elijah:

   - ✓ Both righteous – for Elijah see James 5:16-18
   - ✓ Both rejected – in Elijah's case by the king and his wife
   - ✓ Both threatened
   - ✓ Both risen men! – for Elijah see 2 Kings 2

   So Elisha was called to follow and be identified with Elijah. We are called to follow and be identified with Jesus.

   So the rugged Elijah, the hero of Mount Carmel, strides up to Elisha while he is actually ploughing!

4. **The vision, plan and programme were gradually revealed later.**

   Again the call of service is always identified:

   - **With a person** – first and foremost
   - **With a plan/vision** – he was summoned for a prophetic ministry ***"Elisha … a prophet in your place."*** (1 Kings 19:15-16)
   - **With a programme** – but the programme is **gradually revealed** and **gloriously realised**. It was supernatural, vital and personal.

5. **Elisha received his call while he was faithfully working at the plough.**

   God had been preparing Elisha. To minister to an idolatrous, materialistic and immoral society God needed a man with a true sense of spiritual values – some-one who really loved the Lord. How did God prepare Elisha?

   - He gave him Godly parents: Elisha's parents gave him his name – "God is salvation" – not Ba'al. Just from his name everyone knew where his parents stood about their convictions and what their priorities were.
   - He gave him good training – a ploughman – a farmer: why is farming good training?

- ✓ **It is hard work**: Elisha was used to the hard work of farming in the Jordan valley – it's hot! It was good preparation for the strenuous hard work of being the Lord's servant. Nothing is wasted in the economy of God. He uses everything – even our mistakes.
- ✓ **It is varied work**: ploughing, sowing, weeding, reaping, stacking, selling, looking after the animals. In the future there would be great variety in Elisha's ministry – from King's palaces to humble little huts.
- ✓ **It is teamwork**: ploughing with 12 yoke of oxen required much skill! Many others were involved in the work of the farm. Elisha was the 12th son. Unlike Elijah, he wasn't used to being solitary or working on his own. Later he was to gather round himself a whole school of "the sons of the prophets".
- ✓ **It is accountable work**: the farm belonged to Shapet - his father.

Was Elisha unsettled in being a farmer's boy? Was he longing to get into "full time service"? Did he volunteer? We don't know, but we do know that he was **faithfully** doing his present job of work. This is nearly always the attitude of those God calls and leads into fuller and greater service for Him. The principle is that if you are wholeheartedly doing your present service as unto the Lord, then you are in God's school (make the most of this time of training) and He is preparing you for further service.

6. **Elisha didn't attempt to enter into his ministry until God had called him.**

Elisha didn't appoint himself! Michael Griffiths has often pointed out that one of the great weaknesses of the modern missionary movement (1800 onwards) is that it is based on 'volunteerism'. The problems this has caused have increased with the increasing individualism of our culture.

Elisha didn't say, *"I think I would enjoy being a prophet. It fits my personality!"* It was only when he was absolutely sure of God's call that he left the plough and his family to follow Elijah in obedience to the Lord.

7. **What really constitutes the call of God to 'our company' or to any other agency?**

- **The need is not a sufficient reason**. The need is everywhere. The need cannot constitute a calling from God.
- **The opportunity is not a call**. There are a huge number of opportunities for serving the Lord, but by itself an opportunity is not enough to be a call.
- **The ability is not a call**. We may be physically and mentally qualified, but this is not a call.
- **The desire is not the call**. We may have a burning desire to serve the Lord, but let us beware lest we move before we have His word of command.
- **The invitation is not necessarily the call**. Some 'Elijah' may come to us, but we must make sure that it is God's invitation to us – God's voice through the human one.

The call of God is that deep, inner conviction - accompanied by God's peace in our hearts and confirmed by God's Word - that He would have us do a certain work in a certain place.

Elijah's casting of his mantle on Elisha was the work of a few seconds, but it was a turning point in Elisha's spiritual history. It was the great crisis in his life. If he had failed here, he would have missed God's plan.

Our lives – as far as usefulness is concerned – are either made or lost by our ability to discern God's call when it comes, for we are really only useful in the place where God would have us.

B. The cost of being a servant

1. **How did Elisha respond to God's call?**
   1 Kings 19:20-21 is a model of how we should respond to God's call to serve. How should we respond?

   - **With speed!**

     Elisha immediately left his oxen and ran after Elijah. Compare Philip's reaction in Acts 8:29-30: ***"The Holy Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join this chariot' and Philip immediately ran to the chariot."***
     It is lovely to see immediate, rapid obedience.

   - **With determination**

     There is always a cost in becoming a disciple. There is always **a cost** that **accompanies** the call. The call is not to suffering or pain. No, the call is to follow a person, but it is often accompanied by hardship and persecution. The essence of discipleship is following Jesus.

2. **Elisha was called to a most difficult task**

   God's calls are **always** difficult – impossible without His power! Elijah had to anoint three people: (v. 16)

   Hazael as king of the Arameans (Syrians)

   Jehu as king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel

   Elisha as the prophet to succeed Elijah

   Hazael was going to start attacking Israel and people would be killed. Those who escaped Hazael's sword would encounter Jehu's sword. Those who avoided Jehu would have to reckon on Elisha! Elisha was called to a ministry of judgement.

   Nor could it have been easy to be Elijah's assistant for about nine years! Jezebel was out to kill Elijah. His assistant was likely to be murdered as well!

   Once we respond to God's call we become involved in spiritual warfare. We are marked men and women – specific targets for the enemy. We need the two qualities that make up determination - **stability** of purpose and **stickability**.

3. **The cost?**

   - ✧ Lawful pleasures that have become too engrossing – sports perhaps or the theatre or other fine arts
   - ✧ Luxurious habits, indulgencies and luxuries that enfeeble the muscles of the soul
   - ✧ Business relationships and social associations that entangle the 'happy warriors' of God
   - ✧ Positions of power and influence – seats of honour that must be weighed in the balance and possibly jettisoned to lighten 'the ship' and make us more responsive to the wind of the Holy Spirit
   - ✧ Self must be removed if we would follow Jesus.

   Elisha recognised the cost: to leave his family – the security of a job – the comfort of home – i.e. to leave his comfort zone.

   "Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, no-one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for Me and the Gospel, will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields and without persecutions) and in the age to come – eternal life.' "
   (Mk. 10:29-30)

Gladys Aylward left a message under her pillow just before she left for China. Her mother found it on Oct. 15, 1932. It read, **"He that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me".**

4. **How the cost was represented**

- By the slaying of the oxen for a feast and the burning of the plough. The oxen and the plough were symbols of Elisha's old way of life. Elisha burned the plough to ashes. (v. 21) There was to be no turning back. Elisha "burned his boats" like Julius Caesar's army in the invasion of Britain in 54 BC.
- **But the cost was also joyfully represented.** Elisha had a great farewell banquet – a feast. So often the cost of discipleship is portrayed as something sad, gloomy and devoid of joy – Not so! Elisha didn't embrace the cost only with determination, but also with joy and gladness. Like the man who discovered a treasure in a field and with joy sold all that he had in order to gain the treasure.

Finally Elisha obeyed with devotion and commitment.

C. The commitment in being a servant

1. **It was a commitment to follow fully.** (v. 21)

   "Then he arose and followed Elijah ...." Like the disciples in Lk. 5:11, ***"And when they had brought their boats to the land, they left everything and followed Him."***

   Later Peter made a statement - in over self-confidence but still as the essence of commitment to follow Jesus, ***"I will lay down my life for your sake."*** (Jn. 13:37)

   We are, ***"Those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes."*** (Rev. 14:4) Wherever Elijah went, Elisha followed and so should we. We should follow the Lord Jesus.

2. **It was a commitment to serve faithfully.**

   "Then he arose and followed Elijah and <u>served him</u>!"

   This is a word often used of the priesthood (see Ex. 28:1,3,4). It is used of Samuel serving the Lord in the Temple. (1 Sam. 2:18; 3:1) So Elisha served Elijah – probably in a series of menial tasks. 2 Kings 3:11 speaks of him pouring water on the hands of Elijah – a slave's job.

   But no matter how humble the duty, Elisha served faithfully. The New Testament puts a very high premium on faithfulness of service.

Mt. 25:23 – After the story of the talents: ***"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.' "***

1 Cor. 4:2 – ***"Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."***

Col. 1:7 – ***"You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant who is a faithful minister of Christ ...."***

Rev. 2:10 – ***"Be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life."*** [Letter to the church in Smyrna]

God requires and rewards faithfulness.

D. The compensation in being a servant

We have looked at God's call with its commitment and cost. Finally I would like to look at the in-built compensation.

In the Mark 10:29-30 passage Jesus promises that there is a glorious compensation for those who fully forsake and fully follow.

What was the compensation for Elisha?

- The presence of his master
- The power of the Holy Spirit
- The performance of an effective ministry (miracles) to the blessing of many

Conclusion

To live an abundant life you must assume your responsibilities as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus has cast upon us His mantle. The call to discipleship is a call to:

- Be **identified** with Jesus Christ
- Then to be **inspired** by a plan/vision
- Finally to be **involved** in a programme

The cost of discipleship must be accepted gladly. There needs to be a life committed to Jesus in service. Then the promised compensation begins to become a reality.

Robert Murray McCheyne wrote, **"I feel persuaded that if I could follow the Lord more fully myself, my ministry would be used to make a deeper impression than it has done!"**

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

2. Elisha's Anointing for Ministry – The Double Portion - 2 Kings 2:1-14

A. Introduction

The problem of powerlessness and ineffectiveness in God's work

The relationship of 'being anointed' to the call to discipleship

Anointing is for:

- The battle
- The body
- Blindness

Four Steps

B. The desire and determination to be anointed (v. 1-7)
The apparent desire of Elijah that Elisha should stop following him
Abundant evidence of the difficulties ahead
Adverse criticism from God's people

C. Identification and union (v.3-8)
The place – over Jordan
The people – Elijah and Elisha
Elijah's question – asked on Resurrection Ground
The power of the Holy Spirit

D. The prayer of Elisha (v.9)
Received from his ascended master
The gift of the Spirit of God
Received for service

E. Action (v. 10-14)
Abandonment of old clothes
Putting on the new
Using the anointing

Elisha's Anointing for Ministry – The Double Portion - 2 Kings 2:1-14

"And Elisha said, 'Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me' ". (2 Kings 2:9)

"The supply/provision of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus" (Phil. 1:19)

" ... How much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Lk. 11:13)

"Be filled with the Spirit." (Eph. 5:13)

Introduction

Among us as believers today there is a great deal of impotence and ineffectiveness. We are busy but ineffective. In this area of anointing for ministry there is a great deal of confusion, exaggeration and perhaps more extreme views than in other areas of spirituality. This is an undoubted demonic strategy to weaken us. At issue is: 'what is your paradigm (model) of spiritual power?'

Power is often made into an end in itself. Someone might say, "I have the power" – as if this is the summit of Christian experience. Usually this form of power is used for manipulation, for personal advancement and to gain group approval in order to be seen as successful.

The purpose of our study together is to experience spiritual power communicated by the Holy Spirit to us believers **on the basis of our union with the Lord Jesus**.

Note in 1 Kings 19 there was the call of Elisha to **discipleship** and here in 2 Kings 2 there is his **enduement with power**. There were several years between these two events - ~ nine years. The time period between these events is not important, but the two events are necessary and are separate/distinct. However both events could happen at the same time. In 1 Kings 19 we see Elisha's great act of surrender in response to the call of God on his life. In 2 Kings 2 Elisha is **equipped** to fulfil his call. **One is an act of emptying and the other an act of filling**. Both are necessary! Don't just emphasise the one.

Step One: **abandonment** – forsaking all – surrender of the will – death to the old nature

Step Two: **appropriation** of the fullness of the Holy Spirit

So we **let go** in order to take hold. To give up, to surrender, and to deny self is but the prelude to receiving and possessing that which is far better!

So in 2 Kings 2 Elisha is not seeking the light – the truth – for he has already found that. What Elisha is seeking is **abundant** life! He wants the Holy Spirit to possess him.

The demands of Christian work require us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You only relinquish in order to receive. I believe it is a great mistake to preach 'forsaking all' and the 'call to missions' without an equal emphasis on preaching the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

We will look at the **four steps** Elisha took in order to receive 'the double portion' of power and anointing. But first we need to look at a brief survey of the Old Testament to discover **the purpose of the anointing**.

Under the Old Covenant only prophets, priests and kings were anointed. Under the New Covenant anointing is available to all believers. See Joel 2:28, ***"I will pour out my Spirit on all people ...."*** . In the Old Testament there are at least three reasons given for the anointing.

- **Anointing is for battle**

  "For behold your enemies, O Lord ... shall perish; all evil doers shall be scattered ..... For You have poured over me fresh oil." (Ps. 92: 9-10)

  See the story of Gideon in Judges 6:34, ***"But the Spirit of the Lord clothed Himself with Gideon"***. This gave him the courage to raise an army and attack the Midianites. Again in Judges 14, Samson (v. 5) was being attacked by a lion that came roaring towards him, ***"Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion to pieces*** .....".
  In all Samson's succeeding battles, he is the only man in Scripture who fought without a weapon!

  When we are going into the spiritual battle we need the **anointing** of the Holy Spirit. With His anointing we can be sure of victory. So the anointing enables us to be strong in battle and to be victorious. [See also Is. 45:1-3]

  But the anointing of the Holy Spirit not only enables us to be strong in spiritual warfare, it also **protects and shields us in the battle**. Is. 21:5 gives an instruction to the princes that they were to prepare for war, ***"Arise O Princes, oil*** (or anoint) ***the shields for battle."*** Oiling your shield makes the leather covering supple so that blows from swords and arrows glance off.

  So anointing **prepares us for battle**, it **protects us in the battle** from all the flaming arrows of the enemy and it also **strengthens us in the battle**.

- **Anointing is for the body** (Ps. 133)

  Our relationships are constantly being pressured by the Evil One. The anointing of the Holy Spirit makes us smell nice so we enjoy being together. It brings about unity.

- **Anointing is for blindness** (Ps. 119:18)

  "Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things out of your law."

  Jesus anointed blind eyes. Anointing enables us to see Scripture in new ways (Lk. 10:21-24)

The Four Steps to receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit

Step 1: Desire and Determination (2 Kings 2:1-7)

From this passage you can sense Elisha's desire and determination to have the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Elisha and Elijah both sensed that Elijah was coming to the end of his ministry on earth. Others, such as the sons of the prophets, were aware of this as well. Born out of this awareness was an intense longing in the mind of Elisha for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. The double portion was the inheritance of the firstborn. Elisha longed to continue and expand the ministry of bringing revival again to the Northern Kingdom. **This desire was tested in three ways**:

- **The apparent desire of Elijah to stop Elisha following him**

  Three times – at Gilgal, at Bethel and at Jericho – Elijah told Elisha to stay behind. But Elisha knew this trip was going to end in glory for one of them and for the other – his heart's desire. In effect Elisha replied to Elijah, *"I will never leave you. I am determined to be with you to the end. My calling from God was to serve you and I will not turn back now!"*

  Elijah was testing Elisha. So often God tests us in order to strengthen the desire for God's blessings in our lives. Often our lives seem to be a grindstone grinding us into little bits – problems, difficulties, hardships, disappointments all conspire to discourage us. They shrink our determination and desire and reduce our hunger for God's blessings on and in our lives and work so we can see the fulfilment of the vision He has given to us.

  Never accept appearances! Keep pressing on. Let the problems and difficulties magnify your desire to be anointed/filled with the Spirit of God – ***"Filled up with all the fullness of God"***. (Eph. 3:19) Satan will try everything to try and shrink your faith and your vision so you sink back into passivity.

- **The abundant evidence of difficulties ahead if Elisha was to take over Elijah's role**

  It is a long climb up from Gilgal to Bethel and a long way down to Jericho. Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho each had a rich spiritual past, but each was now a spiritual desert having become centres of idolatry. It was in these towns and others like them that Elisha was to get involved in carrying out his prophetic ministry.

  Elisha had a good view and probably fresh insights as to the problems he would have to face if he was to have an effective ministry in these places.

  Many start with a degree of romanticism about work in the Muslim World or in some other hard place. They quickly get discouraged when confronted by the strength and grip the powers of darkness have on the hearts, minds and even the bodies of the people.

  Then there are other problems as well – personal problems, family problems, team problems, language and cross cultural problems, church problems, political instability etc. This host of apparently insurmountable problems starts to bring defeat, dismay and despair into their hearts. The desire for the anointing of God is quenched. The desire for the fullness of God in their lives giving them the ability to overcome all the problems is drowned. Vision and faith die. People lapse into passivity or become part of the attrition!

  "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction so that, through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope!" (Rom. 15:4)

- **Adverse criticism by God's people**

  Both at Bethel and at Jericho others – believers and prophetic leaders – hinted to Elisha that he should go home. It is hard to take discouragement given to us by other Christians, but sadly it is quite common!

  Remember William Carey was told to sit down by the leaders of his denomination when his heart was stirred by the needs of a lost world. Praise God he was not discouraged and went to India – the Father of Western Missions.

  Remember the ministry of John Wesley. During his lifetime 603 books were written against him and his ministry as well as innumerable articles and pamphlets. Apparently Wesley was too fanatical and emotional and he had a host of other similar 'sins'. But the anointing of God was on his ministry and the Great Awakening occurred through his ministry and that of others.

  Do you have a deep-seated desire to have a double portion? Are you prepared to follow the Master no matter what opposition you may meet or what criticism is aimed against you? Stuart Briscoe was once asked how you identify pioneers in the work of God. He said it was easy, *"Just notice the people walking around with arrows sticking out of their backs – they are the pioneers."* These are the arrows shot at them from their own side – 'friendly fire'! Expect it.

  A passionate desire and a holy determination are absolutely essential if you are to receive 'the double portion'.

Step Two: Identification and Union (v. 8-9)

If we are to receive God's fullness there must be an identification and union with the Lord Jesus. This is a concept that is hard to understand. This story helps! Notice two things in this story.

- **The place 'the double portion' is received is over Jordan**

  Symbolically in Scripture the River Jordan is the place of the power of sin and death. For us in New Covenant times the power and the dominion of our **self-life** must be **broken before** we can enter into the freedom, the fellowship and the fruitfulness of the **abundant life**. This is the message of Roy Hession's book **Calvary Road** – read

by many of us. Jordan must be crossed. To remain on the wrong side of Jordan is to remain in the desert of unfruitfulness.

- **The people involved: Elijah and Elisha together**

  Symbolically Elijah is the representative of the Lord Jesus – Our Master. Elisha represents us. Notice that Elijah and Elisha crossed Jordan **together** (2 Kings 2:8). They both crossed on **dry ground**! The implication is that they both passed through death but it had no power over them!

  Romans 6 teaches us that our union and our identification is with the Lord Jesus - it is the means by which the power of sin and death is broken in our lives - for when the Lord Jesus died on the Cross, we died with Him.

  During World War II, Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones was asked when he was going to preach a series of expository sermons on the Book of Romans. He replied, **"When I have really understood chapter 6."** In 1954 he finally felt he had a grip on chapter 6 or rather it has gripped him! In October 1955 he began a weekly series on the whole of the epistle that continued until 1968! I attended these lectures for 3 years while I was a student in London.

  In his book **The Normal Christian Life**, Watchman Nee tells of reading Romans 6 and fervently praying, "Lord open my eyes". He writes, **"Then in a flash I saw it – my oneness in Christ and that when He died I died. I saw the question of my death was a matter of the past and not the future and that I was just as truly dead as He was because I was in Him when He died."** He was so excited and carried away with joy that he ran out into the streets of Shanghai shouting, **"Praise the Lord! I'm dead!"**

  When the Lord Jesus died He broke the power of sin and death for death had no power over Him. He crossed "Jordan" on the dry land. When we identify ourselves with the Lord Jesus we can pass over Jordan as well – untouched by it – for the law of sin and death has been broken.

  "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? We were buried therefore with Him in baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:3-7)

  "Give thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." (Col. 2:12)

Step Three: The proposal of Elijah and the prayer of Elisha

"Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you."

This is an amazing question! God asks us the same question, *"What can I do for you?"* Notice God only asks us this question when we are on **resurrection ground** – when we have crossed Jordan – when we are raised together with the Lord Jesus: ***"... raised us up together with Him and seated us with Him in heavenly places in Christ ..."*** (Eph. 2:6)
If we remain on the wrong side of Jordan we are still carnal with carnal thoughts and desires. If we are in such a state God will never ask us this question.

The power of the Holy Spirit is always linked to the power of the Cross. Elisha's sphere of service in the future was back over the other side of Jordan in the land of bondage to sin and death. Elisha has to cross back over to the other side - but again it was on dry land. The implication is clear. The power and the anointing of the Holy Spirit is always vitally related to our identification with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. There can be no effective service that does not begin at the Cross where life triumphed over death and where purity and holiness conquered sin. Phil. 3:10 speaks of, ***"The power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering."***

So identification with the Lord Jesus is absolutely vital but it is **not sufficient**, for we must answer God's question: "What can I do for you?" Elisha's answer was, ***"Let a double portion of your spirit be upon me."*** So it is a definite request for the Holy Spirit's fullness. The implication is, "I need to be fully equipped to fully represent my ascended Master in the ministry I am called to fulfil." It was a request to be equipped to be effective.

Notice three things about the 'double portion':

- **It was received after his master ascended to heaven.**

  This principle is often taught in the New Testament – Eph. 4:8, ***"When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives and He gave gifts to men ...."*** [See also Lk. 24:49; Jn. 7:37-39; Acts 1:8; 2:33]

- **He asked for the gift of the Spirit of God.**

  Elisha didn't ask for **power**. Power is never given to a believer independently of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. There is no power without the Holy Spirit for God's work is not accompanied by force or by power but by God's Spirit (Zech. 4:6). So Elisha doesn't want power. He wants the Powerful One. He had noticed in Elijah a dynamic. He had sensed that Elijah, like Samson, was clothed with power from on high. Now Elisha at this point in the beginning of his ministry knew that he needed 'a double portion' of that ***"clothing with power from on high."***

  Our Elijah – the Lord Jesus – received that anointing with the Holy Spirit before He began His public ministry (Lk. 3:22; 4:1; Jn. 3:34).

- **This power is essential for service.**

  We need the power of the Holy Spirit for effective service. Power is not an end in itself. It is always a means to an end and the end is that God should be glorified.

  Power is given for humble service. Power is given to enable us to be overcomers in the place where we are. Power is given so we can represent God's cause and God's name wherever we are. Power is **not** given to make us famous! It is given to make us **fruitful**. Power is not given to make us **eminent** workers, but to make us **effective** workers.

Step Four: Action (v. 10-14)

The final requirement to obtain a 'double portion' is **appropriation leading to action**. Elijah's final words to Elisha were, ***" ... if you see me taken up then the answer is 'yes'! You have what you asked for!"*** And Elisha saw and believed! There is a vital principle here! **Keep your eyes fixed on your taken-up Master**. This was the one condition imposed on Elisha, ***"If you see me, it will be so!"*** So Elisha was to be **completely occupied with a vision of his risen master and not with the falling mantle!**

The anointed Lord Jesus seated at the Father's right hand, having received from Him the promise of the Holy Spirit for each member of His body – His church – is the source and channel through whom the anointing reaches us. **Therefore** we must look to the anointed Lord Jesus in the place of power in the Father's presence. Let us open our eyes to see the Lord Jesus as the One who will share the full outpouring of His Spirit. We must be occupied with the Giver not with the gift. **Then** ***"out of our emptiness will flow rivers of Living Water."*** (Jn. 7:38) Always remember that the anointed Lord Jesus is the full reservoir of power. As we abide in His presence – seeing Him – with nothing between, **then** there will be a ceaseless flow of anointing from the Anointed One.

And the mantle fell! Elisha received 'the double portion'! Notice what happened next!

- **Abandonment of the old** (v. 12)

  Elisha tore his own clothes in two pieces. The old clothes are symbolic of the old life. He was finished with the past. He let go of all that was his own in order to receive what belonged to his Master. Col. 3:8 says, ***"But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie seeing that you have put off the old self ...."***.

  Spiritually tearing our clothes corresponds to stripping ourselves of our own power and ability – everything that relates to self – in order that we may be clothed with the Spirit of God.

Many believers mourn over the powerlessness and failure in their service. They want to tear up their clothes. They realise the sentence of death is on all their efforts. They know they must die to themselves. But this is only part of the truth. It was essential that Elijah's mantle was not put over Elisha's old mantle. The old had to go before the new could be put on. The mantle of God is not a supplement but a substitute.

- **Appropriation** (v. 13)

  Elisha took up the mantle of Elijah and put it on. He took up and made his own the symbol of Elijah's prophetic ministry. He was now going to minister in the power of his ascended master.

  God wants to strip off the old so that He can ***"clothe us with power from on high"***. When this happens there is no longer any confidence in the flesh or in our natural abilities. Now we are empty, available, dependant channels. The power of the Holy Spirit can be poured into us and all the fullness of God can flow through us.

- **Action** (v. 14)

  Elisha hit the waters of the River Jordan with his mantle. The waters parted and he walked over. This is action. He was demonstrating the power of God that he had received. There is no point in just talking about the Holy Spirit! We must apply the power to those baffling situations that lie all around us. We are surrounded by situations where the power of sin and death has taken over and is ruling. We need to go into such situations in the power and energy of the Holy Spirit and see the waters of impossibility roll back and God's children go over on dry land.

  The sons of the prophets on the bank of the River Jordan recognised not only the mantle (the spirit) of the master but also the **works** of the master.

Summary

Facing the demands of fulfilling the call of God on our lives we need the dynamic/power of the Holy Spirit. In order to receive God's power we must relinquish all that is of self. Remember the four-fold requirement to receive a 'double portion' of God's Spirit:

- **Desire and determination**
- **Identification and union in crossing over Jordan**
- **Asking for the anointing of the Holy Spirit – but only on resurrection ground**
- **Action – but remember that the mantle of His power is not given as a supplement. It is a substitute for our own.**

We need a 'double portion' for ministry in the hard places. When God calls us into His service he always equips us for effective service as well.

This was true of:

Gideon – Judges 6:11-14

Jeremiah – Jer. 1:4-10

The Lord Jesus – Mt. 3:16

And us – Acts 1:8

So all God's 'sendings' come with God's empowerment. The secret is **seeing Him** – not our emptiness, not the problems, not even the anointing – but the Lord Jesus only. He will gloriously fulfil His own purposes of blessing. The promise is sure, ***"Out of Him shall flow rivers of living water"*** (Jn. 7:37) and everything shall live wherever the river flows.

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

3. Factors that hinder the Lord's anointing – 2 Kings 2:15-25

A. Materialistic/nationalistic thinking (v. 15-18)

- **The story**
  - ✓ Elijah's ascension declared
  - ✓ Elijah's ascension denied
- **The problem**
  - ✓ The students stopped too soon
  - ✓ They were unsubmissive
  - ✓ They were unspiritual
  - ✓ They were unbelieving
  - ✓ Result: a lot of activity for no purpose
- **The students were rebuked:**
  - ✓ For their folly
  - ✓ For the failure
- **A warning**

B. Dealing with bitterness (v. 19-22)

- **The problem of bitterness**
- **The report of the people of Jericho**
  - ✓ They gave all the facts
  - ✓ They presented the advantages of where they were
  - ✓ They spelled out the problem
  - ✓ They admitted their inability to deal with the problem
  - ✓ They cried for help
- **The requirement for the solution to bitterness** (v. 20)
  - ✓ A new approach
  - ✓ A new antidote
- **The remedy** (v. 21-22)

C. Persecution caused by the spiritually ignorant or spiritually immature (v. 23-25)

- **The problem**
- **The story**
  - ✓ What happened and when
  - ✓ Where it happened
  - ✓ Who was involved
  - ✓ The purpose
- **The reaction of Elisha**
  - ✓ His perception of what was happening
  - ✓ Elisha's pronouncement
- **The retribution from heaven**
  - ✓ A warning
  - ✓ A necessity
  - ✓ A certainty

Conclusion

Factors that hinder the Lord's anointing – 2 Kings 2:15-25

Introduction

Elisha was at the beginning of his ministry in the Northern Kingdom and in these verses we have three stories:

- The hunt for Elijah's body (v. 15-18)
- Dealing with the bitter water in the spring at Jericho (v. 19-22)
- The persecution of Elisha by ridicule outside Bethel (v. 23-25)

From these 3 stories I think we can glean some factors that will hinder us in wholeheartedly serving the Lord Jesus in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. These are:

A. Materialistic/naturalistic thinking by the spiritually immature

B. Bitterness of spirit

C. Persecution caused by the spiritually ignorant

We will look at these three stories in turn.

A. Materialistic/naturalistic thinking

Our Western culture is deeply rooted in modernity. This worldview holds to the early Greek thinking of the dichotomism of the physical-material world which is subject to rational scientific investigation and the completely separate world of the spirit that many would claim does not exist at all.

Many in our culture claim that the physical world is the **real** world and that scientific laws account for all phenomena. As a result, there is a denial of the reality of the miraculous as being part of the real world - miracles are a fantasy believed by the weak-minded.

It is interesting that this view has been around for about 3000 years and was the prevalent view among these "sons of the prophets". Daily these students denied the historicity of all the miracles from Abraham to David.

So Elisha's ministry began with a conflict between materialistic/humanistic thinking and divine truth and power! This is probably going to be one of the first issues you will have to deal with as you begin to move in the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

- **The story**

  Elisha didn't wait around for long on the East Bank of Jordan after Elijah had been carried into heaven. He returned to Jordan and crossed over. There he met the young men who were in training for the prophetic office. They were waiting to see what happened to Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:7).

  Evidently they didn't see what happened to Elijah, yet they realised that something profound had happened. They recognised that Elisha was Elijah's replacement in the prophetic office. But they were not prepared to accept the fact that God had removed Elijah entirely. So where was his body?

  Elisha must have told them that God had taken him up in a whirlwind into heaven. They probably thought this was typical of the spiritual language of exaggeration. So these fifty young men dismissed Elisha's account and started a search party. They had observed that what went up in a whirlwind invariably came down again. So Elijah's body was somewhere. Elisha reluctantly, but after a lot of pressure, let them go. They searched for three days and found nothing.

  - ✓ So Elijah's miraculous promotion to glory was declared by Elisha, ***"Elijah went up in a whirlwind into heaven"***. (v. 11) It was not a predictable scientific statement, but nevertheless it was an observable fact.
  - ✓ But the miraculous was denied by the "sons of the prophets".

- **The problem**

  These students had a problem! **They stopped too soon**! They had followed Elijah and Elisha from Gilgal to Bethel and then from Bethel to Jericho and finally down to the River Jordan. But they never crossed the Jordan. Spiritually their old carnal nature never died! They couldn't be spiritual in their thinking, but rather were self-centred and worldly, limiting God's power to their own limited experience of it.

  So the students felt perfectly justified in trying to locate Elijah dead or alive. It was a **denial** of the statement by Elisha that a supernatural event had taken place. As student prophets they had learned a little in their heads, but until now they had understood little of God and His ways. They had very limited thoughts of God's ability and power.

  So these students were characterised as:

  - ✓ **Unsubmissive** - paying only lip service to Elisha
  - ✓ **Unspiritual** - they were asking material questions (where is Elijah?) and not spiritual questions (where is the God of Elijah?)
  - ✓ **Unbelieving** - they didn't believe in Elisha's heavenly anointing. Their belief system was "seeing is believing".
  - ✓ **All this led to a lot of activity but for no purpose**.
    Sadly this is true of much Christian ministry. There is a failure to recognise God's power, God's anointing for ministry and God's direction. So 50 strong young men - physically strong and well-motivated went into action but they were weak in faith.

- **The students were rebuked**

  - ✓ **They were rebuked for their folly**

    God says, "Believing is seeing". When speaking to Nathaniel, (Jn. 1:50) the Lord Jesus told him that because of his faith in the truth of the words of the Lord Jesus, he would ***"See greater things than these"***.

  - ✓ **They were rebuked for their failure**

    There was no solution because there was no problem! The Bible says, ***"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear/reverence Him"***. So, by implication, it is not with those who ask spiritually immature and silly questions.

- **A warning**

  As you enter into a ministry in the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit living out "the Abundant Life", you will be surrounded by others who are materialistic/naturalistic in their thinking. They will despise you for aspiring to anything greater in Christianity. They will seek to drag you back down to their level.

  "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:14)

  The Lord Jesus said, ***"If anyone chooses to do My will, he will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own."*** (Jn. 7:17)

  But we must be gentle with such unspiritual believers, as was Elisha - the man of God. In time they will see that their much activity accomplishes nothing.

B. Dealing with the bitter water in the spring at Jericho (v. 19-22)

"Does a spring at the same place produce both sweet and bitter water?" (James 3:11)

"Let all bitterness ... be put away from you." (Eph. 4:31)

"Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another." (Mk. 9:50)

- **Bitterness in our lives**

  Sadly many Christians live lives that are marked by bitterness leading to unfruitful work. The work they are doing for God often aborts and this quickly robs them of their joy. Deep down

within their hearts, the blight of bitterness pervades and permeates their whole lives, ultimately resulting in the death of their hopes and dreams and their faith and love, leading to broken relationships – barrenness.

Scripture (Eph. 4:31) insists that this matter of bitterness is dealt with quickly. Yet many believers are content to live with the barrenness and joylessness produced by a bitter spirit. The assumption is that something has happened and bitterness is the result and now nothing can be done about the matter so they must just plod on.

One result of bitterness is soured relationships! We see this between husband and wife, parents and children, relatives, team leaders, in the church and in the workplace as well as with friends and neighbours etc. Workers are often cross, doubting, complaining, selfish, hard-hearted, self-indulgent and sometimes even cruel. In this state they can never be fruitful or successful.

Now this should not be so! Bitterness should never mar the life and testimony of any believer! This story is both a parable and picture showing us some of **the causes** of bitterness, **the character** of bitterness and **the cure** for bitterness. In this story bitterness has baffled and beaten the community of the people of Jericho, for the waters of their nearby spring were bitter, ruining their attempts at agriculture and producing miscarriages in both animals and women. They told Elisha about the situation. Elisha threw a bowl of salt into the spring and, in the name of the Lord, commanded the waters to be permanently cured – i.e. to give "sweet" water.

So it is in many a work of God. Things are going on and growing well but then they begin to wither away and die. They start and then they abort. What causes this? Let us look at this story.

- **The report of the people of Jericho** (v. 19)
  - ✓ **They gave all the facts** - there was no cover-up. One of the problems of bitterness in our lives, in a team or in any work of God is that it is hidden and not easily divulged.
  - ✓ **They presented the advantages** of where they were and by implication why they needed a good water supply. Jericho is still an area of great fertility. It has the advantage of being able to produce crops a month or two before the rest of Palestine and the East Bank because in winter it is warm, being so far below sea level. It was a place of great potential.
  - ✓ **They spelled out the problem**. They presented the "but"! The water was bitter and caused miscarriages/abortions and it ruined potential harvests. It was like the situation described in this report from a worker:

    "This is a great place for ministry for our team. It has huge potential. Outwardly all is well - fields cleared, seeds sown, shoots growing, but then when irrigation is needed something happens and there is no lasting harvest. We have seen no lasting fruit. There appears to be little evidence of the Holy Spirit working through our team."
  - ✓ **They admitted their inability** to deal with the problem. Probably they had tried everything they could think of, but still the bitter water flowed. Often this is the key to solving the problem of bitterness in the heart of an individual or a team. Trying to solve it yourself merely perpetuates the barrenness.
  - ✓ **They cried for help**. The man or woman of God who is in touch with the Holy Spirit will always be sought out by those in need. Are you approachable? Do others notice that you are living in continual enjoyment of heaven's double portion? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? If you are, then you will be sought out by those who are beaten and baffled with personal problems and/or unfruitfulness in the work that God has called them to do.

    We follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus who invited the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him that He might give them rest.

    This report of the people of Jericho is an ideal template for a report!

- **The requirement for the solution to bitterness**

  "And Elisha said, 'Bring me a new bowl and put salt in it.' " I do wonder what the people thought Elisha would do next! Note what happened:

  - ✓ **A new approach**: "Bring a new bowl"! Probably this was the last thing they expected him to say! Usually bitterness on teams or in families is started by relatively trivial incidents followed by non-existent or poor conflict resolution. Sometimes there has been inadequate training. Sometimes there are personality clashes or psychological problems such as psychosomatic diseases or a chemical imbalance in the body etc.

    Attempts at cures have been tried repeatedly in the past. But in many cases counselling or physical remedies (pills etc.) have not worked because the root of the problem is spiritual. It is caused by sin.

    We are tripartite in nature (body, mind and spirit). In our diagnosis of our problems we are quick to diagnose physical and mental dysfunctions, but often there is no cure because the root problem is sin. We need a new approach.

  - ✓ **A new antidote**: "Put salt in it." I would like to suggest that the 'salt' is a symbol of the Cross of our Lord Jesus. The salt speaks of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and this is the only 'salt' for barrenness and the only cure for bitterness. It must be unadulterated 'salt'. The Cross is the source of free grace in the Lord Jesus that needs to be thrown into our hearts and into our society. It is only this 'salt' that can prevent corruption of spirit and cure bitterness. As we have been reconciled to God by His death, so we are constantly saved by His life - not only physically and mentally but more importantly spiritually.

    We need to receive this 'salt' into our hearts. ***"Whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life ."*** Why? Because of the Cross and the Resurrection.

    So, in the name of the Lord, we need to cast the "efficacy of the Cross and the Resurrection" into our polluted springs, streams and rivers.

- **The remedy** (v. 21-22)

  Elisha said, ***"Thus says the Lord, I have healed the water."***

  Note that Elisha says:

  - ✓ It was not his power, methodology, the physical salt or anything else that accomplished it.
  - ✓ The cleansing/healing power was in the Cross and what it accomplished.
  - ✓ It was a past act ("***I have healed"***). The Lord Jesus said, "***It is finished!*** " God has been reconciled and the waters are healed!

  It was an immediate remedy and it was a permanent remedy resulting in the fruitfulness of the land, of the livestock and of families.

  The New Testament says, ***"Let all bitterness ... Be put away from you."*** (Eph. 4:31) The verb demands once-for-all putting away the sin of bitterness. God is always ready to empower us to do what He commands us to do. Apply the Cross into your life and your heart will be permanently cured.

  "Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another." (Mk. 9:50)

  So, in dealing with the problem of bitterness, we must honestly face the facts of our condition. We need to admit our total inability to deal with the problem in our own strength. The problem of bitterness will only be cured in us believers as we humbly face the demands of being set free from bitterness and as we apply the Cross into our lives. This will permanently sweeten us! This is the Gospel in all its fullness.

  "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." (Col. 4:6)

C. Persecution caused by the spiritually ignorant or spiritually immature (v. 23-25)

- **The problem**

  Someone filled with the Holy Spirit and moving in the anointing of God often runs into opposition and difficulties. The persecution we expect often comes from outsiders and enemies who oppose the Gospel. What brings confusion and really hurts and discourages us is when the source of opposition and our troubles comes from the spiritually immature and the spiritually ignorant who are fellow believers. It is they who ridicule and revile us and what we do. This is a form of "friendly fire" (shot at by your own side), but it is just as hurtful - even more so - because we don't expect to be attacked by friends.

- **The story**

  ✓ **What happened and when**

  Elisha left Jericho and headed up the long climb out of the Jordan Valley to Bethel. As he approached Bethel, a gang of youths from Bethel began to ridicule him mocking him and his miracles and demanding that he repeat what had happened to Elijah – "go on up" etc. Elisha, facing the gang, announced that God was angry with them for their mocking disbelief. This was immediately fulfilled as two bears emerged from the forest and attacked the young men clawing many of them.

  Note when it happened. They were despising an embryonic movement of God which God intended to use to bring revival to the Northern Kingdom. Elisha was new in his ministry and so was especially vulnerable.

  ✓ **Where it happened** – near Bethel

  Bethel once had a glorious history. Abraham built an altar there on his arrival in Palestine (Gen. 12:8) and he did so again when he returned from Egypt (Gen. 13:3). For Jacob, Bethel was the starting point of a realisation of who God is - for him God was, ***"The God of Bethel"***. (Gen 31:13, 35:7)

  The town was later assigned to the tribe of Ephraim (1 Chron. 7:28). The Ark was kept there for a while and then moved to Shiloh where it was captured by the Philistines. They returned it. Finally David moved it to a tent in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). Bethel was a sanctuary that Samuel visited annually (1 Sam. 7:16). But sadly, Jeroboam had set up Bethel as a rival place of worship to the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:28-13:32) and it had deteriorated by Elisha's time into a place of idolatry and the occult.

  ✓ **Who was involved?**

  "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing - to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life." (2 Cor. 2:15-16)

  Elisha was the fragrance of life to the people of Jericho, but he was also the fragrance of death to these young men outside Bethel. Gospel truth is either received gladly or rejected, often with mocking comments. If it is rejected, then those who do so are under the wrath of God. ***"Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, whoever does not believe, stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's One and Only Son."*** (Jn. 3:18)

  "Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (Jn. 3:36)

  1 Thess. 2:14-16 is a New Testament example of this same truth:

  "For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out and displeased God and opposed all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved – so, as always, to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last."

So it was a deliberate attack on the authority of Elisha - mocking Elijah's ascension. And they also called him “baldhead”. Baldness is a genetic factor. Evidently it was very rare in Old Testament Jewish men! The opposite was apparently true, for long hair seems to be a symbol of strength and vigour. So bald man were probably considered wimpish!

- **The reaction of Elisha**
  - ✓ **His perception of what was happening**: his statement of God's judgement was not a wild and arbitrary reaction to the mockery of the gang. His motive was not vengeance. It wasn't the anger of a peeved prophet. It was a judicial statement that those who reject the will of God, will suffer judgement as a result. And that these young men being attacked by the two bears were representatives of a far greater “mauling” they would get from the Syrian armies and ultimately from the Assyrian armies who would destroy the whole Northern Kingdom unless the whole people repented.

    So it is with the presentation of the Gospel. ***“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.”*** (2 Thess. 1:8)
  - ✓ **Elisha's pronouncement** - and curse here has the meaning of pronouncing a sentence of judgement in the name of the Lord and that is in accordance with the character of God.
- **The retribution of heaven**

  Elisha didn't know how the judgement would come on these young men. He didn't specify any specific judgement. There is no direct connection between Elisha's statement and the arrival of the two bears. Yet the two bears “clawed” forty-two young men. None were killed, but they were probably very scared!
  - ✓ **A warning** - the bear attack was a warning. They had to learn to fear God. Did they repent or did they harden their hearts? We don't know!
  - ✓ **A necessity** - the bear attack was necessary. God had to intervene and authenticate Elisha as His servant. God will uphold the honour of His people.
  - ✓ **A certainty** - so it will be when those who are spiritually immature or spiritually ignorant mock us and ridicule a work of God - especially in its beginnings. We need to understand what is happening and not get discouraged. What should be our response? Without being vindictive or vituperative, we have a responsibility to gently announce a warning of impending judgement.

Conclusion

Beginnings are perilous times! As we begin to move out in the power and anointing of the Spirit of God, let us be aware of the potential difficulties that will hinder us in fulfilling the work to which God has called us:

- The materialistic/naturalistic tendencies of our fellow workers
- The bitterness of spirit that so poisons our unity and relationships and kills or aborts spiritual blessing, fruitfulness and effectiveness
- The ridicule and persecution that comes from the spiritually ignorant and spiritually immature

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

4. The causes of periods of dryness in ministry – 2 Kings 3:1-25

Introduction

A. Facing Disaster – the causes of dryness (v. 9)

- **The causes that led to the disaster**
  - ✓ Unlawful ambition
  - ✓ Unholy alliances
  - ✓ An unforeseen problem
- **The causes that lead to spiritual dryness**
  - ✓ Unlawful ambition
  - ✓ Unholy alliances
  - ✓ Unforeseen problems

B. Recovering direction – the army received direction from the 'Man of God'

"Make this valley full of ditches." (v. 16)

- **They needed direction** (v. 11)
- **They requested direction**
- **Direction was given to the three armies** (v. 15)
- **The direction given by Elisha was completely relevant**
  - ✓ It was positive
  - ✓ It promised abundance (v. 17)
  - ✓ The water was given for a purpose (v. 18)
  - ✓ It was a preventative penalty (v. 19)

C. Deliverance (v. 20)

- **The divine supply of water**
  - ✓ It was a mysterious supply
  - ✓ It was a miraculous supply
  - ✓ It was a measureless supply
- **A complete victory**

Conclusion

4. The causes of periods of dryness in ministry – 2 Kings 3:1-25

" ... times of refreshing ... from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19)

Introduction

On an individual scale and a local church scale, believers often seem to face periods of spiritual drought (dryness). Somehow we, as believers, find ourselves side-tracked into the desert of disobedience to the teaching of the Bible and the prompting in our hearts of the voice of the Holy Spirit. Both as individuals and as churches we are weakened by lack of spiritual refreshment. This can rapidly lead to disaster!

Is there a Scriptural solution to this issue? If not, then tragedy awaits us! But there is a solution! This story helps us to find this solution - or at least part of it. In this story God's People were going out to battle, but they ran out of water! And we often run out of resources in our spiritual battles.

Notice these three statements:

- **Facing disaster: *"... there was no water for the army or for the animals that followed them"*** (v. 9). But God had provided His man.
- **Receiving direction: *"Thus says the Lord, 'Make this valley full of trenches'."*** (v. 15 NASB)
- **An army experiencing deliverance: *" ... The country was filled with water."*** (v. 20)

We will look at **the disaster, the directions** and **the deliverance.**

A. Facing disaster - the causes of dryness (v. 9)

- **The causes that led to the disaster**
  - ✓ **Unlawful ambition**

    For many years, Mesha, the King of Moab, had paid an annual tribute to the King of the Northern Kingdom. This consisted of 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams with their wool (v. 4). King Ahab of the Northern Kingdom died and his eldest son, Ahaziah, died soon after. Then his second son, Jehoram, became king. Seeing the Northern Kingdom in a weakened state, King Mesha decided this was the time for independence from this tributary-enforcing neighbour and so he refused to send the gift.

    King Jehoram was very angry at the loss of such a good source of income to his royal treasury. [Jehoram was the son of Ahab and Jezebel.] So he made a plan to go to war against the Kingdom of Moab. King Jehoram made a half-hearted attempt at reform, but it appears that he only removed one statue of Ba'al.

    So the first step to the disaster was taken by Jehoram and his motivation was dominated by greed and ambition.

  - ✓ **Unholy alliances**

    King Jehoram invited King Jehoshaphat, King of Judah (the Southern Kingdom), to join him in attacking Moab. King Jehoshaphat should have known better, for

he was a godly man, but he decided to join in this alliance against Moab. He had made this mistake before when he made an alliance with King Ahab against the King of Syria. It was an ill-fated expedition and only when things started to go wrong, did he consult the Lord (1 Kings 22). How typical of us!

The King of Edom, a complete pagan, also joined in the alliance. Possibly the King of Edom joined the alliance because if the two kings were successful against Moab their next attack would probably be against Edom.

So, three Kings against one! But spiritually, there is no truth in the statement, "There is strength in numbers".

- ✓ **An unforeseen problem** (v. 9)

  There were two possible ways of attacking Moab - either the northern route crossing the river Jordan north of the Dead Sea and attacking up the escarpment - nearly 1000 metre climb. By this route there was no possibility of surprise. The alternative was to loop around south of the Dead Sea and much of Edom and then make a surprise attack on Moab from the East. This is the route King Jehoram proposed. Evidently the three armies started well.

  The problem arose when, after seven days of marching in the desert, they ran out of water! They couldn't go forward and they couldn't go back! The soldiers, their cavalry horses and all the pack animals faced death from thirst or possibly, in their weakened state, from surprise attack by the Moabites. It was a military catastrophe. They were all in the desert and all facing death!

- **The causes that lead to spiritual dryness**

  - ✓ **Unlawful ambition**

    So often our troubles arise because of personal ambition - an inner drive for success. And our success is measured by the fact of having more money, more power and more prestige. In the church, the longing for prestige is particularly paramount. We want to be seen and appreciated as being important. But sometimes it is a desire for power - the ability to control the lives of others. This carnal, fleshly ambition secretly drives many Christian leaders. In this story (2 Kings 3) there is no indication that it was God's will that Moab should keep paying tribute to the Northern Kingdom.

    Worldly, carnal ambition on the part of some in the church and in Christian work is often the first step to disaster. It is never God's will that His Kingdom should be advanced by worldly, carnal people.

  - ✓ **The unholy alliance**

    The three Kings represent three sorts of leaders in the church.

    Jehoshaphat - a spiritual leader, but one sadly **lacking in watchfulness**. He apparently forgot previous bad alliances that had got him into trouble before. A lack of being on his guard helped him to move into compromise and into potential disaster.

    Jehoram - a carnal but believing leader was out for gain. He longed for greater power and greater influence along with just being greedy. He himself was the centre of his life.

The King of Edom - an unbelieving "Christian" leader. He was enlisted into the alliance in order to help Jehoram. His motive was probably to weaken and rob his neighbour on the East Bank of the River Jordan.

Scripture warns us not to be unequally yoked. Here is a classic example of being unequally yoked and all for the purposes of greed and power. No wonder it led to a disaster!

So often we are encouraged to enlist in a cause or an alliance whose sole purpose is, in fact, self-aggrandisement and self-promotion. Ostensibly "the cause" is good - "the defeat of the enemy" - but the motives are all wrong. We need to be aware of this and be **watchful** and do adequate research - not only into the plans but also in assessing the motives.

Let us be on our guard when joining an alliance. Good alliances are tremendously effective in bringing glory to God. Poor alliances lead to disaster.

✓ **Unforeseen problems**

Unholy alliances lead to unforeseen disasters! Often this is God's mercy towards us, for it shows that God is not allowing us to go our own way. It is a danger signal that we ignore at our peril. Carnal ambitions and plans bring nothing but failure and frustration in a work of God.

B. Recovering direction - the army received direction from the Man of God

"Make this valley full of ditches." (v. 16)

- **They needed direction** (v. 11)

The three armies were all facing death. The leaders could do nothing. Even the Edomites, in whose land they were marching, were helpless. There was panic! Direction - a plan - was desperately needed. And so it is with many churches and many Christian organisations. Godly, prophetic leadership is desperately needed. Some leaders have **resigned** themselves to a situation and don't believe that things can get better. This is conveyed to the group of believers and consequently there is a loss of any hope among them. Others get caught up in the latest fad in order to get them out of their problems, but with no long-term improvement.

- **They requested direction**

Note who first asked God for help. King Jehoram was the first to break the silence, but he blamed God for all their troubles. He saw God is a God of terror. The King of Edom had nothing to say and said nothing. He had nothing to offer in this hour of spiritual crisis. But King Jehoshaphat, the spiritual leader, had the sense to ask:

"Is there a here a prophet of the Lord that we may ask the Lord by him?" (v. 11)

In the crisis Jehoshaphat turned to the Lord!

In the church, when are we, as God's people, going to turn from all the schemes we are trying for "water making"? We are conscious of our spiritual drought, but we think we can somehow solve the spiritual barrenness we have created.

- **Direction received by the three armies (v. 15)**

Elisha was there and the word of the Lord was with him. We don't know why he was there, but possibly he knew that the three Kings were marching into a disaster. And Elisha, the Prophet of Abundant Life, was the only man who could get the water of God flowing.

He was introduced to the three Kings as, ***"Here is Elisha … who poured water on the hands of Elijah."*** (v. 11) So Elisha was introduced, not as a powerful prophet capable of doing amazing miracles, but as a servant of Elijah. He was remembered for his lowly service!

In verses 13 and 14 Elisha makes it very clear that he will only co-operate because of the presence of King Jehoshaphat. He is rather rude to King Jehoram, ***"What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother"*** – i.e. the prophets promoted by Queen Jezebel.

- **The direction given to the three armies**

  The first direction given by Elisha was, ***"Now bring me a musician"*** (v. 15). This is a verse to encourage musicians everywhere.
  "And when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him (Elisha).***"***

  So in the midst of the tumult and the tangible sense of panic, Elisha wanted to quieten his heart. Perhaps he remembered David's words, ***"Be still and know that I am God"***. (Ps. 46:10) So in the midst of quiet praise and thanksgiving, panic turned to praise and praise led to peace. In the peace, the quiet voice of the Spirit of the Lord spoke to Elisha.

  We will never hear the voice of the Holy Spirit until clamouring human voices are silenced. Habakkuk 2:20 says, ***"The Lord is in His Holy Temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him."*** Rarely do we hear God's voice in an atmosphere of excitement. God's voice begins to flow in the midst of reverent worship.

  Notice that Elisha was a man who knew something of his God-given authority, ***"As the Lord of Hosts lives, before whom I stand"*** (v. 14). His authority is rooted in his relationship with God. We need to be channels through whom the water of God flows. The nearer we get to God, the nearer God gets to the people and the more He is magnified in their sight. Originally God gave authority to one man to harness the earth. But that man, Adam, rebelled and sinned and gave away his authority to the devil. He was reigned over and duped into acting on behalf of the devil.

  The Lord Jesus retrieved that authority on the Cross and the Lord Jesus now once again gives that authority to His disciples. You must know that you have authority! We have been given a name to use - the Lord Jesus Christ. The enemy understands the authority of this name and has to obey.

- **The direction given by Elisha was completely relevant**

  ✓ It was **positive**: ***"Make the valley full of ditches"***. (v. 16)

  Note the statement, ***"This is a light thing in the sight of the Lord"***. (v. 18) Digging ditches in hard stony ground involved faith, obedience and effort by these very tired, dehydrated men. What is a ditch? It is a great ugly opening in the rocky soil. There is nothing lovely about a ditch! It is an empty space, but it can hold water! A ditch is not a hole. If you like, a ditch is a lot of holes joined up. "Ditches" implies **united** effort. So the men had to put down their swords and spears and pick up what pickaxes and shovels they had.

  ✓ It was a promise of **abundance** of water (v. 17)

  "The valley shall be filled with water."

Before the river of the abundant life can flow, there needs to be some painful, internal soul-work done on our part. We need to dig ditches to make room for the rivers of blessing.

It isn't hard to imagine Elisha striding up and down encouraging the men, "Dig deeper ... dig deeper!"

So we need to get going with a spade in our lives.

Is it greed? Heave it out!

Is it pride and ambition? Cast it out!

Is it lust? Chuck it out!

Is it laziness? Root it out!

Falsehood? Temper? Indulgence to self? Out with them all! Don't fear to dig **deep**! The deeper the better! For the abundance of the water of God needs to be contained and retained.

- ✓ The water was given for **a purpose** - victory over the Moabites. (v. 18)
- ✓ It was a **preventative penalty** on the people of Moab so they would not forget the power of the Lord of Hosts. (v. 18)

C. Deliverance!

"Behold water came ... till the country was filled with water." (v. 20)

- **The divine supply of water**
  - ✓ It was a **mysterious** supply (v. 17)

    There was no wind and no rain! This was different from Pentecost. We can never dictate how God should work. ***"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sounds, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes."*** (Jn. 3:8)

    It is possible to trace some of the antecedents in the great Revival Movements in history, as well as the beginnings of major Church Planting Movements. But in the end, there is no "weather forecasting" the movement of the Holy Spirit. It is always a mystery.

  - ✓ It was a **miraculous** supply!

    There were no natural causes for the abundance of water. God promised to supply and God provided the water in response to **faith**. The soldiers had dug the ditches to make storage for the miraculous supply of water because they believed in Elisha.

    So it is with us, we need faith to clean out the rubbish that fills our hearts and minds. What is required of us is the **obedience of faith**. We dig the trenches in the belief that God alone will send the water. No amount of effort by us is going to result in "rivers of blessing" bringing revival to a mass of spiritually dehydrated people in a spiritual wilderness. But our expectant faith creates the capacity to receive all of God's gifts.

    So we need to dig ditches of repentance and prayer and sacrifice. But this is not enough. The ditches are still empty. It is God who sends the water in response to faith.

- ✓ It was a **measureless** supply!

  "The country was filled with water." (v. 20)

  There was enough for every person and every animal.
  When did it happen? At the time of the morning sacrifice. The morning sacrifice was symbolic of dedication to God (see Lev. 2). There is a helpful lesson in this. As believers, there must be no mixed motives. All our thoughts, plans and ambitions must be placed on the altar and killed. **Then** God gives us His all! We receive only to the extent that we resign. We gain only as we give.

- **A complete victory** (v. 21-25)

  The divine supply of the Abundant Life in the Holy Spirit is given to us simply as a means to an end, and the end is that we would experience victory! God fills us so we can fight! God supplies us with "living water" so we can experience successful outcomes in ministry.

  The enemy - the Moabites - came the next morning. (v. 22) The sun shone on the water and the enemy thought what they were seeing was blood. How could there be water in the desert? So they jumped to the assumption that the alliance of the three kings had broken down under the distress of thirst and in the face of death and they had set about killing each other.

  So they rose up and went down to finish them off. But what they found was the three armies rising up like a refreshed giant! The Moabite army was thoroughly defeated. This was followed by their towns and villages being destroyed, their fields devastated, their livestock taken away and their wells blocked up.

  Spiritually, it is only as we appropriate the divine supply of "living water" that we can go forward in complete victory. There can be no routing the enemy until there has been a receiving of the Holy Spirit in all His fullness.

  "***Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."*** (Zech. 4:6)

  It is so sad to see so many believers trying to fight against the 'principalities and powers' when they do not yet have heaven's supply. Fainting soldiers never win fierce battles.

Conclusion

So are you or your team experiencing spiritual dryness? Check your own ambitions and desires. Check to see if you have made an unholy alliance with ambitious people.

If we are to receive God's supply of "living water", we need to dig deep ditches to receive heaven's abundant supply. The deeper the ditch the fuller the flow! Why does revival tarry? One reason is that there is a solemn, painful and hard work of introspection that must be done - digging the ditches and making room for blessing. The ditches are the low places of self-judgement and repentance.

The "living water" is given to us not for any hedonistic pleasure, but for warfare that we may destroy the works of the enemy!

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

5. The Woman who could have been the First Middle East Oil Magnate
2 Kings 4:1-7

Introduction

- **The emergency the widow faced** (v. 1)
  - There was death in the family
  - There was a huge debt in the family
  - There was a sense of desperation in the family

  The emergency was brought to God.

- **The examination the widow underwent** (v. 2)
  - "What can I do for you?"
  - "Tell me what you have got."

  The flask of oil – a significant, sacred, slighted object

- **The exhortation she obeyed** (v. 3-4)
  - The requirements of the prophet
    - Exercise faith – go public
    - Shut the door
    - Pour the oil out of the flask
  - The response of the widow (v.5)

- **The endowment the widow obtained** (v. 6)

  "All the pots were full."

- **The encouragement she received** (v. 7)
  - Enough for - the critical need
    - the constant need
    - the collective need

Summary: Living an Abundant Life

5. The Woman who could have been the first Middle East Oil Magnate
2 Kings 4:1-7

Introduction

One of the main reasons for studying the Bible is because it's truth can change our lives and make us more like the Lord Jesus. As we are transformed, so we can help in the transformation of the societies around us.

One vital aspect is correctly interpreting the Bible. Much of the Old Testament is in story form. A basic principle of interpretation is that these Old Testament stories are given to us to illustrate New Testament truth.

Paul, writing for the most part for literate people in the Greco-Roman World of the First Century, presented truth in an abstract propositional form. This is good contextualisation. We westerners - at least those brought up in modernism - find Paul's teaching understandable. But much of the rest of the world does not think in this way. They learn through stories just as the Lord Jesus taught in an audio (the parables) and visual way (the miracles). We tend to remember good stories.

Elisha is known as the Prophet of Abundant Life. Elisha followed Elijah in trying to halt the slide of the Northern Kingdom into idolatry and degradation. After Elisha, God sent other prophets to the Northern Kingdom – for example Amos and Hosea.

There are 18 stories relating to Elisha and they teach the principles of **the abundant life** that are found in the New Testament. This is a story of a widow who could have become the Middle East's first oil magnate! Her husband was a student in the training for prophets run by Elisha. If John the Baptist was more like Elijah, then Elisha was much more like the Lord Jesus. Both taught people the principles of abundant life through stories.

Every believer is **in debt** in a 3-fold sense:

- We owe obedience to God (Lk. 17:10)
- We owe love to the brethren (1 Jn. 3:16)
- We owe the Gospel to all the lost people in the world (Rom. 1:14-15)

> ***"I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So much as is in me, I am ready to preach the Gospel."***

Spiritually, how can we pay our debts - not only to God but also to all other believers? How shall we pay what we owe to those who are desperately needy - physically needy, emotionally needy, morally needy and above all spiritually needy? How shall we fulfil the responsibility placed on us by our relationship with Jesus and His adoption of us into His family?

Unless we pay the debt, we will face increasing and insistently greater demands from our creditors. There is only one way to meet all our liabilities and that is by the infilling and enabling of the Holy Spirit. In our own ability and strength we can never obey God, love our fellow Christians and meet our obligation to lost souls around us. **We have to live the abundant life**.

This woman is a picture and a parable of most believers today. The key question in this story is, ***"What can I do for you?"*** The Lord Jesus asks us all the same question - especially when we are troubled, burdened, harassed and at our wits end.

- **The emergency the widow faced** (v. 1)

  There were three aspects to the emergency:

  - **There was a death in the family**. Her husband was one of "the sons of the prophets" studying under Elisha. He was probably a godly man and he died. His widow was left alone with two boys to look after. Young widows in the Middle East have a very hard time. In an honour/shame culture the **cause** of a tragedy must be sought and shame poured on those who are responsible. Widows are often blamed for their husband's death and as a result they live a life of unremitting shame. It is very sad.

- **There was a huge debt in the family**. We are not told how all the debt was incurred. It is not necessary to assume that her husband had run up huge personal debts for in the Middle East debt can be inherited. And now the creditor(s) wanted his money back.

  Probably many people had helped the widow. Her extended family would have given what they could. Other sympathetic people in the village would have given. Her husband's fellow students had probably contributed, but it wasn't enough. So the widow **sold all she had** but it still wasn't enough. She had nothing left - no assets at all. So the creditors demanded her two boys as slaves and probably herself as well. The boys and the widow faced the possibility of living their lives serving under some cruel master as bonded slaves. It was a truly horrible situation.

- **There was despair in her life**. (v. 1) She came and "cried" to Elisha! (In Hebrew the word indicates desperation. It is not used in a polite formal setting.)

  This widow was at her wits end. She had no resources left, but still she had to pay. She cried out in total desperation. Perhaps she remembered David's Psalm (34:6),

  "This poor man <u>cried</u> and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles".

  Or maybe it was the statement in Psalm 146:9 ***"The Lord protects the strangers. He supports the fatherless and the widow."*** Perhaps it was Psalm 50:15, ***"Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will rescue you and you will honour Me.***" [See also Ps. 77:1]

What about us? Is this a parable of what we are going through?

Sometimes there is death in our lives - not just the death of family members, but things like death of the love between a husband and wife or between parents and children. There can be death of vision in a church and death of faith in our hearts or death of trust in our relationships in Christian work. At a personal level, there can be death of our hopes and dreams. A quiet despair takes over our lives and a sense of hopelessness enters in.

Sometimes we sense a **heavy burden of debt** and we don't know how to discharge that debt to both man and God. Our bank is empty – our assets exhausted and we have nothing left except a life of fear and frustration.

There are so many unreached people in the world and we seem to be making so little progress. At the same time there has been very heavy corrosion of Christian values in the so-called 'Christian' countries. Looking at the world situation, we know we are called to be 'change agents'. We have a debt to discharge, but we are overwhelmed. We are fighting on too many fronts and this only adds to our hopelessness. Attempting to do God's work in our own strength is totally draining. Our batteries rapidly become flat!

Often we have a 'cry of despair'. Why does the Lord allow us to come to the end of our tether like this? There are two reasons:

- To make us despair of ourselves, of our own strength and wisdom and of all human aid that we discover always fails in the end.
- To create a situation in which God can demonstrate His power and pour His fullness into our lives. He can only give us His fullness when we give Him our emptiness. The weaker we are, the more God can do for us.

God knows very well that when all is well in our lives, we don't call on Him like this widow did. So God's people are often severely tested and tried and we shouldn't be surprised when it happens to us. [Read Heb. 12:3-11 and 1 Peter 1:12.]

The emergency was brought to God. What did this poor widow do? She went to the Prophet of Abundant Life. We need to go to the **source** of abundant life - the Lord Jesus. She told Elisha her problem, but she didn't ask him to do anything for her.

She came to Elisha and told him the problem both **frankly** (honestly stating the facts) and **fully** (she kept nothing back). Our problem is that often we don't like to admit that we are indeed in a crisis and we muddle along as best we can.

- **The examination this frantic widow underwent**

  Elisha asked two questions and received one answer from the widow. The Lord Jesus asks us these same questions when we come to Him.

  - **"What can I do for you?"**

    Elisha probably knew the facts before the widow came to him. Most probably he had buried his student and he may have even contributed to paying back the loan. The widow told him the problem, but there was no request. Elisha wanted to bring her to the place where she would state exactly what she wanted done.

    We often fail here. We pour out our story of misery and explain our plight, but we don't make our requests known to God. Why not? The widow, rather rudely, didn't answer the question.

    Just from observing our three children when they were smaller, I noticed that they would ask a direct question if they thought the answer was going to be 'yes'. If they thought the answer was going to be 'no', then there was no direct question but moaning and groaning just loud enough to hear.

    Perhaps this happened here. The widow didn't believe Elisha (or God) could do anything. But psychologically, pouring out her problem may have had some sort of therapeutic value. Many people believe that this is all that prayer can accomplish.

    But the Bible is very clear! Jesus said, ***"Ask and you will receive ... for everyone who asks receives."*** (Mt. 7:8-11) In Phil. 4:6 we read, ***"Let your requests be known to God"***.

    We must move beyond just moaning to God about our problems and difficulties. We must answer the question, ***"What shall I do for you?"*** [The Lord Jesus asked the same question to blind Bartimaeus on the road leaving Jericho for Jerusalem. Bartimaeus responded with a direct request, ***"Let me recover my sight!"*** That is faith!]

    So don't let us moan and groan. Tell the Lord Jesus exactly what you think you need, expecting to get the answer 'yes'! I think when we get to heaven and perhaps we review our lives, our greatest wish will be, "I wish I had asked Him for more!"

  - **What do you have in your house?**

    The widow must have thought this was a silly question. She knew that Elisha knew her husband was dead. She knew that Elisha knew of the huge debt and she knew that Elisha knew she couldn't possibly pay it off. So she stated the obvious, ***"Nothing. I have nothing left."*** Then possibly she thought a bit and wanted to be truthful so she added, ***"Except a little jar of oil"***. The Hebrew word 'jar' indicates it was a small jar. It was probably a cheap little flask, made of clay, almost worthless.

    - But it was a **significant object**. Why had she kept it? Her husband was training to be a prophet and perhaps it was the last keepsake that she had kept in memory of her husband.
    - It was a **sacred object**. One of the roles of a prophet was to anoint people with oil (Ex. 29:21).
    - It was a **sentimental object**. Perhaps it was the last object to get rid of - a memory of her husband and his calling and perhaps of all their hopes and dreams of the future with their boys.
    - It was a **slighted** (ignored) **object**. The widow thought of it as absolutely useless in her present crisis - of no value at all!
    - <u>But</u> it was a **saving object**!

  We are going to be asked the same question. Take inventory of your spiritual resources. Take stock of what you have. What are your spiritual resources? This is the crucial question the Lord Jesus will ask us when we come to Him in prayer. We have a tendency to answer, like the widow, 'Nothing'.

Oil in the Old Testament is often used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It obviously never crossed the widow's mind that the little flask of oil would be the instrument of God's blessing. To her it held no promise of relief and rescue - only memories of the past. But out of the flask flowed the Divine Fullness - the deliverance from the crisis the widow faced.

This is also true of us. In our desperate need, the solution to our problem is right at hand! So we say, 'nothing', but in His own lovely quiet way, the Holy Spirit reminds us that He is resident in us (and in every child of God). The moment we believed, He entered into our hearts. God's Spirit dwells with us and He is the Spirit of Life - the Spirit of Abundant Life.

"And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper to be with you for ever - even the Spirit of Truth ..... He dwells with you and will be in you." (Jn. 14:16-17)

" ..... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you whom you have from God?" (1 Cor. 6:19)

"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Rom. 5:5) [See also Jn. 7:37-39; Rom. 8:9-11 and 1 Thess. 4:8.]

So God's Spirit **always** dwells in us. Do not grieve Him or slight Him by your casual dismissal of Him. Don't minimise His ministry and never overlook His power. His working in our lives and on our behalf is **our only hope**! He is our **Companion God** - always with us with all **His comfort**, all **His calmness** and all **His immense competence**!

Perhaps He has a sentimental value to you - remembrances of happy days when the Holy Spirit was very real to you. But you think His presence in your life is useless in your present crisis. Never overlook His power or minimise His ministry. Don't ever be afraid that if the worst comes and you are reduced to nothing like this widow, you will be alone. The mighty power of the Holy Spirit is with you! With this 'oil flask' you have an immense oil field with multiple "gushers" pouring the oil into your life, into your family, into your home, into your office/work and into your church. The measure of God's supply is always according to the measure of our needs!

- **The exhortation she obeyed** (v. 3-4)

The Prophet Elisha required three things of the widow:

- **Exercise faith - go public about what God is going to do for you.**
  Elisha said to the widow, ***"Go and borrow lots of empty pots from all your neighbours"***. She had to make provision for divine blessing in her life.

  Nothing is very private in the Middle East. This widow had to knock on the door of each of her neighbours and ask to borrow pots - lots and lots of pots – empty pots - big pots. When she was asked why she needed so many pots, she would have to explain what Elisha, the Prophet of God, had said God would do - multiply the oil from her very small flask! Very soon everyone in the village would have known why she wanted the pots. She had faith in the prophet's words. Others must have thought the stress of the situation had driven her insane!

  Note: they had to be **empty pots**. Vessels to be filled must first be empty. The Holy Spirit cannot fill our fullness, but He waits to fill our emptiness - empty of pride, selfishness, carnality and self-importance. Before the Holy Spirit can fill us we must empty ourselves of our own strength, our own abilities to solve our problems, our sin:

  "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates the body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." (2 Cor. 7:11)

  Let us empty ourselves of pride, anger, bitterness, envy, selfishness, etc.

  Note: **lots of pots** - the widow's faith and courage to keep telling her story of what God was going to do determined the blessing she was to receive. Our response to God's commands determines God's response to our need. If your need is very great, you need not despair, for the greater your need, the more wonderful will be God's supply. The widow could have got more pots. In fact, she could have been the Middle East's very first oil magnate! The fact is: **you are as anointed as you want to be**.

  Smith Wigglesworth was invited to see the Niagara Falls in North America. Watching the Falls, he was heard praying, *"Like that over me, Father, pour out your Holy Spirit like that over me"*.

More than anything in the world, the Lord wants us simply to trust Him and obey Him. What is the Lord's command to you in connection with your present trouble or problem? Are you refusing to obey Him because you are afraid to trust Him? Remember He will deal with you and help you according to your faith.

"Those who trust Him wholly, find Him wholly true".

What are our pots? Our minds, our abilities, our wills, our learning, our affections, our work, our hands and our hearts - all that we are and all our resources. We provide the empty pots and the Holy Spirit fills them. ***"Be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit."*** (Eph. 5:18) All that we bring to Him, He fills. Note again that **we** set the limits of what God does for us. When there were no more pots, the oil stopped flowing! So - a few pots, little blessing - a huge number of pots, great blessing!

- **Shut the door**
  After you have "collected the pots" go to a quiet place and stop doing everything else. If we are to know the blessing of God, we need to shut the door on a busy world and shut ourselves in with God. Look up Lk. 3:21 and notice that it was while the Lord Jesus was praying that He was anointed by the Holy Spirit. [See also Acts 2:1-4; 4:31 and 9:11.17.] All these show that the Holy Spirit comes in answer to prayer and in the place of prayer. The enduement of power always comes as the result of a "shut door". This is where the "oil" flows.
- **Pour into the pots one by one**
  Pouring involved turning the little flask upside down. It was in the act of pouring out that the widow discovered the mighty power of God. We never experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit until we personally appropriate more and more of His resources. As she obeyed, all the pots were filled one by one!

Well, those were the three commands of Elisha, the Prophet of Abundant Life.

The response of the widow

Her response wonderfully illustrates, "***The obedience of faith"*** (Rom. 16:26). The Holy Spirit is given to those who obey God (cf. Acts 5:32). This widow obeyed:

- **Implicitly** - there was no questioning the rationality of the command.
- **Inclusively** - step by step she carried out **all** of Elisha's commands and poured the oil out of the little flask into all the pots.
- **Immediately** - note in Mark chapter 1 that the word 'immediately' comes 10 times. Obedience to the Lord's commands requires immediate obedience. Is there any place in your life where you are consciously delaying obeying the Lord? [See Ps. 139:23-24] Obedience is the key to God's blessing.

➢ **The endowment the widow obtained** (v. 6)

The result of the widow's obedience was that the oil filled every pot - all of them! God's Spirit is willing to fill every "pot" we bring to him in faith - all that we are - our hopes and dreams, our work/ministry - each "pot" filled to the brim! As we bring ourselves, as empty pots, again and again, the Holy Spirit will fill us again and again. The oil stopped flowing when no empty pot could be found to fill. God can fill us only as we make room for His Spirit in our lives.

Some general principles

- As long as it is in your hands, you can measure it. But when you place it in God's hands you are in for a big surprise!
- If we do the possible, God will do the impossible! God is limited when we don't do the possible. God doesn't usually work unilaterally. He prefers to work together with us. John Wesley said it succinctly, **"Without God, man cannot. Without man, God will not."**
- The "but first" principle. First she did the possible and **then** God worked. [See a similar story in 1 Kings 17:10-16 esp. v. 13.]
- You have just a little flask of oil - not a great big barrel! So every day you need a fresh outpouring of God's grace in your life and as you pour it out in blessing on others, you will get more!
- We are designed to be absolutely miserable unless God answers our prayers every day.
- We are all that God has to work with!

- **The encouragement this joyful widow received** (v. 7)

  The wonderful abundance of oil was not given as an end in itself, but as **a means to an end** - to pay the debt. This is the secret of Pentecost. This is the secret of exchanging want for wealth - of exchanging poverty for wealth.

  Note: the oil met her:

  - **Critical need** - to pay the debt to the creditor
    The oil was given by God to meet the woman's critical need. Are you facing a situation that demands from you more than you have? Are the demands being placed on you more than you can bear? Are you afraid of the future? Do you have to pay a spiritual debt to a neighbour? Is God calling you into a very stretching ministry?

    Only God's fullness is able to solve your feebleness and frailty. Only a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit can solve the problems of critical need in your life.

  - **Constant need** – "***Live on the rest"***
    The oil was also given to meet the woman's constant need. After the debt had been paid, there was a life to be lived and for that life the widow and her boys needed adequate resources.

    God's blessings are given to us not just so we will be effective in ministry, but for life and godliness. We are to live ***"in the Spirit"*** (Rom. 8:9).

  - **Collective need** – ***"Live you <u>and your children</u> on the rest"***
    The oil was given for the woman's **collective** need. Her sons, who had helped her with the pots, shared with her in the blessing. Our families need to experience the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ. (Rom. 15:29)

  So there was oil in abundance and, as a result, her debts were paid, their future supplies were guaranteed and her boys were safe. But the greatest thing that happened to her was the personal experience she had of the Lord himself - not His gifts, but Himself - His love and His tender care. In her extremity she proved God was faithful and so much more. That is the greatest thing that can happen to any of us.

Summary: Living an Abundant Life

We can only pay our spiritual debts to God and to men as we appropriate into our lives, by faith, all the fullness of the Holy Spirit. God's resources are always **abundant** and **available**. In this story of the poor widow we see clearly the steps to experience and enjoy the fullness of heaven. The heart of the story is the oil flask. Without it she had nothing! But this small flask was the secret source of abundant life!

"If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life, because of righteousness." (Rom. 8:9-10)

As the Lord says to you in your trouble, ***"What shall I do for you?"*** Say to Him, *"Lord, fill me - all my pots - with your Holy Spirit, so that Your Name may be glorified and my heart may be satisfied."*

Take me Lord, O take me truly,
Mind and soul and heart and will.
Empty me and cleanse me throughly.
Then with all your fullness fill.

Lord, I ask it hardly knowing
What this wondrous gift may be.
Yet fulfil to overflowing,
Your great meaning let me see.

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

6. What are we to do when something dies? - 2 Kings 4:8-37

Introduction

1. **A picture of a man of God** (v. 8 and 9)
2. **A description of a well-equipped Christian life**
3. **Raising dead things to life again**
    - **The concern of the mother**
        - her greatness
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    - **The condition of the child**
        - Divinely given
        - suddenly struck down
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    - **The father**
        - casual treatment
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    - **The failure of the servant**
        - insensitive
        - instructed
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    - **The triumph of the Prophet of Abundant Life**
        - isolation
        - intercession
        - identification
        - insistence

Conclusion

What are we to do when something dies? - 2 Kings 4:8-37

Introduction

Sadly, as believers, we see people and things die.

- **Vision dies** - often people begin so well, with such great faith and zeal, but slowly that vision shrinks and finally dies. Many things kill vision - an accumulation of disappointments and setbacks, betrayal by leaders, sheer fatigue etc. But for one reason or another, faith, hope and expectations die. Vision is dead.
- **Relationships die** - marriages die. The relationship between parents and children dies. Teams explode in bad relationships. Friendships wither and die. Churches, inter-mission partnerships and mission agencies can all die.
- **Our spiritual life can die** - to use a medical example, a major cause of death in our physical bodies is heart attack and the major cause of this is arteries that should be flexible and wide getting clogged up. The heart has to do a great deal of extra work forcing blood down a clogged artery - clogged by cholesterol and other fatty tissues. That extra work kills it. So it is with us, sin slowly (often unnoticed) begins to clog up our spiritual lives and will eventually kill our usefulness in the advance of God's Kingdom.
- What are we to do when something dies? Are we fatalistic with an attitude of, "it's God's will" – resignation? Here is a story of what to do when something dies. Don't accept that death is final! This woman didn't. We preach the Gospel of Resurrection. God can bring to life our dead visions, our dead hopes and our love in those dead relationships. We can experience abundant life. We can meet the demands placed upon us through the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

So let us learn from this story. There are three parts:

- We are given a picture of a man of God - not doing amazing miracles but in the ordinariness of life - travelling from A to B. There was something about Elisha that characterised him as 'a holy man of God'. We will look briefly at what characterises "holiness". (v. 8/9)
- Elisha was given a small at the room on the roof and it was equipped with everything he needed. We will look briefly at this equipment. (v. 10)
- Finally we will look at the raising to life of "something" that has died (v. 11-37)

1. A picture of a 'man of God'

This is one of the most touching stories in all Scripture and indeed in all literature. It is in homes, as you mingle with people in their everyday life, that you learn most about their spiritual condition.

The plane of Jezreel is, from an agricultural point of view, the richest land in Israel. It was often a battlefield bounded on either side by two ranges of hills - one leading to Mount Carmel and the other to Mount Tabor. Shunem (which has the root meaning of rest - the place of rest) is in the Valley of Jezreel about 20 miles up from the Jordan Valley and about 25 miles from Carmel. Shunem is now called Solem.

Elisha seems to have travelled often in the Jordan Valley from Gilgal to the Valley of Jezreel through which a river/stream flowed down into the River Jordan. Shunem is close to the source of this stream. The valley then turns into the Plain of Meggido. So Shunem was approximately halfway from Mount Carmel to the River Jordan. Perhaps Elisha went to Mount Carmel for periods of solitude and meditation. On this frequently made trip Elisha was not unobserved.

Many times the woman of Shunem saw Elisha passing by on the road near her house and she recognised him as 'a holy man of God'. [The title 'man of God' is used more times of Elisha than of anyone else in Scripture.]

Do people recognise us as holy men/women of God? God requires us to be holy and He has made such a life possible for every one of us.

"For God has not called us for impurity but in holiness" (1 Thess. 4:7)

Holiness can be defined in different ways - both negatively and positively. In Elisha's case it can be described **negatively** as:

- no contamination - unspotted from the world of the House of Omri
- no compromise - no unholy alliances
- no cowardice
- no complicity with evil

In the Elisha's case holiness can be **positively** described in his:

- devotion to his parents
- diligence in serving Elijah for nine years
- discernment - he saw the chariots of fire
- approachability
- dependence on God

There are three distinctives of men and women of God in the Bible:

They **believe** in God

They **belong** wholly to God

They **behave** like God

How do you measure up? Elisha measured up well.

Dr. Sa-eed Khan, a Kurd from Iran, was an outstanding believer. He died in 1942. In the '60s a colleague went to the area where Dr Sa-eed had lived and worked and he made friends with an old man there. During conversations he asked him if he had ever known Dr Sa-eed. The old man went pale and whispered, "Dr Sa-eed was Jesus the Messiah Himself".

Note the following five points:

- **'A holy man of God' never needs to worry about the provision of his daily needs**

  It is good to pause and make this observation. Many seem to be anxious about their finances and the provision of their needs now and in the future. If we are "holy people of God" then there is never a need to be anxious. God used this woman of Shunem to provide for Elisha.

  God had wonderfully cared for his master, Elijah, at the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:2-16) and through the widow of Zarephath (now south Lebanon). Elisha had learned from this. God will wonderfully provide for us for He has promised:

  "Therefore, do not be anxious saying, 'What shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear?' .... Your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you." (Mt. 6:31-32)

  "The young lions suffer want and hunger but those that seek the Lord lack no good thing." (Ps. 34:10)

  "And My God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:19)

  "I have been young and now I am old yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken." Ps. 37:25

- '**A holy man of God' is very quickly noticed**

  It didn't take long for this woman to recognise that Elisha was 'a holy man of God'. Something about him was very different from the other people who came through the village. What could it have been?

- ✓ Politeness and friendliness to the labourers in the fields?
- ✓ Being kind and considerate to his donkey?
- ✓ Perhaps his helpfulness to other travellers?

Something about Elisha said to her, "This is the genuine article - a real 'man of God'!"

Are we like Elisha? Do others watching you see in your life 'a holy man/woman of God'? 2 Tim. 3:5 reminds us that it is possible to have ***"a form of godliness"*** but deny its power. We can act out a form of holiness but ultimately we will be seen as fakes/phonies!

O to reflect His grace,
Causing the world to see
Love that shall flow
Till others may know
Jesus revealed in me.

- **'A holy man of God' soon becomes a topic of conversation**

  This woman **saw** that Elisha was 'a holy man of God' and then she **talked** about it. She told her husband and others as well. All of us are the subject of other people's conversations! What are they saying about you? It is a solemn thought! ***"None of us lives .... to himself"*** (Rom. 14:7). We are all watched and we are all talked about. Do they see something of the Lord Jesus in me or what do they see?

- **'A holy man of God' is most needed in the everyday workaday world**

  Elisha wasn't seen in "the pulpit" or in "the church" as he walked along. He wasn't preaching or holding a campaign. He was travelling between A and B living out the ordinariness of life with ordinary people.

  "And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name .... And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when <u>through you</u> I vindicate my holiness before your eyes." (Ezek. 36:23)

  Notice Thomas' statement in Jn. 20:25, ***"Unless I see ... I will never believe".*** We need to be like the one whose name we bear just living out life in the world - followers of the Lord Jesus and seen to be like Him.

- **'A holy man of God' will always see results from his consistent living**

  Elisha did! He was invited to stay in the home at Shunem and a wonderful blessing came to a childless woman as a result of his presence and prophecy in the name of the Lord and this continued throughout her life. [see 2 Kings 8:1-6]

  If we are faithful in **our servant roles** - living out consistently a life of Christ-like holiness, we will see results. Remember Gal. 6:9, ***"And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary."***

  I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day.
  I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.
  The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear.
  Fine counsel is confusing but example's always clear.
  The best of preachers are the ones who demonstrate their creeds,
  For to see good put into action is what everybody needs.

  So if we are faithful in our **believing**, our belonging and our **behaving**, **then** our lives will be fruitful for the glory of God.

2. A description of a well-furnished Christian life

"That the man of God may be competent/adequate/equipped/furnished for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:17)

It says that the woman "constrained" him to come in and eat bread. All who have lived in the Middle East will have experienced this sort of "constraint". The food was simple and homely.

But hospitality isn't just inviting people in to eat, but learning graciously to receive favour from others. This woman had her husband build a little room on the top of a house so Elisha could stay.

The furniture in the room on the roof reminds us of the essential features of a **well-equipped, balanced life** - a balance between rest and ministry. Some lives are badly and sparsely furnished with - inadequate equipment. Others are cluttered up with useless broken equipment.

From this story there are four pieces of furniture/equipment that are essential. Unless we possess what these articles symbolise we will not be well-equipped, effective workers for God.

- **We need a bed! - the symbol of rest**

  "Come unto Me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you shall have rest for your souls." (Mt. 11:28-29)

  There are two kinds of **rest** spoken about by the Lord Jesus - the rest that is a **gift** and the rest that is a **discovery**.

  So why do we need a bed? What kind of rest do we need? We need five kinds of rest:

  - Rest from the heavy burden of sin
  - Rest from the conscience that condemns
  - Rest amidst the unrest in the world
  - Rest from the subtle strivings of our self-life
  - Rest from the responsibility of service for God

  We will look at these in turn.

  - **Rest from the heavy burden of sin**

    There is only one place to find rest from sin - at the Cross - where "the blood of Jesus whispers peace within".

    "And through Him (the Lord Jesus) ***to reconcile all things to Himself*** (the Father) ***having made peace through the blood of the Cross ...."*** (Col. 1:20)

    Are you sleeping/resting on this bed? Or are you like those in Is. 57:20, ***"But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet and its waters toss up refuse and mud."***

  - **Rest from the conscience that condemns**

    This rest comes when we know that all is well in our relationship with God **and** with people - colleagues, team members, in fact all men and women we are in contact with.

    "I do my best to maintain a blameless conscience before both God and men." (Acts 24:16)

    Paul said this when on trial before the Governor Felix. So Paul knew how restful it is to lie on this bed even when on trial. It is great to know that as the Lord looks at us, He is well pleased! ***"Whatever we ask, we receive from him, because we ... do the things that are pleasing in His sight."*** (1 Jn. 3:22)

  - **Rest amidst the unrest in the world**

    Everywhere people's hearts are filled with fear, anxiety, stress, worry and doubt. But we can have rest and release from all these issues. Here are three lovely passages:

    "Those who love Your law have great peace and nothing causes them to stumble." (Ps. 119:165)

    "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace because he trusts in You." (Is. 26:3)

"Be anxious for nothing. (!) ***But in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Phil. 4:6-7)

With the Lord Jesus we can always experience rest, just as the disciples did when caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. See the story in Mk. 6:45-52 where the Lord Jesus walked over the water and got into the boat with them, ***"And the wind ceased."***

- **Rest from the subtle strivings of our self-life**

  The self-life within us is our deadly enemy. Paul cried out in despair, ***"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*** (Rom. 7:24-25)

  Through identification with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus we can have complete deliverance. This comes from the reckoning of faith: **"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."** (Rom. 6:11)

- **Rest from the responsibility of service for God**

  There is a great difference between **working for God** and allowing God to work **through** us. Working for God soon results in fatigue and strain, but to let Him work through us means joy and fruitfulness in service.

  A deep rest and joy comes to the man or woman of God when they realise that God Himself is the 'Worker' and our responsibility is only to respond with love and obedience to His immense ability. Hudson Taylor discovered this after many stressful years of ministry in China. He wrote about this in, **Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret.** When the terrible Boxer Rebellion was launched in China and China Inland missionaries were being executed Hudson Taylor was still able to sing:

  Jesus I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art.
  I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart.
  Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee and Thy beauty fills my soul
  For by Thy transforming power Thou hast made me whole.

  So to live as holy men or women of God, we need to be fully equipped and one very important piece of equipment is a **bed** - the symbol of living in rest!

➢ **We need a table - the symbol of fellowship**

"…. the people who <u>know their God</u> shall stand firm and take action." (Dan. 11:32)

One of the first pictures in Genesis is of the fellowship of God with Adam and Eve - a fellowship that was perfect and unspoiled in the garden in the cool of the day. Sadly this fellowship was broken by sin.

An essential "piece of equipment" for the holy man or woman of God is to have regular holy, happy fellowship with God. So don't be so busy, so occupied or so full of work that you don't spend time with God. Rev. 3:20 is a lovely picture of the desire of the Lord Jesus to have fellowship with us. Let us open the door and sit with him in fellowship at the table.

But the table is also a symbol of holy, happy relationships with all other believers. Open, warm fellowship with other believers is a prerequisite to being in fellowship with God.

So to be holy men and women of God we need to be equipped with "a bed" and "a table".

➢ **We need a stool - a symbol of instruction**

We will never become men and women of God unless we know what it is to be regularly taught by the Holy Spirit from the Bible. We need clear direction if we are to be effective.

"The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us. He shone forth … He came from ten thousands of holy ones with flaming fire at His right hand. Yes, He loved His people … so they followed in Your steps, receiving direction from You." (Deut. 33:2-3)

Mary, Martha's sister, ***"Sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching."*** (Lk. 10:39). Like Mary, we are disciples; we are learners and followers of the Lord Jesus. We have taken His yoke upon ourselves. We have a passion to learn of Him and to do His will. And this requires stern discipline, for we are in inherently careless, self-willed and useless if untaught.

Martha was told by the Lord Jesus, ***"One thing is necessary"*** - that was to learn from the Lord Jesus. Ps. 1:2 says we should, "***Meditate on His law day and night"***. So we should study His teaching, meditate on His teaching (2 Tim. 2:15) and obey his instructions, ***"Taking every thought captive to obey Christ"***. (2 Cor. 10:5) and submitting to His full control. (Rom. 6:13) So a holy man or woman of God needs "a bed", "a table" and "a stool".

- **We need a candlestick - a lamp - a symbol of witness**

  A lamp speaks of a life that is shining in the darkness. This is the Lord Jesus' life shining His light through us. Phil. 2:14-16 says this, ***"Do all things without grumbling or dispute that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you will appear as lights in the world."***

  We need to witness to the light we have found in the Lord Jesus.

So there are four essentials for a well-furnished (well-equipped) life as a holy man/woman of God:

a bed - a table - a stool - a lamp

a bed: symbolic of our rest that is found in the Lord Jesus

a table: symbolic of the fellowship we enjoy with the Lord Jesus

a stool: symbolic of the instruction we receive from the Lord Jesus

a lamp: symbolic of our witness given for the Lord Jesus

Not only are these four essential for a well-equipped life, but notice the order:

first **rest**, then **fellowship**, then **instruction**, then **witness**.

3. Raising dead things to life again

The story revolves around **five** people: the mother (the woman of Shunem), her small son, the father, Elisha's servant Gehazi and Elisha himself. Only Elisha as the Prophet of Abundant Life was able to bring the dead child back to life. We will look at each of these people in turn.

The concern of the mother

- **Her greatness (v. 8)**

  She was **spiritually-minded**, for she recognised the 'man of God' passing her door from time to time and she wanted to learn more from him.

  She was **practically-minded**. She provided for Elisha a private, fully furnished room.

  She was humble and **lowly-minded** (v. 13) Elisha offered to speak on her behalf to the King or the commander of the Northern Kingdom's armies - the most powerful people in the land - if she needed anything at all. She replied with a truly lovely, contented reply, ***"I dwell among my own people."***

  1 Tim. 6:8 says, ***"Godliness with contentment is great gain."*** Paul said of himself, ***"I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content "*** (Phil. 4:11)

  This is a lovely picture of such a common scene in the Middle East. Elisha wants to thank her for her generosity, so in effect he asks the question, *"What can I do for you? Can I use my 'wasta' (influence) on your behalf?"* Ordinary people so often need help in an unjust society.

  What an opportunity! But no, ***"I dwell among my own people"*** - nobly spoken by a daughter of Israel! She was saying, *"I don't need protection and I need no favours."* This is true independence of mind - very different from independence of circumstances. True independence of mind can be judged by the way we give. To be truly dependent on God makes us independent of man.

- **Her weakness**

  The weakness was that she had no children. Evidently her husband was old and she had accepted this very sad position. In Middle Eastern culture to have no children - especially no male heir - is a tragedy and the blame is always placed on the woman. So this woman had come to the position of being childless and when Elisha promised her a son she didn't believe him (v. 16). Her faith couldn't rise to the height demanded. She wasn't like Sarah (Gen. 18:12), ***"Sarah received strength to conceive and was delivered of a child when she was passed age because she judged Him faithful who had promised."*** (Heb. 11:11)

  So this woman lived in a place of rest (Shunem) but it was not a rest of faith. I wonder if she laughed like Sarah. Abraham did not stagger at the promise of God (Rom. 4:20), but this woman of Shunem did! When Elisha made her a promise she didn't believe. But before another year has passed she had a son!

The condition of the son - representing all that has died in our lives and ministries

- **He was divinely given**

  There is the lovely story of his birth. His mother learned the lesson that all life comes from God. I think the lesson for us is that only divinely given things can come to life again! Our **own** dreams, initiatives and plans may die and when they do, they stay dead. This is also true of all relationships. But what is in God's purpose can be resurrected.

  Still the mother must have thought of those verses in the Psalms (139:13-14),

  "For You formed my inward parts. You weaved me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

- **He was suddenly smitten** (v. 18-20)

  We don't know how old the little boy was - perhaps five or six. It is not hard to picture a busy harvest scene. Like any farmer's son, the boy was very interested in the work of the reapers and those gathering the stalks. Possibly the boy was playing with or among the reapers. What a fun day it was at the beginning! Suddenly he became very ill, ***"My head, my head!"*** Was he suffering from sunstroke? Did he play out in the sun too long? His father was too busy to take his only son home and directed a servant to carry the boy back to his mother at home. The boy sat on his mother's knee until noon and then he died!

  Our visions, dreams, plans, hopes etc. can be burned away in the "heat" of circumstances - in the spiritual battle. Faith, hope and even love for spouse, family, colleagues and team mates or local people can die in the midst of the "harvest". Often it is a sudden death while you were busy even having fun!

  In anguish, the mother must have asked, *"Why?"* many times. She didn't understand. Her son was the gift of God through Elisha and so she **determined** to go to Elisha. Elisha was the Prophet of Abundant Life. So she carried her son up to the little room at the top of the house and laid the boy down on the bed of the Prophet of Abundant Life - an action very like pleading the promises!

- **He was supernaturally raised**

  Only God can restore to life what has died. The Lord Jesus said, ***"I am the resurrection and the life!"*** The Lord Jesus raises the dead to life - not just people, but vision, hope and faith. He restores relationships and situations of breakdown. We worship, love and obey God who raises the dead!

  The mother realised that she had no capacity to give life to her son, so she went to the Prophet of Abundant Life.

The boy's father

- **He was co-operative with his wife**

  He apparently lacked any spiritual perception and didn't notice anything special about the 'holy man of God'. But he was willing to co-operate with his wife and build the little room on the roof for Elisha when he passed by.

- **He was casual in the treatment of his son**

  Harvest was the busiest time of the year and his wealth depended on bringing the harvest home quickly and efficiently. Apparently he was too busy to care for his sick son and he instructed a servant to look after the little boy.

  Too busy! In this case he was too busy making money. It is so easy to become too busy with urgent things and neglect what is really important. This is a major reason "things die" in our lives.

- **He was cynical in the treatment of his wife** (v. 23)

  When the boy is dead, his wife comes to him with a request to borrow a donkey to ride to Mount Carmel and find Elisha. His answer was, *"Why? Why now? Why involve religion now? It isn't a religious festival? Why go?"*

  It isn't hard to imagine that the donkey she wanted could be used in the harvest! He had no faith, no hope in 'the holy man of God'. To him all the evidence was that dead things remain dead! Religion had a place for rites of passage - circumcision, marriage and death as well as seasonal festivals, but religion had no part to play in this sort of situation. So why seek help from a preacher in this situation and remember, there was a harvest to bring in.

The failure of the servant Gehazi

It is about 16 miles from Shunem to Mount Carmel. Perhaps in the late afternoon Elisha on the Mount could see two people - a woman on a donkey and her servant - rushing along to find him. As they got closer he recognised the woman. Only an extraordinary event could have brought her to Elisha in this way. So he tells Gehazi to run down and ask her what the matter is.

Gehazi represents Christian workers who lack spiritual authority. We are often immature or even secular in our thinking.

Gehazi obeys Elisha and goes down to meet the woman. She replies, ***"All is well"***. This is so typical of Middle East culture. You don't share bad news with strangers and only reluctantly with close relatives. Her silence indicates her strength. She wants to talk to Elisha who she trusts. When she meets Elisha she throws herself down at his feet. Gehazi tries to push her away. This mother was like Jacob, ***"I will not let you go unless you bless me"***.

- **The insensitivity of the servant** (v. 27)

  His lack of sensitivity was born out of a lack of discernment which is always a sign of immaturity. Gehazi was rebuked.

  The woman pours out two questions that reveal the inner conflict going on in her heart.

  "Did I ask my Lord for a son?" Was she seeking to escape any responsibility for what had happened to her son? We certainly do this when something dies in our life and ministry - vision etc.

  "Did I not say, 'do not deceive me'?" The implication is that you, Elisha, made a prediction that I would have a son and now he is dead. You bear responsibility for this tragedy. And it was true - the boy was God-given. Notice Elisha didn't know what had happened to this family. The Bible is not there for some sort of magical fortune-telling. For a start, Scripture doesn't tell us information that can be discovered from observation and discussion.

- **The servant was instructed** (v. 29)

  Elisha sent Gehazi to carry his staff to the boy. He was told to go swiftly. Don't stop on the way. It was an instruction that obligated self-forgetfulness, self-denial and focus. He had to go quickly not to please people, but to awaken the dead. That too is our purpose.

  Gehazi was sent with the staff. But there is no power in a prophet's staff or in any religious object. Gehazi carried out his instructions swiftly and exactly. Why did Elisha do this? Was it a delaying tactic? Was he seeking time to understand God's way? Was it to get rid of Gehazi and focus on prayer?

- **The servant's impotence and ineffectiveness** (v. 31)

  Gehazi couldn't bring life back to the boy. Faced with death he was impotent. That is so often true of us - we have the tools, we follow the method used by others, but there is no effectiveness. Like Gehazi we have the rod of authority, but not the authority of the rod. We have the techniques, but no power. What has died stays dead.

  It was a long journey for Gehazi – 16 miles to Shunem - failure and another 16 miles back to Mount Carmel probably in the very early morning. This was followed by another 16 miles back to Shunem accompanying Elisha and the mother.

  Our powerlessness can be very exhausting!

The triumph of the Prophet of Abundant Life

Elisha's object was not to cleanse the corpse, embalm it with spices and wrap it in fine linen. All that would do would be to leave a corpse a corpse! His objective was to bring the dead boy to life and restore him to his mother. Life **and restoration** was his goal!

There are four steps to the restoration of things that have died in our lives.

- **Step One – isolation** (v. 13)

  "So he went in and shut the door behind the two of them."

  "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."
  (Mt. 6:6)

  Step one is to isolate yourself from a busy, curious world and be alone with God. Focus only on God and on "the problem". Concentrate your energy on the one vital task - prayer.

- **Step Two – intercession**

  Elisha ***"prayed to the Lord"***. Note the following:

  - ✓ **It was a definite prayer** - specific prayer for the restoration of life to the boy. Why? Because of God's promise to the mother through him - a God-given child - and for the glory of God. Elisha pleaded the promises of God, the honour of God's name, the need of the mother and the grief of the family. One by one he rolled all these great "burdens" on our great "Burden-bearer"!
  - ✓ **It was fervent prayer** - perhaps like Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam. 1:27, ***"For this child I prayed and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him."***

- **Step Three – identification** (v. 34)

  Elisha lay upon the child - stretched himself upon the corpse. Medically this is interesting. But it is teaching us about spiritual identification with what we are praying for:

  - ✓ **mouth-to-mouth** - that they may speak the praises of the Lord and share the power of the Gospel
  - ✓ **eyes-to-eyes** - that they may see - have a return of vision and discernment
  - ✓ **hands-to-hands** - that they would again have a passionate interest in the work of God

  This is how we must identify with the spiritually dead, wrestling with God in prayer and keeping in close personal contact!

- **Step Four - insistence in prayer**

  Elisha kept at his task of prayer until the boy was alive again. And it is with great wrestling that the dead come to life again. It was hard work - a great sacrifice in time and effort. The miracle didn't happen at once. Elisha had to hold on to God. There was no impatience or satisfaction with partial results.

Life came back in parts: first a sign of warmth, then a sign of sneezing and finally his eyes opened - a sign of vision!

There must have been great songs of thanksgiving that night in the home of the little boy. Our God hears and answers prayer. He is the resurrection and the life - the source of abundant life!

"Go, stretch thyself upon the dead,
Thou living proof that Christ has said,
'Ask and you shall receive!'
Oh claim His promise! Ask once more.
Thou shalt receive a boundless store
If - if you can believe."

"Hitherto you have asked nothing in My name, ask and you shall receive that your joy may be full." (Jn. 16:23-25)

Don't allow dead things that were God-given to remain dead!

A Poem by Catherine Hankey

The Prayer of Elisha

The door is shut! Let's none intrude
On that momentous solitude.
Elisha is alone!
Alone beside the lifeless boy,
But yesterday so full of joy.
Now motionless as a stone.

The door is shut, but God is there,
The Living God who answers prayer.
What will the issue be?
A glorious answer comes 'ere long,
Prayer is quenched in thankful song.
Where, death, thy victory?

Despondent Christian! Why not share
This glorious privilege in prayer?
And share its great reward.
'Tis secret prayer that wins the day,
Not prayerless effort! Rise and pray!
Thine is Elisha's God.

Enter thy closet; wrestle there
With faith's "effectual fervent prayer"
Till death shall change to life,
Till hope out of the dust shall spring
And joyous notes of praise shall ring
Out of bitter strife.

Go on in faith, go on in prayer;
Order thy cause before Him there.
It cannot but prevail.
The things impossible with men
Grow possible with God again:
His power cannot fail!

Fear not, though face-to-face with death!
Only invoke the Living Breath
To breathe upon the slain.
Once thou thyself was lying there
As dead as he! Canst thou despair?
Arise and pray again.

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

7. Two divine mathematical principles of the abundant life - 2 Kings 4:38-44

Introduction

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    - **The donation** (v. 42)
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    - **The second divine mathematical principle**

Two divine mathematical principles of the abundant life - 2 Kings 4:38-44

Introduction

It was the privilege of some of the Old Testament believers that, in some measure, they were allowed to see the day of the Lord Jesus afar off in the future and rejoice. The Lord Jesus was ***"before Abraham"*** and ***"greater than Moses"***. Elisha was the last of "the prophets of deeds". After him came "the prophets of the word". The Lord Jesus was both and far greater.

The first story: Death in the Pot (v. 38-41)

- **The condition in the land**

  The problem was a poisoned stew and the story is about how the stew was poisoned and how Elisha had the solution to this problem as to every other crisis presented to him. How did the poison get into the pot? ***"…. Elisha came again to Gilgal when there was famine in the land."*** (v. 38)

  Times and scenes can change very rapidly and a terrible drought came to the land. Perhaps this is the same famine that drove the Shunamite woman from her home. (2 Kings 8:1-2)

  So as Elisha went down the Jordan Valley there were signs of famine all around. Fields and vineyards were barren and fruitless and the farm animals were emaciated. The cause of the famine was probably drought - no rain fell (perhaps for up to 7 years).

  Poor harvests due to lack of water is still a major concern today for those living in the Jordan Valley. The reason is not drought, but the fact of the Israelis removing water from the Jordan River - a major bone of contention between Israel and Palestine.

  [Note: believers are not usually preserved from all the common evils of this world.]

- **The cause of the drought**

  In the Old Testament there is a clear correlation between drought (and the resulting famine) and the disobedience of the people of God. See Deut. 28:23-24:

  "And the heavens over your head shall be bronze and the earth under you shall be iron. The Lord will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed."

  This is one of the results of disobedience by God's people under the Old Covenant. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had flagrantly disobeyed God's law. The worship of Ba'al had invaded nearly everywhere in the Northern Kingdom. The famine was caused by drought and the ultimate cause of drought was disobedience - the inexorable law of the Old Testament.

  The New Testament raises this principle to a higher spiritual level, ***"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will, from the flesh, reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will, from the Spirit, reap eternal life."*** (Gal. 6:7-8)

  So what was the **cure** for this catastrophe in the Old Testament? In Solomon's prayer in 2 Chron. 6:26-27 we have the only remedy: ***"When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, if they pray towards this place and acknowledge Your name and turn from their sin when You afflict them, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, when You teach them the good way which they should walk and grant rain upon Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance."***

  Why wasn't anyone doing this? Maybe Elisha was waiting for genuine repentance to come from the people: ***"There is no one who calls upon Your name, who rouses himself to take hold of You."*** (Is. 64:7)

James 5:16 says, ***"The prayer of a righteous man has great power as it is working."***

According to 2 Chron. 7:14, God's conditions for the restoration of the land are:

"If My people, who are called by My name, humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land".

- **The crisis in the school** (v. 38-40)

  The condition of the land had an impact on the students in the School of the Prophets and led to a considerable crisis. There are seven aspects to this failure:

  - **Instruction that failed** - I can imagine that Elisha was expounding some great Old Testament principle and noticed that the student prophets were strangely distracted. Perhaps he heard their stomachs rumbling. Clearly they couldn't learn because they were starving!

  - **Instruction given** - Elisha told his servant (possibly Gehazi) to, ***"Put on a large pot and make a stew for the sons of the prophets"***. In the New Testament the apostles gave this 'sort of business' only to men full of the Holy Spirit and **wisdom**. But notice Elisha's care for his students – ***"a large pot"*** – ***"make stew"***. It is easy to set up the structures of a project, but that doesn't guarantee the content and the results.

    The students were sent out to collect herbs and things to go into the stew.

  - **The danger of independence** - one student (perhaps this speaks of the danger of individualism) gathers up wild gourds. These are sometimes abundant in the desert. They are rich in colour, ***"pleasant to the eyes"***, but dangerous and deadly. He cuts them up and drops them into the stew.

    So often the world's resources are like these wild gourds. Instead of being satisfying, they bring death. Satan doesn't present death in all its hideousness. Rather he masks his snares to make them tempting so we pick them up!

  - **Ignorance** - probably the reason the wild gourds got into the pot was ignorance, for ***"They did not know what they were"***. Other possible reasons were lack of attention to detail or perhaps absent-mindedness.
    [Theological students are good at this!]

    Sadly, both in church history and in Christian organisations, errors have been introduced to God's people, but very rarely with any protests. We haven't been on our guard as to the potential deadly effects of "mistakes". There can be so much that is good and wholesome in "the pot", but a little poison spoils it all! Scripture warns us, ***"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirit/principles of the world and not according to Christ."*** (Col. 2:8)

    "Man, earthy of the earth, an-hungered feeds
    On earth's dark poison tree:
    Wild gourds and deadly roots and bitter weeds
    And as his food is he!

  - **The Intention**: ***"The stew was poured out for the men to eat."*** (v. 40) What a tragedy! All the students had smelled the stew cooking. Their hunger pangs were intensified, but there was death in the pot. One student recognised – perhaps by the taste – that something was wrong. Imagine the helpless despair that would settle in every heart – like a crushing weight. What little food they had was in the pot and now they had lost it all – all their hopes and expectations were now ruined.

    They must have talked at length about how to get the poison out of the pot. How do you neutralise the poison of wild gourds? How do you subtract – extract – evil things from good projects? What do you do when disastrous things happen

'accidentally' to spiritual projects? This is a picture of Christian ministry, of team life and even of family life. Our basic solution is to get it out – remove the problem. But subtraction never works!

Notice: Elisha remains calm in all the panic and confusion!

- **The inability to eat**: the poison will destroy you, will ruin your family, team or project. In this story the students felt hungrier than before!

  What poisons believers today? There is a long list:

  - ✓ secular humanism introduced in schools and reinforced in universities
  - ✓ poor ethical principles
  - ✓ post-modernity
  - ✓ racism
  - ✓ hedonism
  - ✓ materialism
  - ✓ self-centredness etc.

  These things may have intruded unintentionally into our lives, but they are deadly. They may seem small, but they will poison the whole.

  But death in the School of the Prophets while they were being taught by the Prophet of Abundant Life would have been a contradiction!

- **The cure in the cauldron - 3 steps to the cure**

  - **Admission and confession of the facts**

    "There is death in the pot!" There must be open honesty about our condition before God and before others. Both the facts (there were wild gourds in the pot) and the result (potential death) must come out.

  - **The addition** (v. 41)

    Elisha said, ***"Bring me meal".*** Elisha was not caught off guard. He was always the master of the situation. The meal was the antidote and when put into the pot would cancel the poison.

    The "meal" represents the Lord Jesus - the Bread of Life - and in particular the application of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus to all that is poisoning our lives. The addition of the Cross/Resurrection to "the pot" of our lives cancels the poison.

    As you know, the offerings on the altar in the Tabernacle in the early chapters of Leviticus all speak of different aspects of the work of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. In Leviticus chapter 2 we have the regulations related to meal offerings - details like, 'fine flour, (olive) oil and salt with frankincense - no yeast, no honey etc.' And it was to be, ***"A pleasing aroma to the Lord"***.

    Eph. 5:2 says, ***"And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."***

    So into our poisonous situation we need to add all the meaning of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This is the only addition that will cancel the poison and bring life and health into the pot.

  - **Appropriation**: ***"Pour out that they may eat."*** (v. 41) for now the stew was healthy and wholesome.

    "And hungry souls there are, that find and eat
    God's manna day by day.
    And glad they are, their life is fresh and sweet
    For as their food are they." [Ter Steeger]

- **The first divine mathematical principle:**

  We try and subtract: God always adds!

  - ✓ We need to analyse what are the poisons in our pot
  - ✓ Don't try and subtract the poison out of the pot
  - ✓ Add into the situation the meaning of the Cross and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus, for this is the only factor that will purify the situation

    Eph. 2:12-16: ***"Remember that you were, at that time, separated from Christ, alienated from the Commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility … that He might create in Himself one new man … so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the Cross thereby killing the hostility."***

The second story: the Feeding of the One Hundred (v. 42-44)

This story points forward to the miraculous feeding of the multitude by the Lord Jesus about 800 years later. The story has three parts: the donation (v. 42), the direction (v. 43) and the distribution (v. 44).

- **The donation** (v. 42)
  - **The faithful farmer**: the anonymous donor (like so many millions of others since) came from a village called Ba'al-Shalishah (meaning Ba'al is King of Kings), so a good man from a rotten place! This faithful farmer brought to Elisha the first fruits from his harvest (it must have rained!) - 20 barley loaves. These were small, round, flat breads a little bigger than the palm of your hand. Barley bread was eaten by the poor. The rich ate loaves made from wheat. Along with these loaves there were some ears of corn in his sack.

    The farmer probably accomplished much more than he intended. He probably meant to give Elisha a small meal, but he fed a hundred others! God can make much better use of our "gifts" then anyone else can. Putting it in monetary terms, you can't get so much interest for your money anywhere else!

    The farmer brought the **first fruits** (see Leviticus 23:9-14) of the produce of his fields - the best of the first. He gave, as the law required, the first produce just after a long famine when his own cupboard was bare. He gave as a gift of gratitude to God. So he knew the law and his own personal responsibility and he gladly obeyed. Imagine what his wife and family might have said!
  - **The courageous farmer**: Ba'al Shalishah is in the area occupied by Tel Aviv today. Apparently it had a major shrine to Ba'al. His neighbours were probably offering sacrifices to Ba'al. We also are surrounded by people who devote their treasures to their "god" - gods of pleasure, leisure, ambition etc. - but not this courageous farmer.
  - **The sacrificial farmer**: he gave in a time of scarcity. The law said, ***"You shall not eat either bread or parched corn or green ears until the self-same day you have brought an offering unto your God"***. (Lev. 23:14) It was probably a two or three day journey up from the coast over the Judean hills and then down to the Jordan Valley and to Gilgal in order to give his gift to Elisha.

Does God get our tips or our tithes? Like David, this farmer didn't offer to the Lord that which cost him nothing (2 Sam. 24:24). Also remember the boy who gave all of his supper to the Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:9).

- **The discerning farmer**: he travelled far to give his gift to Elisha - the 'man of God'. He didn't give it to the priests in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. Neither did he give it to the priests in Bethel. He gave it to the Prophet of Abundant Life. He certainly refused to take the gift to the Samarian temples of Ba'al!

  Discernment is needed concerning to whom we give our gifts. Sadly, there are scams even among "Christian" charities. They appeal for money for a good cause but they are a hoax. Before we give we need to ask some questions. Is this a movement of God? Are they doing God's work exclusively? Are they partially lining their own pockets?

- **A farmer with a good sense of timing**: it came at a time of dire need. Evidently the stew was finished and the students' stomachs were rumbling again. Once again there was no food available. There are so many stories in Scripture of God's timing - always just in time and never late!

So the farmer's giving was faithful, courageous, sacrificial, discerning and timely! Elisha must have rejoiced not only at the gift, but also the fact of giving by this one farmer must have been a source of joy - help from a very unexpected quarter.

The New Testament instructs believers in 1 Tim. 6:18 that, ***"They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life"***.

- **The direction given by Elisha**

The gift of food was given to Elisha, but as far as Elisha was concerned, it was not just for himself: ***"Give to the people that they may eat."*** (v. 42) None of us lives for himself.

So the gift was **shared** among the 100 students. Evidently some of the student prophets had wives and children (see 4:1-7). So there were probably many more than 100 people all with great appetites. It was a **sacrificial** choice. It was not a lot, but food sacrificially given is to be sacrificially given away - indicating a greater concern for the needs of others than for himself. The peril of fully-supported Christian workers is that they become just **receivers** and not generous givers. ***"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*** (Acts 20:35) ***"I will very gladly spend and be spent for you."*** (2 Cor. 12:15).

The Prophet of Abundant Life gave the gift entirely away to others. So did Paul and above all, so did the Lord Jesus. There is clearly a paradox - the more you give away the more you are blessed.

There is a lovely story about the great 19th century Baptist preacher C.H. Spurgeon. He was based in South London, but he was asked one weekend to preach in the three largest Baptist churches in Bristol. He went hoping and praying that he would receive gifts from these meetings of £300 - the sum he urgently needed back in London after the weekend for orphanage bills. He got the money exactly. He spent Sunday night in Bristol before going back on the train in the morning to London. But he couldn't sleep! He heard a voice that he knew was the voice of the Lord Jesus saying, *"Give the £300 to George Muller"*. He argued with God, *"I need the money to pay the bills tomorrow for my poor children in the orphanage "*. God spoke again, *"Give the £300 to George Muller"*. Finally Spurgeon said, *"Yes Lord, I will."* Then he fell asleep.

Early the following morning he found George Muller's orphanage in Bristol and asked to see George Muller. He was shown into Muller's room and found him on his knees in prayer. Spurgeon put his hand on George's shoulder and said, *"George, God has told me to give you this £300."* Muller said, *"Oh, dear Mr Spurgeon, I have been asking the Lord this very minute for that exact sum of money for I have bills to pay today for my orphanage."* The two men prayed and Spurgeon left to return to London wondering

how he was going to pay his bills. When he got back to his office, on his desk there was a letter waiting for him. He opened it to find it contained £320! He cried with joy. *"The Lord has returned my £300 plus interest of £20!"*

- **The direction challenged** (v. 42)

  The servant (possibly Gehazi) clearly thought this was a stupid idea. It is always a temptation when receiving a gift given sacrificially by others, to give some of it away and keep the rest. Twenty loaves among 100+ people would be five or more people per loaf the size of the palm of your hand. Clearly Gehazi was thinking of dividing it up so each person would get a few crumbs.

  Why don't we give generously?

  - The fear there will be nothing left for us: this is what the Scripture says:

    "One gives freely yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched and the one who waters will himself be watered." (Prov. 13:7)

    "One pretends to be rich yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor yet has great wealth." (Prov. 13:7)

  - A failure of faith: the servant probably thought he could not do any good for all these people. Philip's replied to the Lord Jesus in a similar situation was, ***"Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient to make even a small difference."*** (Jn. 6:7)

    So we often argue: the need of the world is so great and our resources are so very small that if we do give something it will only make a negligible difference. We can never meet the need. If we argue this way we are falling into the same sin of unbelief that this servant did!

  - The feeling that we should 'save for a rainy day': we should hoard or save what resources we have. The servant and Elisha could have fed for two weeks or so if they were careful. So it is prudent to save. Perhaps this was in Peter's mind when he rebuked the Lord Jesus in Mt. 16:22 - one version says, ***"Pity yourself"*** i.e. don't sacrifice yourself.

- **The direction repeated** (v. 43)

  So Elisha repeated, ***"Give them to the men that they may eat, for thus says the Lord, 'They shall eat and have some left over' ".***

  So the servant reluctantly obeyed his master and served the people and God did the impossible! When we step out in faith, our faith may be very small at first, but then we find God doing the impossible. God loves doing these things for us in response to our small faith. Here are some examples:

  - The impossible situation when under Moses the People of God were trapped between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's armies. God had led them there and then the impossible happened!
  - Joshua and the People of God walked around the walls of Jericho. After 13 trips around, there was a shout and all the walls fell down.
  - The Gospel was preached by a few poorly educated Jewish fishermen, yet their message subdued the culture of Greece and the institutions of Rome.

  Who is sufficient for the tasks assigned to us? Our sufficiency is of God!

"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees
And looks to God alone.
Laughs at impossibilities and cries,
'It shall be done'."

- **The distribution**
  - All the people were **served**
  - It **supplied** all the needs of the people
  - It **satisfied** the needs of the people - no one was hungry - all were satisfied and content
  - It **surpassed** the needs of the people. There were lots of leftovers! - a surplus!

  All this was according to the Word of the Lord!

  "And God is able to make <u>all</u> grace abound to you so that, having <u>all</u> sufficiency in <u>all</u> things and at <u>all</u> times, you may abound in every good work." (2 Cor. 9:8)

  "You will be enriched <u>in every way</u> for all your generosity which, through us, will produce thanksgiving to God." (2 Cor. 9:11)

  " ... Not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God who <u>richly</u> provides us with everything to enjoy." (1 Tim. 6:17)

  When we give to God, we should look for that miracle of surplus that indicates God's blessing and affirmation. What a surprise the farmer must have had!

  When the Philippian believers gave to Paul, he wrote back to them: ***"I know how to abound ... I have received (the gift). I am well supplied. And my God will supply every need of yours <u>according</u> to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."***

- **The second divine mathematical principle**

  We tend **to divide**. We look at what we have and try to divide it fairly among the various needs. Consequently each need just gets a little - never enough to satisfy the need.

  God **always multiplies**! When we act according to the Word of the Lord, no matter how little money or how few talents we have, we are in for a big surprise!

  We try and divide: God always multiplies!

  For those who like calculus, there is a further thought - what about differentiation and integration?

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

8. Cross-cultural lessons from the Life of Naaman - 2 Kings 5:1-19

1. **Introduction**
2. **The various people involved**
   - **The importance of each group of people**
   - **The contribution of each person/group**
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     - ✓ Elisha dealt with Naaman's real problem
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   - **The soaking factor**
   - **The Gehazi factor**
7. **A Summary of lessons from the life of Naaman**

8. Cross-cultural lessons from the Life of Naaman - 2 Kings 5:1-19

1. Introduction

"And whoever wins souls is wise." (Prov. 11:30) We know this, but the question is how? There is a great deal of material on this, but reading and studying and even knowing how, is not enough. There are not nearly enough believers "winning souls". In this story we are given an example of cross-cultural evangelism in the context of "signs and wonders" - what John Wimber called "power evangelism".

It is a great story of an Aramean in Old Covenant times being led by the Holy Spirit **from contamination to cleansing** and how he came to faith in the One True God as a result. The Lord Jesus said, ***"There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha and none of them were healed, but only Naaman"***. (Lk. 4:24-27) Meeting the felt need (the cure of leprosy) led to the real need being met - the need to worship the True and Living God.

We will look at:

2. **The various people involved**
3. **The vital secret – the man and his message**
4. **The victorious result**
5. **Early discipleship of cross-cultural believers**
6. **The various factors involved in miracles, signs and wonders**

2. The various people involved

- **The importance of each group of people**

  There are six different sorts of people involved in winning Naaman for God before he was healed. Each of these played a vital part in the process - some directly and some indirectly.

  The lesson for us is that we are often a link in a chain of events, but we must not be the missing link because of unbelief, laziness or fear. We must speak when prompted by the Holy Spirit. Also we should not lose heart and get discouraged if we are not the final link and so don't have the joy of leading a person to the Lord Jesus. And if we do lead someone to the Lord Jesus, we need to remember we are just the final link, don't forget all the other links. Be humble and thankful.

- **The contribution of each person / group**

  - ✓ **The little girl** – the initial link – she said only a few words, but created great tension between two nations.

    This is a case of involuntary cross-cultural sharing of the Good News. Syria had invaded the Northern Kingdom after the death of King Ahab - as they did frequently. During one of these raids she was carried off as part of the loot and sold as a slave in Damascus. So these were days of cruel raiding and this little girl had been captured, uprooted from her home, separated from her loved ones and carried off to a foreign land. She is an unnamed, insignificant girl - alone and friendless. She had much to be bitter about, but apparently she was not. God loves to use such people.

    From this story we can see **three principles about who God uses**:

    - **God delights to choose and use unlikely people**

    This is a good example - a little girl - young, fragile and yet used by God.

    "For consider your calling brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong ... So that no human being might boast in the presence of God." (1 Cor. 1:26-29)

Sometimes you hear the following excuse, *"I am not very gifted. I am very ordinary. God doesn't need to use me".* But these are the very people God delights to use for His glory! They are weak and frail, but with God's grace and power in them and through them, they can be used by God to be a link in a chain and sometimes, as in this case, the beginning of the chain.

- **God often begins His work very quietly and almost imperceptibly**

What strategy would you have used to capture General Naaman's heart? Something big, loud and impressive? The quiet simplicity of God's way of working is amazing! The source of a mighty river is usually small and hidden. This is how God so often works. So be faithful in the small hidden things that God asks you to do.

The little girl was faithful in speaking to Naaman's wife concerning the wonder-working prophet of Israel. She expressed her faith and confidence in Elisha – 'the man of God', ***"He would cure him of his leprosy"***.

It is very important not to despise ***the day of small things"*** (Zech. 4:10). We are so often in **bondage** to "the big thing" - to the showy and the spectacular, to the public and large crowds. Yet many of God's greatest movements have been started by small and insignificant people and events. Two obscure and unknown women won John Bunyan to the Lord. Again two women greatly influenced D. L. Moody and got him started in his ministry.

- **God often initiates His purposes where we are suffering**

This little girl and her family had suffered. Her parents, if alive, must have been desolate and have asked themselves, *"Why did God allow our little girl to be taken?"* Perhaps they prayed for her. We know the answer, ***"The Lord had a need"*** for this little girl. God allows our suffering and through this we become channels of blessing to others. ***"Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances*** (imprisonment) ***have turned out for the greater progress of the Gospel so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard ...."*** (Phil. 1:12)

Paul gives a list in 2 Cor. 11:23-30 of some of the things he has suffered and then ends up with, ***" ... If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness."***

So, if you like, our prayer should be something like, *"Lord, I am ready like an ox - ready for the plough or for the altar"*.

Also from this story we can see **three qualities of the people God uses**.

- **The little girl had great confidence in God**

Amazingly she was not bitter or resentful. She told her mistress that God would restore perfect health to Naaman. Amazingly there is almost no precedent given to us anywhere in Scripture before this of anyone being healed from leprosy except Miriam, Moses' sister, in Numbers 12. Yet this little girl believed God could do it. God loves this kind of faith.

There are examples of this in the New Testament, ***"Two blind men came to Jesus and He said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said, 'Yes Lord.' Then He touched their eyes saying, 'Be it done to you according to your faith' "***. (Mt. 9:29)

But we also read, ***"And he did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief."*** (Mt. 13:58)

So this little girl knew there was a Prophet of God in Samaria who was the Prophet of Abundant Life. We too are believers. We trust God not just for salvation but for everything in life.

- **The little girl had great courage** (v. 3)

This courage/boldness came bursting out of her heart. It is one thing to believe God. It is another thing to go public with our faith. To do this she had to overcome her fear that they may laugh at her or worse that might think she was a spy or a decoy in order to trap Naaman – i.e. false motivation. She could have been afraid that God wouldn't perform the miracle.

It is always true that when we speak of the Lord Jesus we face fear. But it is a Scriptural principle that courage often triggers the supernatural power of God. There is a great story in 1 Sam. 14:1-15 of Jonathan and his armour bearer. Fear gripped the armies of the People of God, but Jonathan said to his armour bearer, ***"Come, let us go over to the Philistine garrison .... It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few."*** And they attacked - just the two of them. Their faith and courage released an earthquake. Fear was transferred from the People of God to the enemy and they started to kill each other and there was a great victory.

- **The little girl had great compassion**

She might have longed for her kidnappers and those who had enslaved her to suffer greatly. But no, she longed for Naaman to be healed! What was on her mind was not revenge, but that her master would be rescued from this dreadful disease. So when she spoke of Elisha she was immediately believed. There must have been a beautiful consistency in her life as from time to time she talked to her mistress about the Lord God (YHWH). So she spoke out of love and respect for Naaman and his family. She spoke earnestly with clarity and full conviction.

Do we really care for people? Is there confidence, courage and compassion in our lives for them?

✓ **Ben-hadad II - King of Syria** – the second link
[He ruled about 874-853 BC]

It must have been very hard for Naaman to go to the King of Syria to get permission to go to Israel just on the grounds of a rumour based on the statement of a little slave girl. He must have hated the humiliation of being dependent on anyone from this despised, defeated enemy! He may have made the assumption that many people make: inferior people have an inferior religion - and this assumption is made irrespective of the truth.

But why did King Ben-hadad encourage Naaman to go on this trip to Israel? Perhaps he, like many of his generation, was steeped in folk religion and had a respect for superstitious magic. Or perhaps he tried a typical deception that people in our generation use on relatives that are sick – "go and try it" - while doubting anything will happen but glad it will keep them busy.

So he sends a letter to King Joram of Israel - a letter in which he more or less orders King Joram to heal Naaman. By this he implies that he is over Israel - its King, its religion, its prophets and its God. The implication is that when the healing doesn't happen he is entitled to take retributive action!

✓ **King Joram - King of the Northern Kingdom** (Israel) - the third link
[His full name was Jehoram usually abbreviated to Joram to distinguish him from his brother-in-law Jehoram, King of Judah. He ruled 852-841 BC.]

King Joram was a man of little wisdom - arrogant when he should have been modest - fearful when he should have been bold. He received this rather rude letter with no greeting - no compliments and in a rather imperious and contemptuous tone. He read the letter, tore his robes and cried out, ***"Am I God, to kill and make alive?"*** It is true that in Numbers 12:12 leprosy is equated with death.

King Joram tore his clothes because he saw the whole episode as a pretext for another war between Syria and Israel. There is no indication that he prayed to God

for help. He had no faith at all. All he saw was that healing leprosy was impossible and a future war loomed in which he would probably lose his kingdom. Nothing so dishonours God as our unbelief. ***"The wicked flee when no one pursues."*** (Prov. 28:1) Such a person was King Joram.

- ✓ **Elisha's messenger –** the fourth link

  Elisha sent a messenger to the King. ***"Why have you torn your clothes? Let him (Naaman) come to me that he might know there is a prophet in Israel."*** He faithfully delivered the message to King Joram. The result was that Naaman and his entourage arrived at Elisha's door.

3. The vital secret – the man and the message

- **The man – Naaman**

  - ✓ **Naaman was a great man** (v. 1)

    His name means "handsome". Josephus says he was the man who shot the arrow that killed King Ahab (1 Kings 22:34). Some people live and die without ever achieving anything of importance. Not so Naaman! Wherever he went he was acclaimed. He was the general - the commander of the victorious armies of Syria. He was successful in all that he did. He was "honourable" - highly esteemed by the King of Syria and "a mighty man of valour". So Naaman was a great man with rank, wealth, influence and power. He was courageous, popular, highly regarded by his peers and dependable - a true leader. Naaman had it all!

  - ✓ **Naaman and had a terrible disease** (v. 1)

    Beneath Naaman's splendid uniform was a terrible disease – leprosy – a loathsome, hopeless disease. What hope is there for "a great man" if he is a leper? His enemies trembled before him, but he was a helpless victim to this disease. So we see in him outward success but inner tragedy.

    Naaman is a picture of millions who are outwardly successful, rich, powerful and of great influence, but inwardly terribly diseased by sin. In Scripture leprosy is always a symbol of sin – a loathsome **moral** disease. Rank, distinction and wealth are the gifts of God. They can help move forward the Kingdom of God, but they bring with them severe limitations. Note that in Israel this disease would have had Naaman cast out of human society. (Lev. 13:14)

  - ✓ **Naaman had a little girl slave**

    The general and his wife "entertained an angel unawares" - a messenger of God. This little girl boldly witnessed to the power of the Lord God (YHWH) when she discovered her master's disease. With compassion she told of the ability of the prophet of God to cure the general. And Naaman wasn't too proud to listen to the testimony of this little girl. If your soul is sick, try the Great Physician the Lord Jesus. So Naaman responds to this good news with alacrity.

  - ✓ **The three mistakes Naaman made**

    He was wise in that he listened to what this little girl said. He was foolish in that he didn't follow her advice to go straight to Elisha. What were his mistakes?

    - ⅄ **He thought he could buy the cure** (v. 5)

      He took with him a huge amount of money – 340 kilos of silver, 70 kilos of gold and 10 sets of fine ceremonial clothes - approximately worth about £2 million but the purchasing power in 850 BC must have been huge. But all the money in the world can't cure a man of leprosy. You can't earn the forgiveness of sin. ***"Knowing that you were ransomed ... Not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ."*** (1 Pet. 1:18-19)

      Salvation can't be bought. It is a gift from God that must simply be received. (Rom. 3:20; Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:5)

- **He went to the wrong place to be cured** (v. 6)

  Naaman knocked on the wrong door for a cure. He went to the King of Israel and not to Elisha. There was no power in the palace. So he set out for Samaria from Damascus – through Hauran with the lovely snowy peaks of Mount Hermon on his right, down the Golan Heights, around the Lake of Galilee and up to Samaria. It was on this journey, but going the other way, that Paul encountered the Lord Jesus. Naaman was passing through country where the Lord Jesus spent most of His ministry. Naaman knew the route and the countryside well. It was a 5-6 day journey. Naaman had fought and won battles in this countryside and **this** journey must have been one of deep humiliation for him.

  He had a letter of introduction to King Joram. A very typical way to solve problems is to "go to the top" - to the person with the best connection. Somehow Naaman must have had the thought that he must impress the God of Israel.

  But there was **only one door** for the cure of leprosy and there is **only one door** for the cure of sin. It is not the door of respectability or the door of tradition or political power or even religious affiliation.

  "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved ..." (Jn. 10:9) It was the Lord Jesus who said this.

  But this is typical of the way the world works. Strength, wealth and power are marshalled together in response to a problem. The rich and powerful turn to the rich and powerful for help. It's who you know after all! You get what you want by leveraging your standing to get what you need.

  The trouble with this approach was that the King of Israel was powerless over leprosy. And when the powerlessness of the powerful is unmasked, the result is anger and suspicion.

- **He wanted to be cured his own way and not God's way** (v. 10-12)

  He was not impressed when he first learned of God's method of cleansing. So many people want to be cured but only by **their** way and not God's way of cure and salvation. God's way is simple and effective (v. 13), but it leaves no foothold for self-righteousness. We are often glad to do "hard things" to gain salvation. This soothes our pride and makes us joint-workers in our salvation - a sort of equal partnership with God in salvation.

- **The message of Elisha –** the fifth link

  Elisha heard what had happened in the palace and sent a message to King Joram, ***"Why did you tear your clothes? Let him come to me that he may know there is a prophet in Israel"***.

  There are times in evangelism when it is our duty to rise to the height of our commission and declare the truth in very plain terms. We know well that there are no real solutions to the multiple problems of the world. We have and hold the **only remedy** - the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. Let the people go to the Lord Jesus, the source of abundant life and they will know there is a Saviour in the world.

  But it was humiliating for Naaman. It was humiliating enough to go to the King of Israel. Now he had to go to the prophet, Elisha did not come to him. He had to go to a humble home in a village seeking an unknown (to him) rural prophet. And when he got there the prophet wouldn't even come out of his house to greet him - the most powerful man in Syria! Not only that! He had with him a huge fortune and soldiers and servants all witnessing this insult! The message was simply, ***"Go and wash in a muddy river"***!

  - ✓ **Elisha dealt with Naaman's real problem**

    The real problem facing Naaman wasn't his leprosy. Man's basic problem is sin and a wrong relationship with God. Man's problem isn't fundamentally intellectual, social, economic, environmental, psychological, material or even medical. Elisha wasn't

side-tracked on to secondary issues such as bilateral relationships between Syria and Israel or even between religious beliefs. He appeared rather rude! He paid no attention to Naaman's position, power or possessions - just his leprosy.

In nearly all of the recorded stories of Elisha he comes over as kind, humble and easily approachable. But in this instance he appears harsh and withdrawn. Why? Perhaps he wanted to convey to this proud man that the first step in coming to God is humility - a broken and contrite heart that is willing to believe and obey like a little child so that he could enter the Kingdom of God.

I also think he wanted Naaman to notice the vast difference between the Lord God (YHWH) and the idols of Syria. What was required of Naaman was simple faith and implicit obedience.

On this occasion Elisha never spoke. He just sent a message - a case of studied neglect. This was the only way Naaman could understand that the Lord God (YHWH) could not be approached with horses and chariots and great wealth by someone who was in no condition to ***"inherit the Kingdom of God"***. God is never over-awed or influenced by worldly greatness.

✓ **Elisha told him the only remedy**

The message was clear. This trumpet blew no uncertain note. Elisha knew how and where to direct Naaman to be clean. We, too, need to make very clear the way of salvation - the power of the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross to cleanse us from all sin. The Cross and Resurrection is the only source of recovery and healing. Churches are often accused that their preachers are ineffective in changing people. Why? It is not so much a lack of ability and talent as a lack of directness and clarity.

The message was **daring**! Naaman came to Elisha as a famous general who happened to be a leper. Elisha spoke to Naaman as a leper who happened to be a general. He didn't kowtow to Naaman and to the outward trappings of power. He focused on the core problem. What did Naaman expect - some spectacular ritual or some magical trick as Elisha called on the name of the Lord **his** God?

No, Elisha's message was drastic: ***"Wash in the Jordan seven times"***. [Washing seven times bears reference to the Mosaic Law on the purification of a leper in Lev. 14:7-9, 16, 27.]

Why Jordan? Jordan is a symbol of death. There is no other way for cleansing than through death - our identification with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. So no attractive "Abana or Pharpar" of the world's wisdom, power and greatness is never good enough, neither is any other religion, philosophical system or ideology. Hard hearts must be broken, natural pride must be laid low. Flesh and blood - the natural man - cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.

So the message was drastic! Naaman, humble yourself and make a thorough job of washing - seven symbolising a thorough embracing of God's way of cleansing.

✓ **Elisha demanded the absolute trust of Naaman**

This demand of Elisha involved two things for Naaman:

- **Repentance**

Naaman and had to undergo an entire change of mind and heart towards the God of Elisha. He had to humble himself and turn away from his own prejudices and preferences. Note that his first reaction to Elisha's request was anger (v. 11) and an unwillingness to repent. Finally he got out of his chariot of pride.

- **Faith**

Naaman and had to dip himself in Jordan's muddy river in order to be cleansed and this involved putting his trust in the God of Elisha.

Our task in evangelism is the same: repentance and faith. It involves the abandonment of all false ways of salvation. *"I thought ...."* has to go. Placing our complete trust in God's remedy for sin is our only hope.

- **Back to the links on the chain – Naaman's servants –** the sixth link

  Naaman must have been a good leader as well as brave one, for his servants and accompanying soldiers had learned to love him. He had won their affection and loyalty. Even when Naaman lost his temper and was in a wild rage, they were not afraid to come near and speak to him and even bring up the touchy issue of his pride.

  They spoke calmly and sensibly with a great deal of kindness. In effect they said that he should do what Elisha had asked, "***Wash and be clean"***. We all inherently feel we must do something ourselves - some "great thing". A result such as eternal salvation seems so unattainable by just a simple action. Grace is hard to understand.

  Naaman, with some reflection on what they said, pushed aside his prejudice and obstinacy. He may not believe, but he probably felt that direct disobedience was a bit irrational. So Naaman went to the River Jordan. Looking at the River he must have thought that such water had no healing powers at all.

4. The victorious result

- **Naaman was cured by a great miracle**

  ✓ **There was a great humbling.**

  He "went down". All his pride had to go. He went down in the sight of all of his men – servants, soldiers, hangers on and a great crowd of spectators. This mighty man went down – down – down under the water seven times. If we are to be saved we too must 'go down', for God requires a broken and contrite heart.

  ✓ **There was perfect obedience**

  Elisha said, "seven times" and Naaman dipped himself seven times. He took Elisha exactly at his word. Possibly the crowd on the bank had a countdown – one – two – three ..... After six dips I think Naaman was still the leper he had been. But on the seventh dip he came up completely healed. His flesh was like that of a little child. It was a great miracle. What a tumult of feelings must have swept through Naaman. He had passed from a living death to life - from despair to joy. What an amazing rush of feelings of joy and a deep sense of safety.

  We too are "washed" clean by what the Lord Jesus accomplished for us on the Cross - both inside and outside. When we take God at His word to us, He always performs a miracle. It is what Rom. 16:26 calls, ***"the obedience of faith"***.

  ✓ **There was a complete cure**

  "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away and behold the new has come." (2 Cor. 5:17) Naaman had swallowed his pride and lost his leprosy! He was healed inside and out.

- **The great result** (v. 15-19)

  There are three great results from Naaman's cleansing.

  ✓ **Naaman acknowledges the Lord God (YHWH) as the only True and Living God** (v. 15)

  Naaman, the servants and probably the whole crowd must have rushed back to where Elisha was staying. **Now** Elisha was happy to meet Naaman and welcome him. What gladness must have filled Elisha's heart when Naaman said, ***"Behold, <u>now</u> I know there is no God in all the earth but in Israel!"*** (v. 15). Here was Elisha's first fruit from among the Gentiles. Gratitude is one of the first signs of true repentance. But though earnestly urged by Naaman, Elisha resolutely refused any gifts from him. [Remember Elisha had received the gift of a little room from the

woman of Shunem and he had received a gift from the farmer from Ba'al-Shalishah.] Salvation costs **us** nothing, but it cost the Lord Jesus everything!

So before the miracle Naaman was an idolater. Now birthed in Naaman's heart was the truth that the Lord God (YHWH) was the **only** Sovereign and Omnipotent God.

- ✓ **Naaman gives his allegiance to God**

  Now he was going back home to Damascus and he wanted everyone, including the servants and soldiers, to know that his God was now the Lord God and he was going to be a disciple of this God. So he asks for earth from Israel - two donkey loads - so that in Damascus he can worship the God of Israel on Israeli soil!

- ✓ **Naaman abandons all other gods**

  Like the Thessalonians who, ***"Turned to God from idols to serve the Living and True God ..."*** (1 Thess. 1:9) Naaman was finished with his past idolatry. What of the future? He was, ***"To live no longer for himself but for Him who for his sake died and was raised."*** (Paraphrase of 2 Cor. 5:15)

5. Early discipleship of cross-cultural believers

Just note two things:

- ***" ... We know that an idol has no real existence and there is no God but one. For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth .... Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we live and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things and through whom we live."*** (1 Cor. 8:4-6)
- **Contextualisation?** Why did Elisha tolerate the proposal to take two donkey loads of earth from Israel to Damascus so that Naaman could worship the One True God at home? Was this a sort of acceptance of folk religion? Why did he say to this proposal, ***"Go in peace"***? Clearly there is not a deep-seated disapproval.

  Naaman spoke with the enthusiasm of a new believer. He had publicly renounced the religion of Syria and publicly avowed his faith in the One True God. When he returned to Syria he wanted openly to serve God there. He didn't even want to worship the Lord God on land polluted by idolatry! So, as to his private life, he wanted to worship the Lord in the very midst of Damascus.

  Perhaps someone told him of Ex. 20:24, ***"An altar of earth you shall make for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and peace offerings .... In every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you."***
  I think the, ***"Go in peace"*** implies that Elisha believed that the Lord would teach Naaman and keep him and bless him.

  What about Naaman's public official life? Rimmon was the God of Thunder, lightning and storms. Naaman's presence in the Temple of Rimmon was imposed upon him by his official position as "the one on whose arm the King leaned". So clearly, even passive attendance in the Temple was unwelcome to Naaman. I think his question was clear proof of the genuineness of his conversion. He had a tender conscience so even the appearance of evil - in this case idolatry - was intolerable. Twice Naaman repeated, ***"The Lord pardon your servant in this thing"***. Elisha's, ***"Go in peace"*** applies in the second case as well.

6. The various factors involved in miracles, signs and wonders

- **The faith factor**

  Note the emphasis on the link people in the story - the little girl and Naaman's servants who were faithful. We can notice at the end Naaman's faith developing after the miracle.

  But **faith is not proportional to healing** – i.e. little faith results in little healing and great faith in great healing. We read in Lk. 4:24-27, ***"Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his home town ... And there were many lepers in Israel at the time of the prophet Elisha and none of them were cleansed but Naaman the Syrian."***

After Naaman's healing, why didn't every leper in Israel arrive at Elisha's door? Clearly there are other factors involved. There is a great danger in seeing **faith** as the **only factor** in miracles, signs and wonders.

- **The power factor**

  Elisha had the anointing of the Spirit of God. From Moses to the Lord Jesus - about 1200 years - Elisha was unique in the number of miracles he performed. If Elijah foreshadowed John the Baptist, then probably the ministry of Elisha foreshadowed the ministry of the Lord Jesus. He was the Prophet of Abundant life.

  There is the example of Peter in Jerusalem, ***" ... they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that as Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them."*** (Acts 5:15) This didn't happen again in Peter's ministry and I believe it is unique in all church history!

  Sometimes in a meeting or other occasion, ***"The power of the Lord is present to heal"*** (Lk. 5:17). It is a special occasion and cannot be reproduced naturally.

- **The whole person factor**

  God wanted Naaman to worship Him and to achieve this He had to deal not only with Naaman's leprosy but also with his pride. His pride was worse than the fact that he was a leper.

  God wants to bring complete salvation. So it is vital to deal with the whole person - body, mind and spirit. A "sign" is a sign that points to what the Lord Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection.

- **The unique factor**

  Naaman's washing in Jordan is the only place in the Bible where leprosy was cured in this way. As far as the details are concerned, this is true of every healing and every wonder - each one is unique. There has never been an event in Biblical history or church history like the fall of Jericho. God gave specific instructions as to what Joshua and the People of God were to do. Joshua had to do it God's way.

  So the key in every sign and wonder is God's word – i.e. clear instructions and obedience to God's way. The reason for this is that God wants us to concentrate on our relationship with Him and not to focus on what we do.

- **The soaking factor**

  Seven times Naaman had to dip in the River Jordan. Why seven? Perhaps this is in line with the teaching in Leviticus 14 regarding the purification of a leper. But I think the principle that can be derived from this is: **don't always expect instant recovery**. There may be miraculous healing, but it needs to be followed up - e.g. by physiotherapy.

- **The Gehazi factor**

  Gehazi robbed God of His glory by robbing Him of His reputation of **offering grace freely**. Sadly, there are still 'Gehazis' about buying and profiting from God's power. God will not tolerate this for long!

  In general, in our culture, our **words** (like the links in this story) joined with our **works** (our holy lives lived out consistently before people) plus **wonders** done by the Holy Spirit confirming and authenticating our words and lives are what will be effective.

  "For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience - by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God." (Rom. 15:18-19)

  I believe that this is the path to effectiveness in cross-cultural evangelism.

7. A summary of lessons from the life of Naaman

- Wealth, power and position cannot help those who are lepers. Naaman's faith was in his ability to leverage influence by gifts and his faith was misplaced. It was Naaman's **weakness** (leprosy) that led him to worship the One True God. This is a profound spiritual principle.

  "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness... Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest on me .... For when I am weak, then I am strong."
  (2 Cor. 12:8)

- The people with high status - kings, priests, the rich and the powerful are not the sort of people God tends to use. He uses people whose names are not told, like the little slave girl and Naaman's servants who stopped him running away in a rage. It is the little people who are often God's breakthrough people. The people who really matter are the people we hardly know. This story asks us hard questions. Will or can God use us to do His work? Can we hear God from where we are sitting?

- Where do we turn to in our day of trouble? Do we turn to our connections, our science or our professionalism? Would we be willing to listen to a message from someone we didn't know and go and wash in a muddy river? Access to sources of power, wealth and influence can be disempowering in the work of God. Why? Because they divert or shield us from the God who loves us and who is seeking us out in order to meet our need. At the end of the day, Naaman's awful weakness was his only path to God.

- When we do what we do in ministry, to whom do people give the credit - to an unnamed servant or to a named Lord? Do people see us as powerful and rich? Are we encouraging something like Naaman's misplaced faith in those who possess lots of things and special knowledge?

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

9. Some causes of failure in Christian ministry – 2 Kings 5:20-27

Introduction

A. Gehazi enticed

- In spite of miracles
- In spite of fellowship
- In spite of knowledge

B. Gehazi ensnared

- A mis-statement
- A misrepresentation
- A misleading attitude

C. Gehazi exposed

- The examination he went through
- His exposure
- An evaluation of his ministry
- His expulsion

9. Some causes of failure in Christian ministry – 2 Kings 5:20-27

Introduction

Are you a defeated Christian leader? This is a most unpleasant question to have to face, but it is well worthwhile to face it now, quietly and frankly before the Lord. So many leaders in Christian ministries are living defeated, unsatisfying and unsatisfactory lives. They have never entered into the experience of:

- the peaceful life (Is. 30:15)
- the overflowing life (Jn. 7:37-39)
- the abundant life (Jn. 10:10)
- the joyful life (Jn. 15:11)
- the liberated life (Rom. 6:7)
- the triumphant life (2 Cor. 2:14)
- the loving life (1 Jn. 2:5)

Yet they long to do so! These seven characteristics of effective Christian ministry should be true of all of us. They were true of the ministry of Elisha, but not of his servant, Gehazi.

"And Elisha said to him (Gehazi) ... ***'Is it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants?' "*** (v. 26)

We are living in a materialistically-minded society. Avarice and greed dominate people's lives. As believers how shall we live in this society and prevent the icy hand of materialism from grasping our hearts? We have a nature all too ready to respond to the attractions of success, wealth, power and influence that money can give us.

"Put to death therefore ... covetousness which is idolatry." (Col. 3:5)

In this story we have the after-effects on Gehazi, Elisha's servant, of the dramatic healing of Naaman. Gehazi was very upset and piqued by Elisha's refusal to accept any financial or material reward for his part in healing this great and influential man.

Probably he thought Elisha was well-intended, but his ideals were ill-applied and far too "spiritual". They might be good in theory, but were totally impractical in the "real" world. Why would anyone refuse money? It had been offered from the purest of motives. It could have been given to some very good causes. What good could it do back in Syria?

So Gehazi is determined to gain materially from the miracle. He wanted to be rich. He fell,

"Into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs". (1 Tim. 6:9-10)

Why is the love of money the **root** of all evil? Perhaps because the person who surrenders to it cannot shake himself free of it in anything he does in his life. If we yield to it, it will follow us everywhere. It will cling to us at all times and dominate our thoughts and feelings. It will never go away.

A. Gehazi enticed

"Each person is tempted when he is lured and <u>enticed</u> by his own evil desires." (James 1:14)

Gehazi was greedy for gold and for wealth. Wealth gives power and privilege and he was thirsty for these things. Probably when Gehazi identified himself with Elisha and became his servant, he expected wealth, power and prestige – i.e. success. But he found that serving the prophet was not the way to wealth and the path to plenty! To follow Elisha meant a firm and final renunciation of this world and its goods. Elisha offered Gehazi no **present** reward - only God's eternal reward in the future.

But Gehazi never became reconciled to this repudiation of power and prestige and the relinquishment of wealth and all that it means not only personally but in terms of success. So when Naaman and his entourage arrived outside Elisha's house, Gehazi was quick to notice all that General Naaman had brought with him. Gehazi could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the enormous amount of wealth. Perhaps this was the day he had longed for!

Gehazi could hardly believe his ears when he heard Elisha strongly refuse to accept any payment from Naaman after he was cleansed from his leprosy. He heard Naaman say, ***"... so please accept a present now from your servant"*** and Elisha's reply, ***"As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none!"*** (v. 15-16)

This is very helpful for Elisha gives two reasons for his refusal:

a) ***"As the Lord lives"*** : in the light of who the Lord is, His existence, His presence and His promises always to provide for us all that we need

b) ***"Before Whom I stand"*** : the implication is that he is God's representative and as such totally accountable to Him.

So Elisha refused to accept anything. But Naaman's abundant and available wealth was like a magnet to Gehazi's hidden but long-harboured desire for wealth. He said to himself, ***"See, my master has spared Naaman the Syrian in not accepting from his hand what he brought. I will run after him and get something from him."*** (v. 20)

So Gehazi was enticed by material wealth and when he was tempted, he fell.

- **In spite of miracles**

  He had witnessed God's power on many occasions:

  - ✓ in raising the dead (2 Kings 4:8-37)
  - ✓ in food being multiplied (2 Kings 4:42-44)
  - ✓ in the cleansing of Naaman from leprosy

  He had probably witnessed other miracles as well. Gehazi is an example of what Hebrews 6 describes. In verse five it says, ***"... and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come...."*** So in spite of all he had seen in terms of signs and wonders, Gehazi was still seeking the things of **this** earth in time and material wealth.

  In living the abundant life we do need to see the miraculous and signs and wonders in our ministry. But we need to be aware of the potential danger of our own sinful hearts. The miracles we do for others may not necessarily change us inside! We are elated by what we see God do through us, but we can still harden our hearts and let ourselves lose our first love.

- **In spite of fellowship**

  Gehazi was led astray spite of working in close fellowship with Elisha - most probably for a number of years. He had been in the presence of Elisha and seen his passionate devotion to God and the resulting sacrifice. Yet in spite of this great privilege he fell into

the snare of the devil, ***"And that they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will."*** (2 Tim. 2:26)

Fellowship in a team of godly workers does not necessarily produce holiness of heart and purity of life. Gehazi still had this lustful goal even when working with and for Elisha for a number of years. Just because we are in Christian work, it doesn't mean we are delivered from all forms of grasping covetousness.

Familiarity in Christian ministry often seems to bring out of us our unregenerate motives. The more we learn to "act" as mature Christians, the more intensely selfishness takes hold of us - leading to hypocrisy and covetousness.

- **In spite of knowledge**

Finally, notice that Gehazi was enticed by greed in spite of his knowledge of and familiarity with spiritual things. He says to Naaman, ***"As the Lord lives"*** - using the phrase his master Elisha used. On Elisha's lips it was both a statement of belief and his own personal testimony, but on Gehazi's lips it was a lie and hypocrisy!

Beware of religious clichés! Be careful when you use religious words and when others use them. Often such "spiritual language" is a cover-up for a deep-seated lack of spiritual reality. Gehazi knew the words, but he didn't know the great truth behind the words. Nearness to grace is not the experience of grace.

B. Gehazi ensnared

"But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. The desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." (James 1:14-15)

This analysis of how sin develops is clearly seen in Gehazi's life at this point. The steps include:

a. Deciding in his heart to follow Naaman, ***"So Gehazi followed Naaman."*** Included in the list of things the Lord hates is, ***"Feet that make haste to evil"***. (Prov. 6:18) Clearly God was not pleased seeing Gehazi running down the road seeking Naaman as he was going home.

When Naaman saw Gehazi running after him, he treated him courteously, even stepping down from his chariot. Probably Naaman thought that something serious had happened to Elisha. His first question was, ***"Is all well?"***

b. Then Gehazi began the exploitation of the generosity of the Syrian general. Gehazi replied, ***"All is well. My master has sent me to say, two young men from the sons of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing."*** (v. 22)

- **A mis-statement – a lie**

Gehazi lied about his true condition. He replied to Naaman, ***"All is well."*** But all was not well! The snare of the devil had trapped Gehazi. He had been overwhelmed by covetousness. He was committing idolatry at the golden altar of Mammon.

All is not well when we, as believers, are trying to serve two masters. The Lord Jesus clearly said, ***"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will hold to one and despise the other*** [we] ***cannot serve God and Mammon."*** (Mt. 6:24)

Part of the reason for a lack of peace and effectiveness in our lives is this frantic drive and desire for more material "things".

- **A misrepresentation**

Gehazi misrepresented his master Elisha. Elisha had refused to accept any reward from Naaman so it would be seen that:

- ✓ It was God's grace and power that had accomplished the healing and God's grace is free and can always be obtained ***"without money and without price"***. (Is. 55:1) Elisha wanted to make sure there was no commercial stigma associated with his ministry of God's grace.
- ✓ He wanted it to be plain to all that it was God's power that produced the healing. Elisha merely gave Naaman the instructions that God had given to him.

But now Gehazi fell into another of the things that God hates, ***"A false witness who breathes out lies"*** (Prov. 6:19). Gehazi told lies on behalf of Elisha - in Elisha's name. In so doing, he misrepresented his master's:

- **Mind**: Elisha had not changed his mind
- **Motive**: Elisha did not want Naaman to assume responsibility for any of Elisha's "students" (sons of the prophets)
- **Message**: Elisha did not want God's free offer of grace to be tagged with a price

- **A misleading attitude**

  Gehazi deceived Naaman, shamelessly appealing to the General's sense of gratitude and sinfully exploiting his generosity. Naaman instantly responded to the request, ***"Be pleased to accept the two talents"*** (about 68 kg). Gehazi made it look as if he was reluctant to accept anything. So Naaman ***"urged him"***. (v. 23)

  Now if you are in any sort of Christian ministry, notice carefully Gehazi's greed. May it **never** be said of us that we are only serving the Lord for 'what we can get out of it'. This is a very terrible accusation.

C. Gehazi exposed

When Gehazi reached home, he immediately relieved Naaman's two servants of their burdens and carefully hid the silver and gold in the house - as he thought, all unknown to Elisha.

The time soon came when he had to serve Elisha. He probably cleaned himself up a bit and went to Elisha. There followed the judgement day in miniature!

- **The examination he went through**

  Elisha's first question must have been a great shock to Gehazi. ***"Where have you been Gehazi?"*** (v. 25) Elisha was giving his servant an opportunity to admit the whole sordid, sorry business of the deception and greed that he had just been engaged in. Gehazi had an opportunity to repent. But sadly Gehazi was too enmeshed in the snare of the devil. So he replied, ***"Your servant went nowhere."***

- **His exposure**

  Unknown to self-seeking Gehazi, Elisha had accompanied Gehazi in spirit as he went to see Naaman. ***"Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you?"*** (v. 26)

  There, in a sentence, the stupidity of Gehazi is **exposed**. Gehazi forgot that he was dealing with a prophet of God who represented the God of whom it is written, ***"No creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."*** (Heb. 4:13)

  Gehazi imagined he could deceive Elisha as easily as he had deceived Naaman. But it was not so, for Elisha dwelt in the presence of God and God revealed to him all Gehazi's attitudes and actions.

- **An evaluation of his ministry**

  Elisha gave an evaluation of Gehazi's crime: ***"Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen and male and female servants?"*** (v. 26)

Gehazi had seriously failed to understand the value of maintaining the name and the glory of God and His free grace before this Syrian general and through him before the people of Syria. He had allowed his own personal desire for money, wealth and influence to become the most important thing in his life. He had become a victim of materialism. Greed had got its icy tentacles around his heart.

- **His expulsion**

  Elisha pointed out his crime to Gehazi and then pronounced the verdict upon Gehazi. The punishment indicates the very serious nature of this crime in God's eyes.

  Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants for ever." (v. 27)

  Why this punishment? Why leprosy? Perhaps for three reasons:

  - ✓ Leprosy was a very noticeable disease - easily observed by all. Gehazi had boldly attempted to interfere with God's working in Naaman's life - to misconstrue the fact that God was a God of free grace and grace could not be earned. He was now a man who was marked as someone who had attempted to gain from the ministry of God's grace.
  - ✓ Leprosy is a Biblical 'type' of the self-life. Gehazi is marked as a man of the self-life. He had put 'self' first. He was now known to all as a man who was self-centred and self-seeking.
  - ✓ Gehazi was a warning to all people who would follow in the path of selfishness and greed. Divine judgement rests upon those of us involved in Christian ministry who put money before ministry, gold before God and silver before the souls of men and women.

    Those who covet the world's treasure often have to share the world's uncleanness!

Conclusion

The obvious lesson is the great danger of **covetousness** in Christian ministry. There is a definite limit for an 'honourable' amount of money that Christian workers should have in any culture. When that limit is exceeded, wealth is a form of leprosy that goes on through the inheriting generations until it is possible that a man's grandchildren may cry out for "clean" poverty again rather than inherit this terrible disease of greed.

The danger of misrepresenting and tarnishing the glory and the power of the free grace of God by covetousness is always present in Christian work. So let us not be fooled by the delusions of wealth, power and "success". When God opens doors for you to minister His Word and you see the Holy Spirit move in power, utterly reject this idol of Mammon. His "paradises" are phantoms!

The only really good way to live on earth is to have the peace of God in your heart and to walk daily in fellowship with Him. Follow this with all your energy. Sacrificing this for a worldly dream, as Gehazi did, is the extreme of madness! If you are not experiencing the love of the Lord Jesus, you might be a multi-millionaire, but in reality you are but a poor, empty, unhappy person.

But with the Lord as My Shepherd, I shall want for nothing. May God be merciful to us and in nothing more than keeping us in holy awe of Him. Let us always remember that Our God is a jealous God!

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

10. What to do when you have lost your cutting edge – 2 Kings 6:1-7

1. Introduction: Symptoms of a lost cutting edge characterised by:

- Loss of freshness
- Loss of courageous faith
- Loss of effectiveness

2. The Project – a pattern to be followed (v. 1-4)

a. **Expansion**
   - Born out of **discontent** with the status quo
   - A **decision** to build
   - A **determination**

b. **Effort**
   - That is **united**
   - With each **individual** playing his/her part
   - There must be **perseverance**

c. **Equipment/tools**: the presence of God in our projects

3. The Predicament – a peril to be avoided (v. 5)

a. **His labour**

b. **His loss**

c. **His lament**

4. The Procedure to be adopted to regain our 'cutting edge'

a. **Admission to our master of our loss**
   - Rejection of self-recovery
   - Rejection of responsibility
   - Rejection of deception
   - Rejection of giving up

b. **Acknowledgement of <u>where</u> we lost it**: analyse yourself

c. **God's addition into the situation**: the application of the Cross

d. **Action on our part**

Summary

10. What to do when you have lost your cutting edge – 2 Kings 6:1-7

1. Introduction: Symptoms of a lost cutting edge

The Lord Jesus said, ***"The thief*** *(that is Satan)* ***comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they might have life and have it abundantly."*** (Jn. 10:10)
We are promised abundant life, yet so many believers are not living that way!

About 80% of the Bible is in story form. Why? We remember stories more easily than propositional, linearly presented information. A principle of the interpretation of the Old Testament stories is that they illustrate New Testament truths. In the Old Testament Elisha is known as **the Prophet of Abundant Life**. There are 18 stories given to us and these stories illustrate the principles of living the abundant life. This story in 2 Kings 6: 1-7 illustrates how to live in spiritual effectiveness.

But there is frequently a problem of powerlessness, ineffectiveness and lack of fruitfulness in our work. This isn't only our problem, but also one Jesus' disciples experienced.

"Then the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Why could we not cast him out?' " (Mt. 17:9)

The call of God to His church worldwide is to get moving or in the language of Is. 54:2:

"Enlarge the place of your tent. Stretch out the curtains of your dwellings. Spare not. Lengthen your cords and strengthen your pegs. For you will spread abroad to the right and the left."

In some places churches are responding to this call faster than in others. But in responding to the call to get moving, there is a problem in that we may attempt to do God's work without God's power. The busyness of our lives often causes spiritual loss and we become side-tracked into secondary issues that are not God-controlled.

This is often characterized by:

- **Loss of freshness**

  In the process of God's dealings with His disobedient people in the Old Testament, the first blessing to be withdrawn was the dew that came down in the hours of quietness and refreshed the dry earth (Haggai 1:10). With the dew, came a freshness and a fragrance. When life loses its touch with God, it is usually this that goes first. Spiritual life becomes flat and stale. No amount of work or knowledge can make up for this loss. Freshness is that indefinable something that gives to our work its true value.

- **Loss of courageous faith**

  The classic example of this is found in 1 Kings 19:1-4. It is a picture of a disappointed, exhausted worker whose faith has lost its grip on the presence and the power of God. Faith is paralyzed and testimony is lost. We too need to hold fast in our faith to the power of God to do what most consider impossible. Elijah turned his eyes away from God and fixed them on the difficulties and dangers that surrounded him. [Peter had the same problem when he got out of the boat to walk on the water.] Elijah, instead of standing before God, stood before Jezebel. A cowardly spirit took hold of this man of faith and he ran from his difficulties.

  The evidence of paralyzed faith is self-absorption - a focus on myself. Elijah wanted an escape from the difficult situation. A loss of the note of triumphant faith leads down the road to spiritual ruin. Often dispirited, discouraged Christians seek a way out of hard circumstances and forget that just there - in that 'impossible place' - God waits to give them His best. How much effectiveness we miss when we take ourselves out of God's plan.

- **Loss of effectiveness**

  In this story, this student prophet lost the effective part of his tool in the work he had committed himself to do. He lost the part that produced results. The Evil One will not trouble us greatly as long as our ministry is ineffective.

So this is a lovely story illustrating what it means to be involved in the service of God. But it also shows that losing the heavenly anointing **in the midst of the work** makes the service ineffective, unfruitful and unproductive. This story lays down the principles of how to regain a fresh anointing from God and so fulfil His calling on our lives.

Elisha was a man of God who worked in the Northern Kingdom that, in his day, was in a situation of apostasy, hardness of heart, rebellion and idolatry. Elisha was characterised in the Old Testament as a man who had a 'double portion' of the anointing of the Spirit of God. Unlike Elijah, who mainly worked alone, Elisha trained many other prophets to bring revival to the Northern Kingdom. "The Sons of the Prophets" – "the school" - was in Gilgal in the Jordan Valley, about 6 miles north of Jericho.

Elisha is a representative of the Lord Jesus. The sons of the prophets represent us. The axe head speaks to us of spiritual power and effectiveness - the anointing of the Holy Spirit enabling us to be effective - on the 'cutting edge' of God's work.

Sadly, we often find ourselves like those described in 2 Tim. 3:5, ***"Having a form of godliness, but denying it's power."*** So we will look at:

2. **The Project – a pattern to be followed**
3. **The Predicament – a peril to be avoided**
4. **The Procedure to be adopted to regain our "cutting edge"**

2. The Project – a pattern to be followed (v. 1-4)

The sleeping area (the dormitory) for the students in Elisha's school for training prophets was too small. Evidently the school was growing. [The purpose of the school was to train prophets to go out in the power of God to bring revival in the Northern Kingdom where the spiritual life was at a very low ebb due to the introduction of Ba'al worship.] Note the very ordinariness of the story. A formal petition was sent to the principal of the school (Elisha) to put up a bigger and more suitable building. Note that the first qualification for all Christians is twofold:

* to have a discipleship relationship with the master
* to have regular free and easy access to the master

a. Expansion

- The project was born out of **discontent with the status quo**. This is true of all vision and it is **vision** that initiates projects. Vision is an act of seeing, combining insight with foresight. It always starts with a deep dissatisfaction with what **is** and a clear grasp of what **could be**. It begins with indignation over the status quo. **Indignation is not enough**, but it is indispensable to vision. Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in 1968 aged 42. This was written about him just after his death:

  " His distinguishing quality was his capacity for what can only be called moral outrage. 'This is unacceptable', he said of many conditions that most accepted as inevitable - poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, prejudice, crookedness, conniving – all such accepted evils were a personal affront to him."

  Apathy is the acceptance of the unacceptable. **But anger is sterile** if it does not lead to positive action. For this there needs to be a vision of what could be - a **vision** of the **purpose of God** and **what the power of God could achieve**. Vision is birthed out of prayer and faith and a concern for God's greater glory.

- There was **a decision** to build something new. We must strive to get beyond mere pensive longing. We need to set our faces like a flint. We need strong resolution. Don't ask the question, "What can I do?" Ask, "What does God want to do in my life and through me - here in this 'project' and in this area?"

- There was **determination** on the part of the student prophets. They were going to face many problems but they were determined to have a go.

In so many areas, we need to move into ***"a broad place where there is no constraint"*** (Job 36:16). There are many common constraints and various restrictions imposed on us. But God wants us to move out of constraints into the **place of expansion**.

b. **Effort**

The second factor about the project is that it involved **effort**. All projects do!! The students had the vision and they had to do the work. Note that it was:

- A **united** effort. ***"Let <u>us</u> go to the River Jordan"*** - a team effort
- An **individual effort**: ***"Let us go to Jordan and let <u>every man</u> take a beam from there."***
- It also needed **perseverance.**

Vision is not enough. Visionaries need to become planners and then workers. Men of vision must become men of action. The world has always been scornful of dreamers. Joseph's older brothers said to one another, ***"Here comes that dreamer!"*** (Gen. 37:19ff) For projects to succeed, there must be creative imagination wedded to indomitable hard work. There must be passion and practicality.

But to start work is not enough. There must be **perseverance**. A great example of perseverance in the work of God is William Wilberforce. As a young man from an aristocratic background, he became a member of the British Parliament at the age of 24. (It was the age of corruption in British politics. His father bought his seat.) Wilberforce was converted under the preaching of John Wesley. He went to Wesley and asked if he should give up his seat in Parliament and become a pastor. *"No"* said Wesley, *"Stay in Parliament and fight the greatest evil of the British people – slavery."*

So Wilberforce started. He was not a very impressive man. He was small and rather ugly with poor eyesight, an upturned nose and a high squeaky voice. He often suffered from ill health. He brought the first Bill for the Abolition of Slavery before the House of Commons in 1787. It was defeated by a very wide margin. It was presented again in 1789, 1791, 1792, 1794, 1796, 1798 and in 1799.

Each time the Bill was defeated. But Wilberforce campaigned on. He wrote tracts - the first in British history. John Newton and many others helped him. A grass roots movement began – the first real example of democracy in British politics. In 1806 the Foreign Slavery Bill was passed. It prohibited the involvement of British ships in the slave trade. In 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Bill was passed. It prohibited British citizens from trading in slaves. By now 20 years had passed. In 1823 the Anti-Slavery Society was formed as a lobby group pleading for the abolition of slavery itself and the emancipation of all slaves in British dominions. Until 1825 Wilberforce fought on in Parliament. In 1825 he resigned as an MP due to ill health, but he kept organising protests and petitions. On one Friday in July 1833 the Abolition of Slavery Bill was passed through both Houses of Parliament with the British government agreeing to pay £20 million in compensation to the slave owners! The slaves got nothing! On the Monday after that momentous Friday, Wilberforce died having "fought the good fight" for 46 years of campaigning in Parliament.

Vision, hard co-operative work and perseverance - all three are vital.

c. **Equipment**

Good tools for the job ensures efficiency. It is hard work felling trees, stripping them, making beams, carrying them to a construction site, erecting and fitting out the building.

We also need **tools** for the work God has called us to accomplish.

So the project involved: **Expansion, Effort and Equipment**.

Finally, note that they wanted Elisha to go **with** them in their project. ***"Please be willing to go with your servants"***. How we need to echo this prayer to the Lord Jesus! John 15:5 says, ***"Apart from Me, you can do nothing"***.

We need not only **the permission** of God, but also **the presence** of God in our projects. We need to know that God is with us!

So that was **the project – a pattern to be followed**.

3. **The predicament – a peril to be avoided** (v. 5)

We move from the collective project by the students as a whole to the story of one individual. This is encouraging for the story shows that God is not only concerned for **the work**. He is concerned for each individual worker.

There is a children's story about a goose that laid a golden egg - one golden egg each day. In his greed for more gold, the foolish farmer killed the goose in order to extract all the golden eggs at once. He found just one small golden egg. There would be no more ever! In management terms, this is learning to balance a care for production capacity with productivity.

From this story we see clearly that God cares for 'the goose'/the Christian **and** 'the golden eggs'/the Christian's productivity. So expansion – yes! But so often, in an individual case, a little mistake can ruin all!! Vision, faith, planning, hard work and perseverance may then lead to nothing!

There are three parts to this student's predicament:

a) **His Labour**

b) **His Loss**

c) **His Lament**

1. **His Labour**

This student began well. He wasn't shirking his responsibility. He was actively engaged in the task of logging. The tallest trees near the River Jordan grow at the water's edge. So this student had chosen the toughest assignment. He was zealous. Perhaps he was overly energetic. But he wasn't watchful or thoughtful about a possible loss of his effectiveness – the axe head falling off!

Paul said, ***"And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."*** (1 Cor. 2:4)

In our work there is always the potential loss of spiritual effectiveness.

2. **His Loss**

The student lost his axe head - his cutting edge! It wasn't a deliberate loss. It wasn't stolen. It was an accident! He didn't deliberately sin. It was an innocent accident probably due to lack of attention to detail by an amateur logger!

But an axe handle is not enough to chop down trees - good and sturdy as it is. It is not fit for purpose. There is a great deal of difference between activity and effectiveness! So much Christian work looks like trying to cut down trees with axe handles. There is a lot of activity, a lot of sweat, a lot of noise, but all to no effect!

The devil won't trouble us much as long as the work we do is ineffective. This student lost his cutting edge in the midst of doing the work. Perhaps this is the thing that needs to be **feared** by all disciples - having a name for being effective, but in reality being cut off from the place of spiritual power. It is possible to be well known among Christians and to retain their respect even after the power of the Holy Spirit has departed. This student retained his knowledge of how things should be done, but he no longer possessed the power to do them.

Any loss of spiritual power and anointing is crucial. In Zech. 4:6 God says, ***Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts"***. No success is possible without the anointing and empowering of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Kings 20:40, there is a story of a man who failed to do his duty because, ***"He was busy here and there"***. It is so easy to focus on being "busy", but in the long run little is actually accomplished. Our **effectiveness** is entirely due to the Holy Spirit working in our lives. That is what gives us a cutting edge.

3. **His Lament**

"Alas, my master, for it was borrowed", he cried out with deep frustration. He was deeply grieved because:

- He had lost his cutting edge
- He couldn't continue the work of getting a log for the project
- The axe didn't belong to him

We too need to lament over our loss of power. We need to confess our impotence and powerlessness. We had a cutting edge, but we lost it. Perhaps the cutting edge of:

- Holiness in our lives
- Evangelism and the teaching/discipling of others
- Effectiveness in the practical work we are called to do in the "big project"

And it was borrowed power! Ps. 62:11, ***"Once God has spoken, twice I have heard this; that power belongs to God"***. Any power we have is only borrowed and we can lose it!

Remember Samson! Remember the occasion after his hair was cut off and his power had gone. I think one of the most tragic verses in Scripture is, ***"But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him"***. (Judges 16:20) - borrowed power lost!

Have you lost your cutting edge? Is your cry:

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still.
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill."

Well, if that is your cry - your confession - then take heart from this story, for there can be a restoration of your cutting edge. There is re-instatement in the work you are called to do. There is re-equipping for action. There is renewal of spiritual power.

Often and this is very hard for "senior" workers - especially those whom God has used in the past. They stand high in respect from fellow workers, but may have inwardly lost touch with God. If this is so, they will be in the process of ruining an effective ministry.

4. **The procedure to be adopted to regain our cutting edge**

This is the whole point of the story. How do you regain your cutting edge when you have lost it? It is no simple matter. It requires an amazing miracle to make it happen for the loss of spiritual power is very serious. But F. B. Meyer said, *"You do not test the resources of God until you try the impossible."*

There are four steps to recovery of a lost cutting edge:

a. **Admission to our Master of our loss**
b. **Acknowledgement of <u>where</u> we lost it**
c. **God's addition into the situation: the application of the Cross**
d. **Action on our part**

a. **Admission to our Master of our loss**

This frustrated and fearful young man made his way to his master and put the case into his master's hand. This must also be the first step in our case.

We must stop working and go to Our Master and admit our loss. Note that the young man rejected several other possible courses of action:

- **Self-recovery of the axe head by his own effort**
  He could have tried swimming, trying to dive down to the bottom of the muddy waters of the River Jordan. He could have tried fishing the axe head out with a net of some sort - with probable failure because of too much mud. But he said 'no' to all attempts of self-recovery and he went to his master.
- **He could have tried to borrow someone else's axe** and thus evaded his responsibility to recover what he had borrowed. He said 'no' to this option as well. His axe had been committed to him for service and he was responsible for it.
- **He could have tried deception** and tried to fool everyone else that he was being effective by hitting his tree with the axe handle. But no, he went to his master.
- **He could have given up and gone home** – i.e. quit. He could have said, *"I am called to be a preacher, not a builder. I am leaving!"* No, he went to his master.

All these reasons and others are given for the breakdown of Christians in their service. We need to remember 1 Jn. 1:9, ***"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."***

Confession, though humbling, is necessary if we are to be used again on the cutting edge of the work of God.

b. **Acknowledgement of where we lost it**

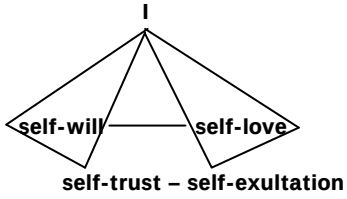
"And the Man of God said, 'Where did you lose it?' " (v.6)

Notice there was no scolding! Neither will the Lord Jesus scold us. But always **before** the recovery of power and effectiveness, there needs to be a searching investigation into the **why** and **where** we lost it. We need to look specifically for that mistake, that failure, that criticism of others, that pattern of behaviour, that habit, that secret sin that is the root cause of the loss of the heavenly anointing in our work. Deep within our own hearts we are aware of the location of the loss of power - where we failed the Lord.

So you need to go back and **analyse yourself** and the situation.

- Did you lose it in the fast flowing river of worldliness where **materialism and consumerism** got hold of you and the hunger for money, power and prestige robbed you of your anointing?
- Did you lose it in the muddy bottom of **impurity**? Did the tiger of lust stalk you and capture you?
- Did you lose it in the murky waters of **self-centredness**, selfishness, depending on your own self-knowledge, self-effort and self-aggrandisement?
- Did you lose it when you gave up the discipline of having a private time with God every day? A **neglect of prayer**?
- Did you lose it when you **had that row** with another Christian?
- Did you lose it through **carelessness** - allowing doubtful things to come into your life?

Pause for a moment to take a full-length portrait of this hideous thing we call **'self'**. Begin to be forced to accept that God's estimate of our self-life is true. **It must die**! Like a pyramid, the foundation of self is foursquare.



So the building blocks of the pyramid are: self-assertion, self-conceit, self-indulgence, self-pleasing, self-pity, self-sensitiveness, self-defence, self-sufficiency, self-consciousness, self-righteousness and self-glorying. All self-centredness will cause you to lose your cutting edge.

Other factors cause some people to lose their cutting edge:

* **Disappointment**: one or two disappointments we can cope with, but a steady stream of disappointments leads to cynicism about people, about the programme and about the project.
* **Betrayal**: This is more serious. It is being let down by those you trusted.
* **Fatigue**: a failure to pace yourself
* **Working outside your area of gifting**
* **Guilt/Shame** real or false - having a bad conscience
* **Fear/anxiety**
* **Passivity**: Watchman Nee said this was the greatest danger Christian workers faced.
* **Bitterness**

God is able to recover your lost cutting edge even though you lost it because of carelessness, ignorance or sin. But if you want to recover your cutting edge, you have to admit before God that you have lost it and more specifically, **where** you lost it. You have to go with the Lord Jesus and point out the exact place/circumstances of where it was lost. This may involve some shame and humiliation for all the other students would know by now that this student had lost his axe head. But specific confession leads to specific forgiveness.

c. God's addition to the situation

It is not easy to recover our spiritual anointing. Small sins, perhaps neglect or inattention to detail in this case, are very serious and can ruin everything! Recovery of our cutting edge requires a miracle. ***"He cut off a stick and threw it in there and made the iron float."*** (v. 6)

The axe head floated! This was clearly a reversal of the law of gravity! Wood was cut down and thrown into the river. In Scripture the River Jordan often symbolises death. The wood speaks of the Cross. The Lord Jesus was "cut down" in death and thrown into the river of death. The recovery of lost power can only be accomplished through the application of the Cross of the Lord Jesus into our situation. The piece of wood (the Cross) is God's power for our loss: ***"And He, Himself, bore our sin in His body on the Cross, that we might die to sin and live in righteousness"***. (1 Pet. 2:24)

We know and feel the downward drag of the ***"law of sin and death"***. (Rom.8:2). We are powerless to recover the anointing and the power of the Holy Spirit. We have no ability to reverse this spiritual law of gravity. But the Cross, where God condemned and dealt with our sinful nature, deals with this situation! ***"For the law of the Spirit of Life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."*** (Rom. 8:2)

We recover our lost spiritual power by the application of the Cross to our situation. We receive cleansing from our sin, release from bondage and the lifting up of our cutting edge from the muddy bottom of the river by God's power! The law of the Risen Christ operates in our lives, reversing the mighty law of sin and death. So identify yourself with the Cross. As Paul said, ***"I am crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."*** Believe you are forgiven and that resurrection power has restored to you your spiritual anointing - your cutting edge.

d. Action on our part

"Take it, so he put out his hand and took it." (v. 7)

Don't try and analyse God's miracles. The other students were probably watching all this. They watched as this student bent down low, put out his hand and took back what he had lost, humbly accepting God's provision and God's grace.

So let us too not so much admire the miracle as exercise faith and take our cutting edge and get back to work. Others are working and there is a project to complete. Take the initiative, move out in the power of God and go for it!

Summary

Cut down your beams – build your visions. Go for expansion in your life, in your witness, in your faith and in your project. If you lose your cutting edge, the loss is never final! Take these four steps and the power and the anointing of the Holy Spirit will return and you will experience breakthroughs, victories, growth and, above all, the fulfilment of the vision that God gave you.

For Further Thought:

Seven major blockages to spiritual effectiveness

The Blockage (the pastoral issue)	**Discovering God to be:**
1. Isolation and loneliness	YHWH-SHAMMAH ***'The Lord is there'*** (where you are!) Ez. 48:35
2. Passivity/Inaction	YHWH-SEBOT ***'The Lord of Hosts'*** – the God of armies of angels Josh. 5:14
3. Anxiety/Fear	YHWH-SHALOM ***'The Lord who is our peace'*** Judges 23:6
4. Guilt/Shame	YHWH-TSIDKENU ***'The Lord our righteousness'*** Jer.23:6
5. Bitterness from past/present hurts	YHWH-RAPHA ***'I the Lord am your healer'*** Ex.15:26
6. Temptation to the idolatry of materialism and self-sufficiency	YHWH-JIRAH ***'The Lord will provide'*** Gen. 22:8
7. Bondage to negative thoughts – the occult etc.	YHWH-NISSI ***'The Lord is my banner'*** (leading to victory) Ex. 17:15

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

11. How to handle fear – 2 Kings 6:8-17

Introduction

A. How fear develops

- **The fact of a fierce conflict** (v. 8)
- **The fact of "mysterious" communication**

  Strategies of the enemy Satan:
  - ✓ intimidation
  - ✓ infiltration
  - ✓ insinuation
- **The fact of real confusion**
- **The fact of an urgent command**

B. How fear is displayed

- **Panic / fear immobilises us**
- **Panic / fear causes perplexity**

C. How fear is dispelled

- **A definite command**
- **A basic assurance**
- **A fervent prayer**
- **A definite answer**

A Summary

11. How to handle fear – 2 Kings 6:8-17

Introduction

The wonder is not that we are sometimes afraid, but that we should ever be free of fear!
If you look at the facts - the **visible** facts - worse enemies surround us than surrounded Dothan:

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places." (Eph. 6:12)

The demonic powers are terrifying! We are as incapable of coping as was this young man.

The Lord Jesus came to answer the questions of our hearts in the weakness of our faith, for He listened to the prayer, ***"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief"*** (Mk. 9:24)

Sorrow comes with fearful suddenness - a summons by the police, an accident or the loss of our job and the whole fabric of our faith appears to be ripped away. With what we have lost, all seems lost. So we are often in "Dothan". But we are not alone for Our Master, the Lord Jesus, is with us! We ask, ***"What shall we do?"*** The answer comes, ***"Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord!"*** (Ex. 14:13; 2 Chron. 20:17)

The Lord Jesus predicted that as the Great Day of His return came closer, the hearts of people would be, ***"Failing them for fear"*** (Lk. 21:26). We are living in just such days. The problem of fear and anxiety is assuming huge proportions. We battle with fear every day. But the Bible urges us **not to fear**. But often a plague of fear - a panic attack - grips our hearts. This passage in Elisha's life should help us learn how to handle fear. There is no need for us ever to be afraid! The Lord Jesus said, ***"Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world"*** (Jn. 16:33).

Through this story we will look at:

A. How fear develops

B. How fear is displayed

C. How fear is dispelled

To live in the power of the risen Lord Jesus is to be free from fear and to be equal to every situation that arises. ***"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"*** (Phil. 4:13).

So we are not to be afraid:

- our lives are not really in danger for we have eternity to look forward to
- our work and ministry is not really in danger for it is God's
- our truth is not in danger
- heaven is not in danger
- God is not in danger

So our faith is not in danger! God is not merely in heaven. He reigns everywhere!

So to us "King Ben-Hadad and his counsellors" still sit and plot. The cure and conversion of Naaman did not turn them from their ways. But while the enemy planned, God disappointed all their clever plans by warning Elisha. Whatever God's enemies plan, God knows and, ***"He who sits in the heavens laughs ...."*** (Ps. 2:4)

We are not to be ignorant of Satan's plans and devices (2 Cor. 2:11) and generating fear in our hearts is one of Satan's great weapons. We are told to **resist** the devil (James 4:7), but to **flee from** temptation (1 Cor. 6:18, 10:14; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22).

So King Ben-Hadad planned. They were good plans and well executed. But the king forgot one thing, God was in heaven and He knew all! In the end the King decided to capture Elisha in Dothan. Dothan is about 12 miles (19 km) from Samaria - the capital city of the Northern

Kingdom. You can still see the ruins of ancient Dothan today. The two wells, after which Dothan is named, are still there.

So the Syrian army surrounded Dothan with, ***"Horses and chariots and a great host"*** all to capture a single unarmed man – Elisha - who was sleeping peacefully. But the next morning as the sun rose, Elisha's new servant saw the sun glinting on the swords, spears and shields of the army of Syria. Escape was impossible and fear gripped his heart. He rushed to Elijah with the cry, ***"Alas my master! What shall we do?"***

Spiritually the attack wasn't against Elisha but against Elisha's God. Similarly, the disciples were in a storm on the lake and they cried out to the Lord Jesus, ***"Do you not care that we are perishing?"*** (Mk. 4:38). The temptation to be afraid is always there.

A. How fear develops

We will look at the story in 2 Kings 6:8-17

- **The fact of a fierce conflict** (v. 8)

  There was war between Syria and the Northern Kingdom. Hell and heaven are in conflict. We are involved in a long and bitter **spiritual** war. As Syria was seeking to invade and defeat the Northern Kingdom, so, in all places, God's people are in danger of being overrun and defeated.

  We believers in the Muslim World are deeply ashamed of our forefathers going to war as Crusaders - that was a massive mistake and a major sin and consequently we try and minimise all military vocabulary. But we should never allow ourselves to forget that we are in a **spiritual** war against demonic forces. As followers of the Lord Jesus we are likened to soldiers going into battle (Lk. 14:3). We are commanded to, ***"War a good warfare"*** (1 Tim. 1:18). We are told to, ***"Fight the good fight of faith"*** (1 Tim. 6:12). We are to wrestle with the superhuman spiritual forces of Satan (Eph. 6:12).

- **The fact of "mysterious" communication**

  In this case the very secret plans of the King of Syria were rapidly known to the King of the Northern Kingdom via Elisha. It is particularly in the area of spiritual communication that Satan attacks the believer. ***"We are not ignorant of his*** (Satan's) ***devices."*** (2 Cor. 2:11) So we are not ignorant about how Satan will attack us and cause us to fear.

  - ✓ **Intimidation**: 1 Peter 5:8, ***"Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour."*** Lions apparently roar to frighten their prey. I am told their eyesight is not so good and the food they eat (antelope's, zebras etc.) is very well camouflaged. So they roar to cause the animal to panic so it runs, breaks camouflage and is easily seen by the lion. So Satan "roars" at us, seeking to cause panic. We break from our "cover" and are easily caught.
  - ✓ **Infiltration**: 2 Cor. 11:14, ***"And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."*** He is seeking to deceive us and turn us into wrong paths. He is ***"The father of lies"*** (Jn. 8:44).
  - ✓ **Insinuation** (deception): in Luke 4:1-13 Satan seeks to tempt the Lord Jesus to abandon His task and ultimately to worship Satan. The way he seeks to do this is a strategy of distracting the Lord Jesus to get Him to do a miracle to meet His own physical need. He even quotes the Bible in order to tempt the Lord Jesus. Satan failed, but it reveals to us how he will subtly tempt us and distract us from God's will and so try to defeat us.

  We need not be caught unawares, unprepared or unarmed. God's lines of communication (through prayer) are always open. God doesn't want us to be ignorant of satanic plans. Even when we are surrounded by chaos, confusion and conflict, **we need never be afraid**.

- **The fact of real confusion**

  The King of Syria was, not unnaturally, really confused and frustrated. His plans were

clearly upset two or three times. This led to a number of conspiracy theories. The most likely of these was **a spy** in the council.

In our case we always seek to follow the Bible's command, ***"We have renounced disgraceful and underhand ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."*** (2 Cor. 4:2).

Yet as believers, we notice that our opponents are often confused by what we say and with our motives. They develop "conspiracy theories" as to why we live as we do.

Confusion also prevails in the hosts of darkness when a believer foils their well-laid plans. God, ***"Catches the wise in their craftiness and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end."*** (Job 5:13)

- **The fact of an urgent command**

  The problem was Elisha! Somehow he knew all that the King of Syria thought! The King's response was immediate, ***"Go and arrest Elisha!"*** Elisha was at Dothan. So horses and chariots and a great host of soldiers were sent to capture Elisha. I imagine the King of Syria thought that Elisha would be very well guarded by the soldiers of the Northern Kingdom, for Elisha must have been the ideal spy!

  So we are targets for the enemy, especially as we are seeking to overcome ***"strongholds"*** (2 Cor. 10:4). While we are constantly in touch with heaven in prayer, Satan's aim is to "silence" us. He wants to paralyse you – dominate you. Why? You are a very valued servant of the King of all Kings!

B. How fear is displayed

Dothan was surrounded. Elisha could not escape even under the cover of darkness. As dawn broke, Elisha's servant woke early and probably went up to the rooftop. What he saw amazed him and filled him with fear! There was a vast army of soldiers and chariots all around the small town. Terrified he ran to Elisha and cried, ***"Help, my master! What shall we do?"***

- **Panic/fear immobilises us**

  The servant's heart was seized with terror and panic. The half wail/half cry of ***"Help"*** indicates a sudden overpowering fear. Sometimes there is a noise in the night and you wake up. Immediately your mind thinks of robbers or worse. Icy fingers grip your insides and your body and your mind freeze!

  Or perhaps you have to speak before a judge/policeman and you feel as if your knees have turned to rubber and you can barely stammer. Perhaps you have a phone call, *"There has been an accident ... one of your children is involved..."* Anxiety floods your mind and weakness paralyses you. Fear almost drowns you.

  Some fears can be analysed. Ask yourself what you are afraid of. But sometimes we are gripped by a nameless, irrational fear. Our minds can't think and our bodies feel as if they are in a strait-jacket.

  So fear has many faces and they are all ugly. All cause mental and sometimes physical and always spiritual paralysis. Such fear can dominate, control and destroy your life.

- **Panic/fear causes perplexity**

  "Whatever shall we do?" "How do we get away?" Probably the servant's imagination was thinking of torture or worse - some sort of terrible fate.

  The Lord Jesus said, ***"There will be dismay among the nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear at the expectation of all the things which are coming upon the world."*** (Lk. 21:25-26)

  As we get closer to the End when the Lord Jesus will return in great glory and power, we can expect panic, fear and perplexity to get increasingly worse.

This servant was serving Elisha, the Prophet of Abundant Life, but he was overcome by fear. We should never get into the position where we cry in panic, *"Lord whatever should I do?"* Believers are never hopeless! Eph. 2:12 says the unbelievers have ***"no hope"***. Yet we are often tempted to despair for all the ***"forces of wickedness"*** of Eph. 6:10-12 *[Note: never people of flesh and blood]* are seeking to destroy us and we **can** be overcome by fear. The heart of the problem of fear is that we are looking in the wrong direction! We are looking at "the surrounding army".

C. How fear is dispelled

Elisha was completely **un**surprised by the news of the encircling soldiers. His reply is classic! Never forget it!

"Fear not. For they that are for us are more than they that be with them" !!

Let us notice in detail how this young man's fear was dispelled:

- **A definite command**: ***"Fear not!"***

  These were the first words Elisha said to the young man. It is a very frequent command in Scripture:

  - ✓ To **Abraham**: ***"Fear not, Abram...."*** Gen. 15:1 [see Gen. 21:17, 26:24 and 43:23]
  - ✓ To **Moses** and the people: ***"Do not be afraid..."*** Num. 14:9; Deut. 20:3, 21:8
  - ✓ To **Joshua**: ***"Fear not, neither be dismayed."*** Josh. 8:1 also Judges 6:23
  - ✓ To **the disciples**: ***"Fear not little flock ...."*** Lk. 12:32 [see also Lk. 1:13, 1:30, 2:10, 5:10 and 8.50]
  - ✓ To **Paul**: ***"Fear not Paul ...."*** Acts 27:24

  This is not just **advice** given to us - just a suggestion – no! it is **a command**! We need to learn how to banish panic from our hearts. How can we do this?

- **A basic assurance** - the believer's confidence

  "For they that be with us are more than they that be with them." The hosts of darkness might be many, but they are not as many as the vast angelic beings of heaven!

  "The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands." Ps. 68:17

  The apostle John saw this great host and wrote, ***"I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders and the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands .... "*** (Rev. 5:11)

  Jacob had a glimpse of the vast hosts of the Lord. ***"Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him and when Jacob saw them he said, 'This is God's host' ".*** (Gen. 32:1-2)

  So why shouldn't we panic? The answer is that we vastly outnumber the enemy wherever we are. God's commands to us never come without some basic facts to give us confidence and hope.

  But this assurance was not enough for the young servant! So Elisha prayed to God. Prayer succeeds where rationality does not.

- **A fervent prayer**

  How we need to pray for ourselves when we are afraid! We need to remember the promises of God never to leave us or forsake us. But probably much more importantly, we need to pray for others who are fearful.

  Elisha prayed, ***"Lord, I pray you, open his eyes that he might see!"*** It was a prayer for vision. The angels were not specifically sent to help Elisha. The angels were already there! All that was needed was that the eyes of Elisha's servant might be opened to see

the heavenly army that was already there surrounding them and defending them. The army of God was not **sent** in answer to prayer. It was **already there**!

- **A definite answer**

  "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha."

  Before, the servant only looked at the **physically** visible facts he could see with his eyes. Now he saw God's protecting army of angelic beings around Elisha and his servant.

  The ministry of God's angels to us is only fully understood when our eyes have been **spiritually** opened. Then we can be absolutely sure of complete protection, for the Lord Jesus is above every name that can be named in heaven and on earth. He is the Conqueror. He has disarmed the demonic rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in the Cross. (Col. 2:15) And as we identify with Him, ***"We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"*** for nothing ***"will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"*** (Rom. 8:39).

  So it is absolutely vital that, ***"We look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."*** (2 Cor. 4:18)

  This vision calmed the tempest of fear in the heart of this servant. ***"The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Phil. 4:7) So the peace of God came into the heart of this servant and with peace came serenity.

  1 Jn. 4:4, ***"You are from God, little children, and <u>have overcome</u> them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world"***.

  With this confidence, fear turns to praise! Neh. 8:10 says, ***"For the joy of the Lord is your strength."*** When God's joy fills our hearts, then we are, ***"Strong in the Lord and in the power of his might"*** (Eph. 6:10).

  Satan seeks to rob us of our joy. Why? Fear is one of his greatest weapons. We can't be joyful and fearful at the same time. One makes us strong and the other weakens us terribly. So when you are tempted to be afraid remember God's promises and begin to sing! Sing praises and worship God in song. The discipline of maintaining joy is the greatest antidote to fear.

A summary

All around us there maybe chaos, confusion and conflict, but as we are God's children, we need not fear! We can rejoice in God's victory. Once our eyes have been opened to the reality of heavenly things – the great angelic armies of God - we gain an assurance that gives us a sense of overwhelming hope and joy in the time of the fiercest attack. We, too, may enjoy the blessing of "open eyes" to see all of heaven's forces and resources - abundant and available now.

So when we are in distress and fear is entering our hearts, let us pray that our eyes will be opened! And when they are, our fears will be gone. Doubt and anxious worry will vanish!

Remember Peter was in prison (Acts 12:1-12) about to be executed in the morning - like the apostle James the brother of John who had been killed with the sword. Peter was asleep (that was being peaceful!). What happened appeared to be a vision (v. 11) but it was, in fact, **real**. He was free! But in his heart, I think he was already free in reality even while he was still in prison.

So now the great army of Syria met to capture two unarmed men - Elisha and his servant. Elisha prayed that the eyes of his servant would **be opened**. Now that same power **closed** the eyes of the army!

So, on the one hand, Elisha's servant presents us with a picture of a fearful believer. On the other hand, Elisha presents us with a picture of a believer living the **abundant life**, who is constantly aware of the very great heavenly forces **already** defending God's people.

The rest of the story (v. 18-23) is really on a different theme:

Ethical issues in the Abundant Life

Elisha never read Romans 12:20-21, ***"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; ……. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."***

[Read the whole passage Romans 12:17-21.]

Elisha's lack of fear and his ability to allow the peace of God to control his heart and mind, helped him to make the right decisions. [See Col. 3:15 and Phil. 4:6-7.]

What was the result?

The Prophet of Abundant Life expressed God's purpose for the Syrian soldiers. His purpose was to show how gracious God is - how kind! The Old Testament believers had the responsibility to be a light to the nations. But they failed miserably! Not so this Prophet of Abundant Life!

So Elisha reacted with courage and graciousness doing all he could to bring an awareness of the glory of God by demonstrating that He is a God of Grace.

So when difficult situations arise, make sure:

- your decision-making reflects the peace of God in your heart
- your decision will, in some measure, release the power of God
- your decision will, in some way, demonstrate God's purposes for the redemption of men and women

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

12. A Day of Good News – 2 Kings 6:24-7:20

Introduction

A. The Need

- **The need for rescue**
- **The need for relief**
- **All were in terrible need**
- **All were faced with the prospect of death**
- **Humanly there was no hope of meeting the need**

B. The supply

- **The supply promised** (v. 1)
- **The supply protested** (v. 2-3)
- **The supply provided** (v. 5-8)
  - ✓ It was a supernatural supply (v. 6)
  - ✓ It was a suitable supply (v. 7)
  - ✓ It was a sufficient supply (v. 8)
- **It is a day of Good News!**

C. The interface communicators (v. 9-11)

The qualification needed to be an interface communicator for God – to be a leper! Why?

- **Lepers accept a living death**
- **Lepers consider themselves to be expendable**
- **Lepers have experienced God's victories**
- **Lepers have eaten; they have clothed and enriched themselves**
- **Lepers know that keeping the Good News to themselves is criminal**
- **Lepers know that some great danger will come upon them if they don't tell**
- **Lepers urge one another to speak and fulfil their responsibility**
- **Lepers take action:**
  - ✓ determined action
  - ✓ united action
  - ✓ sacrificial action
  - ✓ vocal action
  - ✓ urgent action

A Summary

A Day of Good News – 2 Kings 6:24-7:20

Introduction

This is a great story. The purpose of believers being in the world is mainly to reach out to all the people in the world - every man, woman and child – all 7 billion people. The earth is not just a waiting room for heaven. As you will have noticed, when we were saved, we were not immediately raptured! So what are we doing here if the only purpose of being a believer is to go to heaven? No, we are on earth for a purpose and one part of this purpose is to share the Good News with all people.

This is a story about four lepers who share the Good News. The story opens up some wonderful principles about what we should be doing. It is a picture and a parable.

Clearly some time had passed since a part of the Syrian army had been sent to capture Elisha at Dothan. They had been blinded and taken to Samaria – the capital city of the Northern Kingdom. Then their eyes had been opened. They had feasted and then been sent back to Damascus. King Ben-Hadad had had a previous experience of the power of Elisha's God in the healing of his general, Naaman, from leprosy. He now had a further demonstration of Elisha's generosity and power.

But apparently King Ben-Hadad had learned nothing! And this time he gathered his entire army to attack Samaria. The King had not yet learned that the God of Elisha was a God of "apparent impossibilities". "Spiritual experiences" like this usually have only a very temporary effect on unbelievers unless they are under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. So war between the Northern Kingdom and Syria was renewed.

The invasion was evidently sudden for King Jehoram was unprepared. King Jehoram hadn't learned any lessons from the past either! The people of Samaria were in great danger and they were being led by a king who was without faith in God - a man of expedients. His capital city, which was poorly protected, had hardly any provisions to sustain being under siege. Outside there was a bold and determined enemy.

Notice too, that Elisha, the Prophet of Abundant Life, was in the place of critical need (not in Dothan or Gilgal) and he was neither inadequate nor frustrated by the crisis!

A. The Need

This is a picture of us, believers in the world, and our situation is spiritually dire! Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, was besieged by the enemy. Inside the city terrible things were happening - starvation, disease, death and even cannibalism. It was truly awful. Human beings are never more selfish than in such a crisis. Read 2 Kings 6:28-29 - one of the most horrible stories in the Bible.

- **The need for rescue**

  We live in a world like that city. Our most basic need is to be rescued not from, ***"flesh and blood"*** (Eph. 6:12), but from the hand of Satan - from guilt, from shame, from fear, from bad habits and from "the world system".

  This city is a picture of how God sees the world. Paul, writing to the Colossians, reminds them that they were, ***"delivered from the power of darkness"*** (Col. 1:13). We need to be brought **out of** prison before we are brought **into** "the banqueting house"!

- **The need for relief**

  Rescue wasn't enough! They were starving. They needed abundant supplies of food to meet their terrible hunger. As we have seen, some were even reduced to eating their own children (6:28-29). Asses heads (remember asses were "unclean" animals and not to be eaten) were being sold for 80 shekels of silver = 880 grams of silver. They were also using 'pigeon droppings'. Some commentators say these were very small edible bulb of a weed called today "the star of

Bethlehem". Other commentators imply that the pigeon droppings were used for fuel to cook bread. In either case it is a sign of desperation!

We need to be rescued, but rescue is not enough. We need the Bread of Life. We need freedom and we need food. We need to feed our minds and our spirits on God's heavenly supplies made available to us through the Gospel.

- **All were in terrible need**

  The rich, the poor, the cultured and the common people, the powerful and the despised - all of us are in terrible need for all of us, ***"Have sinned and come short of the glory of God"*** (Rom. 3:23). Rom. 5:13 says, ***"Death passed to all people, for all have sinned"***.
  So all people, in all countries, in all times face the same **spiritual bondage** and have the same **spiritual** hunger.

- **All were faced with the prospect of death**

  All people - those in little hovels as well as those in the beautiful palace in the city - were threatened with starvation. Death was coming soon to all.

  We, sinners, face the same prospect - first from physical death and then from eternal death (hell) - eternal separation from God. Without rescue and relief all people face the same twin deaths.

- **Humanly there was no hope of meeting the need**

  The clear teaching of Scripture is that **political** attempts can't solve spiritual crises. King Ben-Hadad and the powerful men in the city were powerless. Note Ben-Hadad's words to the woman in 6:27, ***"If the Lord does not help you, there is no hope!"*** He spoke truthfully, but not in faith, rather with an angry and bitter spirit. He did not blame himself, but Elisha the Prophet of Abundant Life. King Ben-Hadad used the same language that his mother Queen Jezebel had used in reference to Elisha's mentor, Elijah: ***"May God do so to me and more also if the head of Elisha ... remains on his shoulders today"***. [See 1 Kings 19:2 for Queen Jezebel's words] It was a really stupid vow. People destroy themselves when they rebel against God.

  So we cannot rescue ourselves and we cannot rescue each other, ***"None ... can by any means redeem his brother"*** (Ps. 49:7). There is no sinful human being who can meet this need. We must look to God.

  So this city of Samaria is a picture of all humanity on the earth - all in desperate need. We need rescue from Satan, from shame, from guilt and from fear. We need relief. We need food. We need a banqueting table! **All** of us are in terrible need. All of us are faced with the prospect of death. Our **only** hope is God, for we cannot save ourselves. This is a picture/parable of the world.

B. The supply

Elisha, the Prophet of Abundant Life, was staying with someone in the city. He was to be found wherever there was a need - wherever there was a crisis. But he was waiting there in peace and calm instead of being filled with fear and despondency. With Elisha were some 'elders' and they were probably praying. Mal. 3:16-17 says, ***"Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another and the Lord gave attention and heard it. ... 'And they will be Mine' says the Lord of Hosts, 'On the day that I prepare My possession ....' "***

Possibly their prayers were interrupted, for Elisha had a vision that King Jehoram had sent someone to kill him. But as soon as the King had issued the order he cancelled it and followed the messenger. They arrived about the same time at the place where Elisha was staying.

- **The supply promised** (7:1)

  Elisha spoke clearly to the King about God's abundant supply the next day, ***"Tomorrow 7½ litres of fine flour will be sold for a shekel and 15 litres of barley for a shekel*** (a shekel =~11 g of silver)***".*** Even in times of greatest prosperity prices were never so low.

To the King and probably to nearly everyone else, the change was too great and far too quick! But "the impossible" is always possible with God.

God's supply for all of man's needs is also **promised** throughout the whole Bible. As early as Gen. 3:15 - just after the first human beings sinned. God promises both rescue and relief; both freedom and food. And God does not lie to us nor does He attempt to deceive us.

- **The supply protested** (7:2-3)

  Elisha's prophecy of a miraculous supply of food was completely denied by "the right-hand man" of King Ben-Hadad. The "noble" and "wise" of this world often deny God's power. They are cynical and sceptical concerning God's promises. This unbelief robs its victims of blessing and rewards them with death! Note: it was a "natural" supply - in fact supplied by the Syrians!

- **The supply provided (7:5-8)**

  Here is a wonderful description of the Good News of the Lord Jesus – God's supply! When the Lord Jesus asked the disciples to feed 4000 people (Mk. 8:1-9), they replied, ***"Where will anyone be able to find enough to eat to satisfy these men with bread here in this desolate place?"*** They too, protested God's supply. But it was provided. Notice that it was:

  ✓ a **supernatural** supply

  God put the Syrians to flight. Only God can do this! The Syrian soldiers lost their sight at Dothan. Now their hearing was confused! What they heard was the angelic armies of the Living God on the march and they were terribly afraid and made the assumption that it was the combined armies of Egypt and the Hittites - the two regional superpowers of the day. They couldn't think of anything more terrifying!

  ✓ a **suitable** supply

  God's provision **exactly** met their need. They needed **rescue** and they needed **relief**. They were rescued from their enemies (7:7) and there was abundant food, horses, equipment and gold and silver.

  The Good News is that God's supply exactly meets our needs. God rescues us from the oppression of the enemy. Acts 10:38 says, ***"You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."***

  In English when teaching small children we often say:
  Jesus
  Exactly
  Suits This is wonderfully true!
  Us
  Sinners

  Never get to the point where you begin to wonder, *"Do people really need the Gospel?"*

  ✓ A **sufficient** supply (7:8)

  There were great stores of food, horses to replace those they had eaten, clothes, silver and gold! There was enough for all! All had more than enough - a superabundance! God's supply for our needs is **always** supernatural, suitable, and sufficient - even more, it is superabundant!

  Elisha's words must have spread very rapidly throughout the city. Perhaps some believed and many doubted. All waited to see what would happen the next day. Was it "too good to be true" ? Yet hope was born in their hearts - an incredible hope!

- **It is a day of Good News**

  In fact, every day is a day of good news! For we are living in a day of grace:

- ***"Do not be afraid, for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all people"*** Lk. 2:10

- ***"For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."*** Jn. 3:16

- ***"At the acceptable time I listened to you and on the day of salvation I helped you*** (quoting from Is. 49:8); ***behold now is the acceptable time behold now is the day of salvation"*** 2. Cor. 6:2

- ***"But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the law in order that He might redeem those who are under the law …"*** Gal. 4:4-5

- ***"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners among whom I am foremost."*** 1 Tim 1:15

- ***"Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me as in the day of trial in the wilderness …' "*** Heb. 3:7

We are living in a day of grace! All people are sure of a great welcome when they come to the Saviour. ***"All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me and the one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out."*** (Jn. 6:37)

One of the last words in the Bible is, ***"Whoever wants to, may come!"*** (Rev. 22:17)

C. The interface communicators

So the need was very great and the supply was fabulous! Who is going to tell the people in the city who are in desperate need about God's supply? Let us look at the men God uses. They were men who had never heard Elisha's message – four famished, thieving lepers!

What are the qualifications for God's interface communicators? God chose lepers!

"Now there were four men who were lepers at the entrance to the gate (of the city)***"***.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. [See Is. 55:7]

"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world … so that no human being might boast the presence of God" (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

It is only the divine power of the Holy Spirit that makes us adequate for the task God has called us to.

So God uses lepers! There is a sense that God **only** uses "lepers!" So are you a "leper"? Please follow closely! What are the qualifications of being a leper?

- **Lepers accept a living death**

  God uses people who have been brought to an end of themselves. They have recognised and accepted God's verdict on themselves - that in themselves there is nothing good - that they can do nothing. Lepers are those who have accepted the verdict of **a living death**.

  Now in the Bible, leprosy is a symbol of our self-life. So these four lepers were sitting just outside the gates of the city which were closed because of the Syrian army. They were excluded - cut off from the people. They were living off scraps. But there were no scraps from the starving city! So if people were hungry in the city, these men were hungrier. When the Syrian army attacked the city, they would strongly attack the city gates and the four lepers would be the first to be killed.

So the lepers had been **judged** and **excluded**. The old nature "self" has to be judged and excluded. Please understand! Many believers acknowledge that they have **sinned**, but not many have wholeheartedly and unconditionally admitted that their self-life has to die - to be excluded from their lives - for it is totally unclean. Some admit that it should die, but out of fondness, they keep it alive and close to decision-making in their lives. So they are selfish and self-willed. They seek to glorify themselves and they depend on self-effort. In practice they idolise themselves.

Have you come to a place in your life where you accept God's verdict on your self-life? Have you passed the death penalty on your self-life?

A great worker for God, called by God to be an interface communicator in Africa, spent the first few years there in growing frustration at his ineffectiveness and inadequacies. He was thinking about going home. He went out into a banana plantation alone to tell God that he had come to an end of himself. *"I just can't do it!"* But there among the bananas he claimed God's promises and he experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit for the first time. He was never the same person again! He sent a postcard back to his family in England. On the postcard he drew a picture of a grave and on the tombstone he wrote: **"Here lies Norman Grubb"**. He put the date that he died to 'self' among the bananas.

Unless we are crucified with Christ, God won't use us. Self has to die.

"I am crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me." (Gal. 2:20)

This is the symbolism of baptism. It is accepting that you are leper - living a living death. Self needs to die constantly. This is the message of a great book by Roy Hession: **Calvary Road**.

- **Lepers consider themselves to be expendable** (7:3-4)

  In the extremity of their need, they begin to think! Where is there any hope? Clearly there was none if they stayed where they were. Possibly there was a faint hope if they went to the Syrian army. So these four lepers got up and advanced on the great army of Syria in the twilight. As they advanced the Syrians fled very fast and so when the lepers arrived it was a totally silent camp except for the noise of the horses. The watch fires still burned, all the tents were empty, but there was food in abundance on the table!

  These lepers thought that they had nothing to lose. They considered themselves expendable. They didn't hold their lives dear. In Phil. 2:30, we read of Epaphroditus, ***"For the work of Christ, he was close to death not regarding his life."***

  How we love our comfort zones and staying within them. We love our respectability. These lepers had lost everything and they were prepared to risk the only thing they had left - their lives. So they left the city gates.

  What about us? Too many of us are holding on to our imagined right to our own lives. We are not willing to lay down our lives for the Lord Jesus who laid down His life for us.

- **Lepers have experienced God's victories**

  God uses men and women as interface communicators who have witnessed his victories. (7:5)

  "For the Lord had made the army of the Syrians hear the sound of chariots and horses - the sound of a great army. So they said to one another, 'Behold, the King (of Israel) ***... has hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to come against us."*** (7:6)

  The angelic army of God was heard - but not seen - this time. The four lepers witnessed the overwhelming victory of God. It is rather comical really - four weak, sick men advance and the Syrian army flees in terror!

What can we learn from this? We can't preach and share the Gospel with others until we appreciate the magnitude of the victory that the Lord Jesus accomplished on the Cross. Amongst many other things, Col. 2:15 says that on the Cross the Lord Jesus, ***"Disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them."***

The Syrian soldiers fled leaving the weapons, chariots, swords and spears etc. behind either in the camp or on the road. They were disarmed! When you are disarmed you are defenceless and have nothing to attack with.

On the Cross, the Lord Jesus disarmed the 'principalities and powers' and all the forces of Satan. Have you "seen" and understood this? The implication is really very, very wonderful!

- **Lepers have eaten; they have clothed and enriched themselves** (7:8)

  We are **witnesses**! A major requirement to preach the Gospel effectively is that you have experienced the power of the Gospel in your own life! How can you urge others to, ***"Taste and see that the Lord is good"*** (Ps. 34:8), if you have never tasted yourself?

  So are you eating the Bread of Life? (Jn. 6:35), ***"Jesus said to them, 'I am the Bread of Life, whoever comes to Me shall not hunger and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst' "***.

  Have you feasted? Are you **clothed** with power from on high? Are you gathering gold and silver and precious jewels from the riches of the Kingdom of God?

  These lepers had as much food as they could eat - perhaps from the table of the King of Syria. Instead of their rags, they could choose the best robes. There was an abundance - more than enough than just for themselves.

  To be witnesses, we have to demonstrate that we have joy and peace and all the other ***"fruits of the Spirit"*** (Gal. 5:22)

- **Lepers know that keeping the Good News to themselves is criminal** (7:9)

  After the lepers had feasted and clothed themselves, had stuffed what bags they had with silver, gold and jewels, they realised that there is **a crime of silence**.

  God uses believers who are convinced that to withhold the Good News of God's supply from and imprisoned and starving world is to be a terrible criminal! It is the criminality of silence! How guilty the church has been down through the years. Still 6 billion people have not heard the Gospel. We go to church. We sing, praise, worship and give thanks and then we go home and are silent all week.

  We have been given a task (Mt. 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8) to share the Good News - a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). This is a day of **very good news**!

- **Lepers know that some great danger will come upon them if they don't tell** (7:9)

  Inevitable judgement awaits a selfish believer. In Ezekiel 33:7-9 we read of the blood-guiltiness of those who fail to speak God's words. David was aware of this and prayed,

  "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness O God, God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of Your righteousness. Oh Lord open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise" (Ps. 51:14-15)

- **Lepers urge one another to speak and fulfil their responsibility**

  "Now therefore come, and let us go and tell." (v. 9). That was their great commission and they went and did it.

  God is calling "lepers" today - spiritual lepers who are conscious of their self-centeredness (their leprosy), conscious too, that they are outcasts from the world – possession-less and famine stricken, yet willing to take bold steps to get to full salvation and find freedom. This they find! The abundance of riches is beyond all their expectations. These are the ones God uses to tell the world of His great supply to meet their great need!

- **Lepers take action!**
  - ✓ **determined** action to tell the people of the city
  - ✓ **united** action - each testimony reinforcing the other - they went as a team
  - ✓ **sacrificial** action - they had to leave much behind
  - ✓ **vocal** action - they told their story
  - ✓ **urgent** action - the time was short - people were dying of starvation. For us the Lord is coming and so the opportunity is lessening.

Notice: the four lepers told one gatekeeper. This gatekeeper told the other gatekeepers. The gatekeepers told the king and eventually the king told the city.

What was the result? Nearly all were saved - all except those filled with unbelief!

Initially the king remained in unbelief. Many of our cares and worries are like those of King Jehoram – imaginary. God had promised but the king didn't believe.

Eventually two horsemen were sent to see if the lepers' story was true. They found an empty camp and a roads strewn with discarded weapons. They returned to the city with the news that they were saved! The gates were flung open. The people rushed to the abandoned camp and returned to feast! Apparently Elisha was forgotten! This was the last time King Jehoram heard of or had an encounter with Elisha!

A Summary

In speaking about world evangelisation there are some things we must never forget:

- The world's desperate need of:
  - ✓ deliverance from the hand of satanic powers
  - ✓ the supply of the Bread of Life - the Lord Jesus
- God's supply is available to all and God's supply is sufficient to meet the need of all who come
- The Good News must be communicated to all the world by men and women who meet God's qualifications

Let us not fail!

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

13. Lessons in Guidance – 2 Kings 8:1-6

Introduction: our problems with guidance

1. Revelation

- **Given personally**
- **Given particularly**
- **Given partially**

2 The response to revelation

- **Accepted implicitly -** God's will is:
  - ✓ good
  - ✓ acceptable
  - ✓ perfect
- **Accepted immediately**
- **Accepted inclusively -** it involved:
  - ✓ separation
  - ✓ sacrifice
  - ✓ service
    - as a pilgrim
    - as an ambassador
    - as a witness
- **Accepted independently**

3. The reward of obedience

- **Arranged wonderfully**
  - ✓ as to time
  - ✓ as to persons
  - ✓ as to mood
- **Apportioned immediately**
- **Awarded openly**

13. Lessons in Guidance – 2 Kings 8:1-6

Introduction: our problems with guidance

How often we, God's people, find ourselves having to make decisions that directly affect ourselves, our families, our futures and our relationships. We find ourselves constantly making decisions that have far-reaching effects. We know it is absolutely necessary that, as believers, we should be guided by the God of Wisdom and not by chance or by the views of others or merely by our own preferences. We need the wisdom from above. In obedience to God's directions we find that, ***"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord"*** (Ps. 37:23). God rewards the obedience of faith.

This story in 2 Kings 8:1-6, is very interesting as it helps us with our problems of guidance in times of crisis. It is the story of the godly woman of Shunem who had built a room for the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 4:8). She receives instructions from the Lord to leave her home and her country because the Lord has called for a famine to afflict the Northern Kingdom for a period of time.

Altogether the reign of King Jehoram only lasted 12 years. Seven of these years were years of famine and clearly some years were years of war between the Northern Kingdom and Syria. Shunem must have been on the track of the invading Syrian army and probably what could be looted would be looted. All this was because of an unrepentant nation and a stubborn king! But in the midst of all this desolation, God had mercy on this Shunamite woman.

This woman was probably a widow and stood in great need of guidance in the midst of these very difficult days. In obedience to the Lord, she leaves her home and takes up residence in the south, in Philistia - probably around Gaza. After seven years she returns to her old home in Shunem and in a most marvellous way she recovers all her possessions and the property she had given up seven years earlier.

We will look at this story to gain some lessons in guidance.

1. Revelation

"Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, 'Arise and depart with your household and sojourn wherever you can, for the Lord has called for a famine and it will come upon the land for seven years' ".

We have already met this "wealthy woman" (2 Kings 4:8). She had the spiritual discernment to know that Elisha was a "man of God". As a reward for her generosity towards Elisha, after years of barrenness she became the mother of a son whose birth was announced by Elisha (2 Kings 4:16). Years later she had seen the power of God demonstrated on her behalf in the restoration of this son to life again (2 Kings 4:18-37). So this woman knew and had already experienced the promise, the provision and the power of God in her life.

Yet, in the life of faith there will always be new tests, new demands, new sacrifices and new occasions to demonstrate obedience to God's perfect will. In this story we have a test of faith and obedience. Note the following:

- **The revelation was given to her <u>personally</u>**

  "Elisha said to the woman .... " (v. 1). We need to remember that God always treats us, His children, as **individuals**. His Fatherly care for us is demonstrated in many ways but especially in His personal interest and concern for each of us as individuals.

  We know of His **constant care** for us, ***" ... Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all "*** (food, drink and clothes etc. - Mt. 6:32). Part of God's care for us is His discipline. Heb. 12:6-7 says, ***"For the Lord disciplines the one He loves .... It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons"***.

But even in the hard times there is not only His care but also His **comfort**. ***"Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Mercies and the God of <u>all</u> comfort".*** (2 Cor. 1:3)

No reference is made to this woman's husband who is mentioned in 2 Kings 4. Perhaps he had died. In which case this is an example of Ps. 146:9, ***"The Lord watches over the alien and upholds the widow and the fatherless."***

- **The revelation was given <u>particularly</u> to this woman**

  It was a definite and specific instruction:

  - ✓ she should leave her house and land immediately
  - ✓ she was told she should leave with her whole household
  - ✓ she was told the choice of destination was up to her
  - ✓ she was told the reason – famine
  - ✓ she was told the time involved - 7 years

  I think God is pleased to tell us, His children, exactly what His will is right down to the particulars so we are not in doubt. He reveals His will in general terms in moral issues to all people, but He also guides us, His children, **specifically** in the path we should take as He leads us in ***"paths of righteousness"***. He does this in a number of ways:

  - ✓ **generally** by His Word in the Bible
  - ✓ **specifically** by his Holy Spirit - always in line with Scripture
  - ✓ from time to time by **other believers** speaking to us
  - ✓ through **circumstances**

  In general we can discern God's will when we sense God's plan as a continuing thought that is confirmed through the Bible and confirmed by friends and circumstances.

  In this case guidance came specifically from Elisha the Prophet of Abundant Life. Elisha announced to her the 7-year famine. [See Acts 11:28 for another announcement of a 7-year famine.]

- **The revelation was only a <u>partial</u> revelation**

  The woman wasn't told exactly where she was to go and live for seven years. She wasn't told what she was to do during the seven years and there was no mention what would happen after the famine.

  God doesn't promise to give us a complete blueprint of our future - mapping out every detail, every difficulty and every trial that we are going to face. We discover what this woman discovered, that if we take the first step in obedience to God's will, then the way will open up to us step-by-step.

2. The response of the woman to God's revelation of His will

"So the woman arose and did according to the word of the man of God. She went with her household and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years." (8:2)

Here is the obedience of faith. Like her obedient ancestor, this daughter of Abraham went out not knowing where she was going.

- **Her response implies that she accepted God's will <u>implicitly</u>**

  She didn't argue or fuss. This is amazing for there was still plenty in the land and no indication of an approaching famine except the message of Elisha. She gave up what was predictable for complete uncertainty! She realised she was a "child" - she simply had to obey.

God's will is:

- ✓ **Good**: because God works all things together **for good** to them that love God (Rom. 8:28)
- ✓ **Acceptable**: because it is made by our Heavenly Father who plans all things for us in love
- ✓ **Perfect**: because God works according to a **perfect** plan that has no faults, no flaws and where all the issues have been considered

- **Her response indicates that she obeyed God's will <u>immediately</u>**

  There was no hesitation or procrastination. Someone has said that "delayed obedience is disobedience". Faith does not delay when God's will is known. Faith delights in an immediate response.

- **Her response indicates that she wanted to do God's will <u>inclusively</u> – i.e. all of it**

  She didn't leave behind any member of the household! She relied on God alone. She may have been tempted to leave some members of her household to guard the house and the fields. But no, she put her land and her farmhouse and everything into God's hands and left.

  It appears that the woman made no legal provision to secure her property for she was sure that the God who sent her away would bring her back and restore to her the inheritance of her fathers.

  Her decision meant:

  - ✓ **separation** from her friends and neighbours - her human support structure
  - ✓ **sacrifice** - she had to relinquish her hold on her inheritance - her rights to the land and her home
  - ✓ **service** - she had to leave her own country and go and live in a different culture - in a foreign land that was generally hostile to her people
    - Her **pilgrim** character was revealed. She could have echoed the song that says, **"This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through"**. She was to live among the Philistines for seven years. While there she would seek to be:
    - an **ambassador** of the Lord God
    - a **witness** to God's might and power

    So with separation and sacrifice came the opportunity for service on the behalf of the Lord God to the Philistines.

- **Her response indicates that she took the decision to obey <u>independently</u>**

  We can imagine what would have happened if she has conferred with all her neighbours. They would have done all in their power to dissuade her. All sorts of arguments and objections would have been raised. Many dangers and difficulties would have been pointed out. Everyone would have sought to persuade her to stay at home rather than go and live among those "foreigners in the south".

  When God calls upon you to make a sacrifice or face suffering of any kind, there will **always** be those who will seek to turn you from the path of perfect obedience. But the fact of the matter is that we are accountable **only to God** and not to friends no matter how kind and concerned they may be for our future. It is God who has called us.

  Our conviction, as believers, is that God, who loves us, will overrule all for our best and will support us under trials and finally deliver us from them. At times we need to act as the Shunamite woman did - with our best judgement. At other times it will be a clear case of obedience. But none of us will fight the fight of faith as well as those who are sure of the victor's crown. None of us will bear the burden and work as hard as when we know that God's deliverance is at hand.

3. The reward of obedience

The story in these six verses also reveals the reward for her obedience to God's guidance (v. 3-6). After the seven years of enforced exile this woman from Shunem returned to her home and her property. When she arrived, she apparently found that her possessions and property had been taken over by others who were not willing to restore them to her! She must have been very disappointed! She was now homeless and an outcast! Her only recourse was to plead her case before the king of the Northern Kingdom - King Jehoram - and very little could be expected from him.

When she appeared before the king for an audience she discovered that Gehazi, Elisha's former servant, was relating to the king, ***"All the great things that Elisha had done"***. At the very moment of this woman's appearance, Gehazi was telling the story of the wonderful restoration to life of this very woman's son! Catching sight of the woman and recognising her, Gehazi exclaimed: ***"And here she is - the very woman I'm talking about"*** **!** (v. 5)

The king was impressed! He was so impressed that he listened to the woman's request and immediately commanded that all her properties should be restored to her!

Now there are a number of aspects to this woman's reward that deserve attention:

- it was **wonderfully** arranged by God
  - ✓ Notice the **timing**: the woman had been told by God to leave her home and her land for 7 years. Now that the 7 years of famine were over and she had returned to her own country, she found that God had been **silently planning for her return**!
  - ✓ Notice the **people involved**: the woman needed to see the king in order to present a case to him. At the very time she sought an interview with the king he was being given an account of Elisha's ministry by Gehazi!
  - ✓ Notice the **mood** that the King was in: ***"The King's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will."*** (Prov. 21:1)

    And in this case the Lord turned the king's heart in favour towards this woman and he immediately granted her request.
- **The reward was given to her <u>immediately</u>**

  The reward for this woman's obedience and faith in God's words was given to her immediately.

  "The King appointed an official for her saying, 'Restore all that was hers together with all the produce of the fields from the day she left the land until now' " (v. 6).

  As believers we are always rewarded in the measure of our faith. The New Testament speaks of ***"little faith"*** (Lk. 12:28) and ***"great faith"*** (Lk. 7:9). Little faith will be rewarded in little measure; great faith will be rewarded in great measure. We should constantly seek to increase our faith, ***"For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal Kingdom of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"*** (1 Pet. 1:11).

  There is an English hymn with these words:

  "Those who trust Him wholly, find Him wholly true."
- **The reward was awarded <u>openly</u>**

  This woman's initial act of faith in forsaking her inheritance and her country may not have been known to many people. It was a matter between her and her Lord. But the Father, ***"Who sees in secret, will reward you"*** (Mt. 6:18).

  As believers, we may be called upon by God to make decisions that will involve us in sacrifice and suffering. Our act of faith and obedience may be made in secret so that no one else knows about our decision. But Our Lord Jesus has promised, ***"Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake, will receive a hundred-fold and will inherit eternal life"*** (Mt. 19:29).

This godly woman relinquished all in obedience to God. In God's time she received all again with interest! She surrendered all. All was restored!

God has promised us, ***"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you."*** (Ps. 32:8)

This is the promise that God has given to us as His children. This was the case of this godly woman in 2 Kings 8:1-6. Under God's all-wise and all-loving direction she left her home and her country for seven years. In God's good time she returned home and received back all her properties.

So God's promise was fulfilled, ***"Those who know Me, I will honour"***. (1 Sam. 2:30) This woman discovered that God's way is the best way.

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

14. Lessons to be learned from weak leadership – 2 Kings 9 and 10

Introduction

1. **The appointment of Jehu as a leader**
   - **God's patience**
   - **God's plan**
   - **God's programme**
   - **God's purpose**

2. **The anointing of Jehu as a leader**
   - **The source of the anointing**
   - **The sphere of the anointing**
   - **The symbolism of the anointing**

3. **The activity of Jehu as a leader**
   - **The extermination of the house of Ahab**
   - **The eradication of idolatry**

4. **The assessment of Jehu as a leader**
   - **His strengths**
     - ✓ spiritual discernment
     - ✓ faith in God's word
     - ✓ great zeal
     - ✓ hatred of idolatry
   - **His weaknesses**
     - ✓ excesses
     - ✓ deceit
     - ✓ inconsistency
     - ✓ disobedience

14. Lessons to be learned from weak leadership – 2 Kings 9 and 10

Introduction

God has chosen that His work in the world should be carried out by people who are filled with the Holy Spirit. He has also chosen that some of these same people should be in positions of leadership. By teaching and example they will lead the work of God. The New Testament lays down very tough qualifications for anyone seeking a position of leadership for there is a very close connection between God's work and those who lead it. If the leadership is self-seeking, unspiritual, proud and self-sufficient then God's work is brought to ruin.

Sadly, many who want to be Christian leaders are not qualified to lead but are still elected to fill positions of authority and responsibility. Others started out as spiritual people and were appointed in God's will, but allowed a self-seeking spirit to begin to dominate their lives and the result is a mixture of motives - weak leaders.

In Elisha's time the Northern Kingdom very urgently needed a king who would actively and jealously promote the cause of the One True God. King Jehoram, the reigning king, did nothing for the cause of truth and righteousness. He had witnessed the power of God many times through the ministry of Elisha, but he never repented. In fact he permitted, ***"The idolatry of ... Jezebel and her witchcrafts"*** to remain and flourish in the land. (9:22)

In these two chapters we have an account of the appointment of Jehu as king over the Northern Kingdom and his commission to root out idolatry (Ba'al worship) from the Northern Kingdom.

A brief outline

9:1-3	Elisha commands one of 'the sons of the prophets' to anoint Jehu, a commander in King Jehoram's army, to be king.
9:4-10	Elisha's command is carried out and God's plan is revealed to Jehu.
9:24	Jehu immediately undertakes to obey and kills King Jehoram and then Jezebel (9:33); then Ahab's descendants (10:1-11); then the priests and worshippers of Ba'al (10:25) and finally he destroys the images and the Temple of Ba'al (10:26-27)
10:29-31	An assessment of Jehu as a leader
10:34-36	An account of Jehu's death

1. The appointment of Jehu as a leader (9:1-3)

God told Elisha to order one of 'the sons of the prophets' to travel to Ramoth-gilead - in north Jordan today near the Syrian border - and there to find Jehu and anoint him as king to replace Jehoram who had hopelessly failed in his responsibilities as leader and shepherd of God's people. We can learn some lessons from the appointment of Jehu to be a leader.

- **God's patience**

  With great patience God waited to see if the people of the Northern Kingdom would repent of their idolatry and turn away from their worship of Ba'al and return to the One True God. God was to remove King Jehoram and appoint Jehu as king in his place. This is a clear indication that he was prepared to give the people another chance inspite of the fact that nearly all the people were apostate and idol worshippers. He was willing to give the people another leader who was to turn their hearts to the Lord.

- **God's plan**

  Something of the plan was revealed to Elijah at mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:16). God told Elijah, ***"Jehu, the son of Nimshi, you shall anoint to be king over the Northern Kingdom and Elisha, the son of Shaphat, from Abel Meholah you shall anoint to be a prophet in your place. And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael***

shall Jehu put to death and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. Yet I will leave 7000 in the Northern Kingdom, all the knees that have not bowed to Ba'al and every mouth that has not kissed him."

So in this passage we have God's plan, previously announced, and now carried out. Jehu is anointed as king.

- **God's programme**

  God's programmes always have a leader as a focus. Jehu was the man singled out and selected to do God's will. And God knows where to get His man. The 'son of the prophets' was ordered to go to Ramoth-gilead - a fortified town/village near the border between Syrian territory and Gilead (part of the Northern Kingdom).

  In a time of spiritual crisis or in fact at any time, God's people need to look to God for God's appointed leadership.

- **God's purpose**

  God's leaders are appointed with a **purpose** and in this case it was to bring His people back to their faith in the Lord God. We would call it 'Revival'. When the church is at a low ebb, we need to cry out to God for zealous leaders who are appointed by God to represent God and His truth. The success of such a leader can be measured by the way in which he seeks to obey the word of God and do the will of God.

2. The anointing of Jehu as a leader (9:4-10)

When Elisha's servant arrived, he made his way directly to the headquarters of King Jehoram's army and confronted the army officers with the fact that he had a message for Commander Jehu. Then, getting Jehu in a room alone, Elisha's servant poured the anointing oil over Jehu's head and said, ***"Thus says the Lord the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the People of the Lord*** (over the Northern Kingdom)**"**. This occurred in 884 BC - 36 years after the beginning of King Ahab's reign.

God's appointment to a position of leadership is **always** accompanied by God's **anointing** to that position. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests and kings were anointed for their work as leaders. So Jehu was not only elected by God to the position of being a king, he was also equipped by spiritual authority for the position of king.

Notice that the young prophet fled as rapidly as possible for he wanted no part of any purposes for which Jehu might want to use him. Sometimes, as Christian leaders, we are asked to get involved in public affairs - an errand on a particular occasion. But having delivered our commission, ***"Let us open the door and run"***!

- **The source of the anointing**

  "Thus says the Lord God … I anoint you King …. " (v. 6)

  The source of this anointing did not lie in Elisha or in Elisha's servant. The anointing came from God. We can appoint leaders, but only God will equip people for leadership by anointing the leaders of His choice.

  The supreme example of this is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is written of Him, ***"And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And His delight shall lie in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what His eyes see or decide disputes by what His ears hear, but with righteousness He shall judge the poor …."*** (Is. 11:2-3)

  All leaders involved in God's work need to look to the Lord constantly for a fresh anointing of His Holy Spirit: ***"Being filled with the Holy Spirit"***.

- **The sphere of the anointing**

  God's anointing of Jehu was for a specific task. This is true of all leaders. Too often we assume the Holy Spirit's anointing on us in very general terms – i.e. "that we might be a blessing". No! God's anointing of the Holy Spirit is to do the task that God has called us to perform individually.

  In this case Jehu's task was clearly outlined, ***"You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the servants of the Lord "*** (v. 7)

  So the anointing of God was given by God in order that God's will may be done. It was God's will that the yoke of idolatry would be broken. In Is. 10:27 there is a small phrase, ***"the yoke will be broken because of the anointing"***. [This is rather an obscure phrase but if correct in translation it makes sense with the rest of Scripture.]

  So the anointing of God is for an assigned task.

- **The symbolism of the anointing**

  The oil poured on Jehu's head was symbolic of the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of the Lord. This little ritual pointed to a deeper reality. It was a sign pointing to the substance of the empowering of God.

  When He began His ministry, the Lord Jesus said, ***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me ...."*** (Lk. 4:13)

  No servant of the Lord can be effective in his ministry without this vital and victorious anointing.

3. The activity of Jehu as a leader (9:11-10:28)

We have the record of the activity of Jehu as a leader. He is recorded as being active in two main areas - the extermination of the house of Ahab and the eradication of the idolatrous religion of the worship of Ba'al. We will look briefly at these.

- **The extermination of the House of Ahab**

  God's command to Jehu was, ***"To strike down the house of Ahab"*** (v. 7). Jehu immediately started to do this. He killed King Jehoram (v. 24). He killed Queen Jezebel (v. 33). Then he killed Ahab's descendants (10:1-11).

  All of this was in direct fulfilment of Elijah's message given to him by God about King Ahab and his descendants, ***"Behold I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up and will cut off from Ahab every male .... For the anger to which you have provoked Me and because you have made Israel to sin."***
  (1 Kings 21:21-22) [See also 1 Kings 14:6-11 and 16:1-4]

- **The eradication of idolatry**

  Jehu also sought to bring about the destruction of idolatry in the Northern Kingdom by destroying the Temple of Ba'al and killing most of the priests and worshippers of Ba'al. He did this by pretending to worship Ba'al. He gathered all the prophets, priests and worshippers of Ba'al together in one place. He then had his soldiers encircle the place and systematically kill them all. Then the soldiers tore down the idols and broke down the Temple of Ba'al.

4. The assessment of Jehu as a leader

- **His strengths**

  Jehu accepted God's call and anointing and committed himself completely to accomplish God's plan and programme.

  ✓ **Spiritual discernment**: he showed spiritual discernment when he met King Jehoram who asked him fearfully, ***"Is it peace, Jehu?"*** Jehu answered,

"What peace can there be so long as the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abounds?"

Jehu had the spiritual perception that there would never be peace in the Northern Kingdom as long as Ba'al was worshipped instead of the One and Only Lord God.

- ✓ **Faith in God's word**: after he had sentenced all the descendants of Ahab to death and the sentence had been carried out, Jehu said, ***"Know then that there shall fall to the earth nothing of the word of the Lord which the Lord spoke concerning the house of Ahab, for the Lord has done what He said by His servant Elijah"*** (10:10).

  No leader can serve the Lord effectively who is not supremely confident of the promises of the Word of God. We need the same confidence that the Lord Jesus had when He said, ***"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the Law until all is accomplished"*** (Mt. 5:18).

- ✓ **Great zeal** in the cause of the Lord. He said to Jehonadab, ***"Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord"***. Jehu was not half-hearted! He did with all his might what he thought was God's will. Jehonadab, son of Rechad, appears to be the founder of a reforming religious group that lived on after him for several generations. [See Jeremiah 35 for evidence that they were still a reforming group 250 years later!] He believed in the One True God. He was a Kenite who, with the tribe of Judah, had entered the land under Joshua. Jael, the wife of Heber, was from this same family (Judges 4:10-24). They lived at Jabez (1 Chron. 2:55).

- ✓ **Hatred of idolatry**: he was determined to rid the Northern Kingdom of the plague of the worship of Ba'al that had so ruined the Northern Kingdom. He warned his soldiers that if any one of them permitted any of the priests or worshippers to escape, it would be a case of, ***"forfeiting his life"*** (10:24).

So in assessing this leader, Jehu, we need to remember his strengths. God certainly did!

"And the Lord said to Jehu, 'Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in My eyes and have done to the House of Ahab according to all that was in My heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne (of the Northern kingdom)***"*** (10:30).

Doing, ***"what is right in the eyes of the Lord"*** is said here of Jehu. He is the **only** king of the Northern Kingdom to have this said about him. It is only said of King David (1 Kings 15:5) and a few of the good kings of Judah - the Southern Kingdom. [1 Kings 15:11, 22:43; 2 Kings 12:2, 14:3, 15:3,34, 16:2, 18:3 and 22:2] The only other King to receive a dynastic promise was David.

- **His weaknesses**

  The Bible presents not only Jehu's good points but also his weaknesses and failures. With his virtues, Jehu had some major failures. In the long run, these undid his good qualities.

  - ✓ **Excesses**: In his zeal, Jehu exceeded the boundaries that God had put on him. God had told him to kill King Jehoram, but he went on to kill Ahaziah - the King of Judah! This was never part of his mandate.

    Again in 10:12-14 Jehu killed 42 relatives of King Ahaziah! This again was never commissioned by God. It was murder!

    How easy it is for a leader to undertake a task for God that God has never asked him to do. How easy it is to try and put right **all** that we see is wrong - to correct **everyone** who we see has made a mistake - to condemn everyone who we, at least, think has compromised. In our excessive zeal we do much damage. Remember, if we are told to deal with a "Jehoram" we should not get involved in any attempt to deal with an "Ahaziah". In His own way, God will deal with all. Avoid "murder" through this type of excessive zeal.

- ✓ **Deceit**: Jehu was deceitful. In order to gather all the idol worshippers together, Jehu said to them, ***"Ahab served Ba'al a little, Jehu will serve him much"*** (10:18). Jehu had no intention of serving Ba'al. He lied in order to gather the idolaters together!

  As Christian leaders we need to beware of deceit and lying even if we think it may be for a good end. The end never justifies the means. We dare not pretend or exaggerate or minimise in God's work. Of Jehu it is written that he used "cunning" or "subtlety" (10:19). If we use such deceitful tactics, we are simply imitating Satan who, as a snake, was more "crafty-subtle-cunning" than any other "beast" that the Lord God had made (Gen. 3:1).

  Writing to the Corinthians, Paul said, ***"But we have renounced disgraceful, underhand ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God"*** (2 Cor. 4:2).

  As leaders we must never be deceitful. If we are, then we are being manipulated by Satan.

- ✓ **Inconsistency**: In 2 Kings 10:28-29, ***"Jehu wiped out Ba'al from Israel. <u>But</u> Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, in which he made Israel to sin - that is the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan"***.

  Jehu destroyed one form of error but he sanctioned another! Why? In killing King Jehoram and Queen Jezebel and the whole house of Ahab he was doing the Lord's will, but it was also to his own advantage for he became king instead!

  In Hosea 1:4-5 we read, ***"And the Lord said to him*** (Hosea) ***' .... In just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel and I will put an end to the Kingdom of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.' "***

  We offend God when we do what is right, but not for His honour and glory, rather for our own self-interest.

  Then Jehu did not destroy the two idols that King Jeroboam had set up. It was Jeroboam who had set up the Northern Kingdom by breaking up Solomon's Kingdom into Judah and the North. He didn't want the people of the Northern Kingdom to go to the Temple in Jerusalem (the capital of the Southern Kingdom – Judah) in order to worship God. So he set up these two golden calves as alternative places to worship (1 Kings 12:13-14).

  Why didn't Jehu destroy the two calves? Because this could have ultimately led to a reunification of the two Kingdoms and the restoration of the Davidic line of Kings over the whole of the North. This meant that it was against his own political interests! Jehu was tempted to serve his own will and his own ambition only and he fell.

  If there is one charge laid against Christian leaders more often than any other, it is that of acting inconsistently! A leader deals with one problem but refuses to deal with another. He is bold in some issues but willing to compromise on others. Behind all this observable behaviour often lies self-interest as in Jehu's case.

- ✓ **Disobedience**

  "But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam in which he had caused Israel to sin." (2 Kings 10:31)

  A leader of God's work must meditate day and night on the Law of the Lord (Ps. 1:2). Like Joshua, he must not turn from God's Word either to the right hand or to the left

(Joshua 1:7). Our only protection, the only guide we have, is the written Word of God. How easy it is to start well with great faith and courage but to fail to maintain this attitude.

Success does not humble us! It hardens our hearts! We begin to drift away from our commitment to wholeheartedly following the Lord and so we forfeit the blessing of God. Jehu's problem was carelessness and the other issues we have raised of self-interest etc. and, like dry rot, they ate into his being and destroyed him.

Getting rid of Ba'al is of little use if we keep the golden calves. We need to echo David's prayer in Ps. 86:11, ***"Unite my heart to fear Your name"***.

Let our hearts never be divided by self-interest. Let us resolutely guard against excesses in zeal, deceit and lying, inconsistency and self-centredness and disobedience to God's Word. Then we will be able to glorify the Lord and extend His Kingdom.

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

15. Principles of prayer and intercession for a life of victory – 2 Kings 13:14-19

Introduction

1. The conflict

- **An analysis**
  - ✓ a proclamation of war
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- **The application to us**

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- **Facing the enemy**
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- **Joash failed because he was fearful**
- **Joash failed because he was faithless**

A Summary

15. Principles of prayer and intercession for a life of victory – 2 Kings 13:14-19

Introduction

As believers we believe in the power of prayer. We all accept the strategic importance of intercession in this life. We have probably read books about spiritual warfare praying and we have listened to messages and stories of how prayer has changed things. We know a lot, but we don't pray. Perhaps more accurately, we don't pray very much. There are a few like Epaphras who ***"Always laboured fervently in prayer for the church at Colossae"*** (Col. 4:12).

We all **want** to intercede on behalf of others in prayer, but it appears that in the matter of intercession **desire** is not enough! There must be **performance** and persistence. Wistful wishing will not do.

I think this story can help us to pray. This story is the last act of this great Prophet of the Abundant Life (while he was alive). Jehu reigned over the Northern Kingdom for 28 years. Then his son, Jehoahaz became king. He was a wicked king and, like his father, he continued the sins of Jeroboam. God's judgement came on the Northern Kingdom (13:3) and the army of Jehoahaz was badly defeated. But God saved the Northern Kingdom from complete destruction. In the end Jehoahaz reigned for 17 years and then his son, Joash, began to reign. Not much is said about him. He became king, he sinned and he died. So now about 45 years after the last "story", this "story" is told. Those 45 years are a complete blank!

But before Elisha died, King Joash arrived at his door after the king had been severely defeated in battle by the Syrians. He asked Elisha for advice. This "story" takes place in the room of the dying Elisha - the Prophet of Abundant Life.

Elisha wanted to teach this fearful king the secret of victory over all his nation's enemies. It was a simple enough lesson. But the king didn't really have the spiritual capacity to understand. Elisha was disturbed at the king's failure to understand and rebuked him for his lack of persistence.

We are going to unpack this story under four headings:

1. The conflict

The whole context of the story is that of conflict and war. The enemy was constantly attacking the Northern Kingdom. Over the decades Elisha had been the main defence of God's People! The king acknowledged this, ***"You are the chariots and horsemen of Israel"*** (v. 14).

The language of the story is ***"bows and arrows"*** (v. 15) and, ***"the arrow of the Lord's deliverance"*** (v. 17). This is the language of war. A warfare worldview has to be at the heart of our understanding of our ministry. I know that you understand this.

- **An analysis**

  When God's People entered the land under Joshua, they were told that there would be constant conflict. It was to be for them **both** a ***"land of rest"*** and also a ***"land of warfare"***. They were to experience constant attacks by strong and subtle enemies on down through the centuries. This meant they had to live knowing that:

  ✓ There is a proclamation of war

  In Lev. 26:6-8 God promised, ***"I will give peace in the land and you shall lie down and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land and the sword shall not go through your land. You shall chase your enemies and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall chase a hundred and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword"***.

This is the language of war - physical war against flesh and blood. Our warfare is just as real, but it is a **spiritual war**, ***"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places"*** (Eph. 6:12).

- ✓ Definite principles for carrying out this warfare

  There are two essential principles:

  - God requires of us **obedience to His word**
  - God requires of us **dependence on His power**

- ✓ Promises of victory in the conflict

  "The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways." (Deut. 28:7)

- The application to us and our situation

  We have entered "the promised land" – "the abundant life" – ***"the heavenly places in Christ"*** (Eph. 1:3). However, this 'place' - ***"the heavenly places"*** - is not only a place of privilege and a place of abundance and rest. It is also a place of war - a spiritual war against dark satanic forces.

  These same principles apply to us in our spiritual warfare:

  Submission and total obedience to the Word of God

  Complete dependence on the power of God

  This will secure victory and effective deliverance from all demonic enemies. The Lord Jesus gave this same promise to Peter concerning the church, ***"The gates of hell will not prevail against it"*** (Mt. 16:18).

  This spirit of absolute dependence on God is at the heart of intercessory prayer.

2. Consternation and fear (v. 14)

"Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash, King of Israel, went down to him and wept before him ... "

There is a clear demonstration of **fear** and anxiety in the behaviour of Joash the King.

- **Facing the enemy**

  The enemy was about to attack the Northern Kingdom again. Aggression was building up and the king's army was very weak. We are in a somewhat similar situation on a spiritual level. This is not theory! Often the attack by the hosts of demonic forces is very real and very close! The enemy is at our gates. We have to get to grips with him (Satan) in all his might and in all his evil malice.

  What is our reaction to the threat of attack - fear or faith? Joash reacted with fear.

- **Misunderstanding the facts**

  Joash misunderstood Elisha's prophetic role over the past many years in the Northern Kingdom. He looked down at the dying prophet and, overcome with the grief, cried out,

  "***Oh my father, my father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel!"***

  This cry tells us that the king had totally misunderstood the nature of Elisha's ministry over all the decades. He thought that **Elisha** was Israel's **defender**. But Elisha was just a man! His eyes were on the prophet rather than on the God of the prophet. He thought that with Elisha dying, all their defences were gone! He was panic-stricken!

What about us? What do we do when we are being attacked by our spiritual enemy? In whom do we place our trust? To whom do we look? Are we looking to men? No matter how great or good, no matter how saintly or scholarly, they will always fail us! Are we trusting in God alone? That is our only hope!

"Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man in whom there is no salvation .... Blessed is he whose help is in the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God." (Ps. 146:3-5)

So are we trusting **someone** or **something** (an organisation perhaps) other than God for victory in our battles against demonic forces? **This is perhaps the greatest single cause of prayerlessness!**

3. The command

How did Elisha deal with this panic-stricken leader? First the notice that there was no rebuke! Elisha didn't correct his misunderstandings nor did he expose his mis-confidence. No! Elisha sought to teach the king **positively** concerning **his resources in God** and **his responsibilities to God**. Elisha's command came in two parts.

- **A lesson in achieving victory: part one**
  - ✓ the exhortation

    "Take a bow and arrows. Put your hands on the bow."

    Elisha was eager to teach Joash that he already had the resources - the equipment - for him to take responsibility in the matter of achieving victory over his enemies.

    This is also true of us. We have prayer. We have the responsibility to, as it were, 'put our hands' on prayer and use prayer.

  - ✓ the encouragement

    "And Elisha put his hands on the king's hands."

    Elisha wanted to encourage and strengthen the king as he was beginning to assume authority in the fight. The implication was clear to the king. Elisha was supporting him. God would be with him. God's hands of strength and wisdom would be upon the king's hands of weakness. God would endue this fearful king with power.

    Then Elisha told the king to open the window eastward - towards the enemy. Joash obeyed. We need clear direction where to attack. Next the king was told to shoot his arrows out of the window towards the enemy. As the king obeyed Elisha and the arrow flew, Elisha said, ***"The arrow of the Lord's deliverance ... victory"*** (v. 17)

  - ✓ the explanation

    The arrow in flight represents the Lord's **coming** deliverance and the coming of an overwhelming victory. So King Joash was being taught that:

    - he must not look at the problems
    - he must not look to man or human assistance and aid

    He must only look to the Lord, for only He can give deliverance. Victory over our enemies lies **only** in the power of God.

- **A lesson in achieving victory: part two**

  "And he (Elisha) ***said, 'take the arrows' and he*** (Joash) ***took them. And he*** (Elisha) ***said to the King of Israel, 'strike the ground with them'."***

  - ✓ Elisha's requirement

    The king (the leader) must act and act decisively. There must be no hesitation or half-heartedness. Apparently, at this point Elisha must have removed his hand.

Too often in leadership we are overly dependent on the influence of others. The measure of the king's 'striking' would indicate the measure of his faith.

- ✓ the king's response

  He hit the ground three times with the arrow and then stopped! Instead of demonstrating his full confidence in the power of God to produce overwhelming victory by repeating the blows many, many times, he feebly and faithlessly hit the ground with the arrows and then stopped. Gal. 6:9 says, ***"And let us not grow weary of doing good for in due season we will reap if we do not give up"***. Joash gave up!

4. The censure by Elisha

Joash was probably very well aware of the symbolism of it all. Yet he failed the test! Did he do this deliberately? Elisha was angry, ***"You should have struck five or six times, then you would have struck down Syria until you had made an end of it. But now you shall strike down Syria only three times"*** (v. 19). In other words – there would be only a partial and temporary victory. These are words of regret and rebuke.

How often does God say this to us? Lk. 18:1 starts, ***"And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart"***.

Perfect success in our ministry **is** possible. Perfect blessing only comes in response to trust, obedience **and** persistence. Has the Lord ever said to you, *"You failed! If you had kept on trusting, you would have kept on praying, and then you would have had the victory?"* It is sad when we only realise the power of prayer in retrospect but then it is too late!

We often lack: finances - new workers - people saved - disciples growing into maturity - church growth and multiplication and so many other things. Let us pray on in faith, never doubting and never growing weary.

Why did Joash fail? We don't know his heart. The following is an assumption and so may not be true.

- **Joash failed because he was fearful!**

  He didn't want to smash the Syrians! There was much greater military power beyond Syria - the Assyrians with their capital at Nineveh. Syria was a buffer state between King Joash and the very great military might of Assyria. God had commanded him to destroy the armies of Syria. But he was much more afraid of Assyria than of Syria. Joash was involved in power politics. He was seeking to manipulate the situation for his own ends and benefit!

  Why don't we pray? Is it laziness? Or could there be a deeper reason? In our hearts, we sometimes find we don't want to trust God alone to grant us victory over all our spiritual enemies. We stop praying and we trust our own wisdom and power. Why? Self-interest? Perhaps then we can get some credit! In effect, we want independence from God's complete control! This "self-life" in us must be put to death.

- **Joash failed because he was faithless**

  So perhaps we, like King Joash, don't trust God to have our best interests at heart. The king was faithless as regards the Assyrians, probably thinking that God was unable to deal with their military might. Eventually Assyria overran the Syrians, the Northern Kingdom, and attacked the Southern Kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 18-19). Nevertheless, God was always in complete control! Read what just one angel of the Lord did to the Assyrians in one night in 2 Kings 19:35-37!

  But we are also faithless and fearful. We don't trust God to grant us complete victory over all our enemies. We attempt to manipulate things according to our own understanding and we cease to pray!

A Summary

How much do we know of, ***"the arrow of the Lord's deliverance"*** and victory? How much are we guilty of living in defeat because we don't trust the Lord to give us the victory again and again? If we are to know for ourselves the effects of, ***"the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man"*** (James 5:16), we must know about and practice **insistent** and **persistent** prayer.

So let us take the arrows of the Lord's victory in our hand and smite the enemy – the 'principalities and powers' - until they flee in open defeat. Unless we do this, in our ministry will only see:

* small achievements
* stunted growth of our teams and among our disciples
* stagnation in our churches

Let us **ban** – outlaw - all formal prayers, languid prayers and aimless prayers.

Let us pray ardently, pressing our prayers on God - earnestly and increasingly. Don't let us accept partial victories! Never say, like the man the Lord Jesus spoke of, ***"Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years, relax, eat, drink and be merry"*** (Lk. 12:19).

Let us never be content with partial victories.

The Bible says, ***"According to your faith will it be to you"*** (Mt. 9:29). Don't let the Lord Jesus said to you, ***"O you of little faith!"***.

"He is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask all think, according to the power at work in us." (Eph. 3:20)

Elisha would possibly say to us, *"Shoot, shoot, shoot those arrows of faith. Hit, hit and keep on hitting those arrows on the ground"*.

Never accept small results. Never be content with partial victories! Claim God's power over all the wiles of the devil. Claim the salvation of your people. Advance the Kingdom of God. Like Daniel, open your window heavenward and remember that unseen hands empower us and guide us.

These are the last words of Elisha. He had fulfilled his ministry. He departed in peace. His last act was to demonstrate the power and trustworthiness of God. What he said would happen, did happen (2 Kings 13:25).

Some New Testament parallels

Luke 18:1, ***"Men ought always to pray and not faint. "***

Eph. 6:18 ***"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and be on the alert with all perseverance and petitions for all the saints."***

Col. 4:2 ***"Devote yourselves to prayer; keep alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving."***

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

16. The power to influence others - 2 Kings 13:20-21

A. Introduction

B. The occasion of the miracle

- Defeat
- Defencelessness
- Death

C. The origin of the miracle

- Negatively
- Positively

D. The object of the miracle

- The Lord God is alive
- The Lord God is active
- The Lord God is almighty

E. Conclusion

16. The power to influence others - 2 Kings 13:20-21

A. Introduction

We want to live in such a way that we can influence others for good and for God. But what is the secret of a powerful and permanent influence for God? Can we influence people not only while we are alive but also after death?

We are going to look at an account of a man being resurrected from the dead through contact with Elisha's bones. It is an amazing story completely charged with divine power. In this story we see that the secret of effective influence through our lives is the miraculous power of God. There is no way to explain the events for there is nothing inherently 'holy' in bones.

When we read the biographies of John Wesley, Hudson Taylor, Henry Martyn and many others we are, in a sense, "touched by their bones"! What is the explanation? The secret is not in the book - the biography. It is not in our power to imagine being with them in the events. It is not in any attempt to imitate their experiences. The power to influence is of God.

These people, long dead, influence us through the eternal Spirit of God. They touch us and transform us. I think this is the major lesson we can learn from Elisha's life.

In 2 Kings 13:20 we read, ***"So Elisha died and they buried him"***. The assumption was that that was the end of the story of this amazing Prophet of Abundant Life. He could do no more miracles. He had fought a good fight. He had finished the course. He had kept the faith. His friends had fond memories of him and how blessed they had been by him, but that was all.

Life moves on. New events happened and the people of the Northern Kingdom largely forgot Elisha. They forgot that Elisha had always pointed them to the Living God who was able to defend them from all enemies and to bring them victory.

This passage in 2 Kings 13 speaks of a desperate need among the People of God. Moabites were marauding over the land causing fear and devastation.

This man's resurrection was to remind the people of God's wonder-working power that was still present. We will look at the miracle under three headings:

B. The occasion of the miracle

C. The origin of the miracle

D. The object of the miracle

B. The occasion of the miracle

What were the factors that led to the amazing event?

- **Defeat**

  In 2 Kings 13:20 we have recorded the event that took place when raiding parties of men from Moab had invaded the land. They were ruthless - killing people and removing whatever they could over the border into Moab. The people lived in constant fear of their approach. If they were caught they would be killed and if not they would lose all their possessions. Remember Elisha's first public miracle was in connection with Moab. Now this is his last miracle!

  The life of a believer can be like this - suffering defeat at the hands of our demonic enemy. We feel thoroughly beaten and bruised by the enemy. We live in fear! We identify with Paul when he cried out, ***"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"*** (Rom. 7:24)

- **Defencelessness**

  The people were defenceless against these Moabite raiders and also against the Syrian army. (v. 22) They were attacked again and again. Their own army had disintegrated so the raiders were unchallenged and unopposed. In this story the funeral of this dead man was in process but it had to be suddenly abandoned. The people couldn't even bury their dead in peace. They were defenceless with no resources at all to challenge and defeat their enemies. How often they must have said to each other, *"Oh how I wish that Elisha was alive now! He would help us. But he is dead. There is no help. There is no hope".*

  Often before God **can** help us, we need to learn that we have no defence ourselves against our enemies. Our resources are inadequate. We must learn that, by ourselves, we can do nothing at all!

- **Death**

  This miracle occurred after this man had died! He remains anonymous. We can speculate about who he might have been, but death had claimed him as a victim.

  There can be no resurrection without a prior death! Before the resurrection life - the abundant life - can be experienced, there must be a death. The man who rises up in triumph with the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus, must first go down in death to self. That is the Biblical order - first death then resurrection.

  So the context of this great miracle was a defeated and defenceless people who were experiencing death.

C. The origin (source) **of the miracle**

- **Negatively**

  This miracle was not performed by any human power or by any human being at all. The man was not raised to life just by contact with the bones of Elisha, for they had no inherent power in them. It was, ***"Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts."*** (Zech. 4:6)

  If we are seeking to be effective in our influence of others for God, we need to remind ourselves often that we can achieve **nothing** ourselves. Oh it is possible to manipulate people through clever psychology, but this kind of influence doesn't survive long and it never produces long-lasting spiritual results.

  In all centuries men have loved to build elaborate tombs to "prophets" that they did not listen to while they were alive. One wonders what the apostle Peter would say if he were to preach again at St Peter's in Rome! Truth is always the same and the best way to honour the dead is to believe what they did and follow their example.

  The tomb was probably rock-hewn vault. Coffins were not used then. The body would have been wrapped in a cloth and laid on a stretcher. The vault would have been closed with a stone or a door.

- **Positively**

  The miracle was done by the power of the Living God. So there can be blessing in bones, but only if the power of the Holy Spirit is present. There is no power at all in relics. The bones of dead saints have no spiritual power except demonic bondage. This miracle is due only to the wonder-working power of the Living God.

  It was this power by which Elisha, the Prophet of Abundant Life, performed all the miracles we have looked at. God's power enabled Elisha:

  ✓ to part the waters of Jordan (2:14)

  ✓ to heal the bitter waters of Jericho (2:22)

- ✓ to supply water for the thirsty armies of the three kings (3:20)
- ✓ to meet the widow's needs and enable her to pay her debts (4:6)
- ✓ to raise the son of the woman of Shunem to life again (4:35)
- ✓ to make the poisoned food edible (4:41)
- ✓ to feed the multitude (4:44)
- ✓ to cleanse Naaman's leprosy (5:14)
- ✓ to restore the lost axe head (6:6)
- ✓ to enable the spiritually blind servant to see (6:17)
- ✓ to predict plenty in the midst of famine (7:1)
- ✓ to warn the woman of Shunem to flee from famine (8:1)
- ✓ to appoint Jehu as king (9:3)
- ✓ to rebuke Joash (13:19)

Now, as a final proof that it was the power of God and nothing inherent in Elisha, even his dead bones were used to convey God's power.

So the question is: are we believers living and operating totally in dependence on the power of God? If we are depending on our own intelligence, our own power of personality or our own acumen, then nothing lasting will be accomplished. But if our trust is completely in the power of the Living God, then we shall see what God can do. This influence will have a lasting impact.

D. The object of the miracle

What was God's objective in carrying out this amazing miracle? What happened in the tomb of Elisha was a divine confirmation of Elisha's teaching. The Lord Jesus did many miracles. In John's Gospel they are called 'signs'. A sign gives you information for a purpose. God's miracles are never without point or purpose! So what was God seeking to say to God's people? I would suggest three things. We need to be reminded of these often:

- **The Lord God is alive!**

  The Prophet of God was dead, but the God of the prophet was still very much alive! The People of God had been trusting in Elisha to lead them, protect them and meet their needs. Now that he was dead they were suffering discouragement, defeat and death at the hands of their enemies.

  They need to be reminded not to put their trust in any human leader, but only in the Lord God. He alone is our refuge and strength. The Lord Omnipotent still reigns!

- **The Lord God is active!**

  Probably the people felt that now Elisha had gone, God's power and activity among them had also gone. I am sure that no one in that funeral procession was expecting God to intervene - neither the mourners nor the Moabites! Yet no sooner was the body thrown into in Elisha's tomb, than the man became alive, ***"and stood up on his feet"***!

  There are many examples of Bible stories where you wish someone had been recording it on a video camera! Imagine the expressions on the faces of the mourners, of the Moabites and of the man himself! What did they all do next?

  It was a mighty demonstration that God was still active and still had miraculous power to intervene on behalf of His people.

- **The Lord God is Almighty!**

  In raising the man to life God was proving irrefutably that he was both the Lord of Life and in control of the death process. Remember the Lord's words to John (Rev. 1:17-18), ***"Fear not, I am the First and the Last and the Living One. I died and behold I am alive for evermore and I have the keys of death and hades."***

  If we, His people, will put our complete trust in Him, He will secure for us the victory!

E. Conclusion

So here is a demonstration of God's power to triumph in every circumstance. Elisha's God is our God and He lives today! The lives of God's servants down through the centuries testify to us that His power is not diminished and that He is able to intervene in the lives of His people - the followers of the Lord Jesus - bringing victory where previously there has been defeat and wonderful liberty where there has been bondage.

Speaking of Abel, Hebrews 11:4 says, ***"And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks"***. In Revelation 14:13 we read, ***"And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'write this: blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed' says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours for their deeds follow them"***.

So if we want to exert an influence for God both during our life and after our lives here on earth, we need to live our lives in the mighty, miraculous power of God. We need to know practically and daily, ***"What is the immeasurable greatness of His power towards us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come ...."*** (Eph. 1:19-21)

The influence of a believer whose life is filled by God's Spirit is something that never comes to an end! Although the believer may die and be buried, such influence lives on pointing others to God as the God of all power and the Author of Salvation.

Sadly, we can ruin our spiritual effectiveness by our personal obtrusiveness in our preaching, our self-centred living and in so many other ways so that our testimony is empty.

God longs to use any believer who is truly willing to hide him/herself in death - death to the self-life - that the Lord Jesus may be magnified. Life out of death is the great lesson! 2 Cor. 4:12 puts it this way, ***"So death is at work in us, but life in you."***

We touch other lives for good after God has touched our lives. Elisha was a man who had the same troubles as his contemporaries and was liable to the same death as them. But because of the power of God, even unarmed, he was mightier than the armies of Syria. He was able to help all in difficulties, to bring relief in every affliction and to triumph over all opposition.

But above all Elisha, the Prophet of Abundant Life, through his life pointed to the Lord Jesus, the source of abundant life. He pointed to the Lord Jesus as Saviour, to the power of faith and to a life of victory.

Finally, remember, ***"Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy. For your dew is a dew of light and the earth will give birth to the dead!"*** (Isaiah 26:19)

Studies in the Ministry of Elisha

17. Secrets of effectiveness in the ministry of Elisha

Introduction

1. His unblemished character – a man of God

- **The negative characteristics of holiness**
  - ✓ no contamination
  - ✓ no compromise
  - ✓ no cowardice
  - ✓ no complicity
- **The positive characteristics of holiness**
  - ✓ devotion
  - ✓ diligence
  - ✓ discernment
  - ✓ desire for "a double portion"
  - ✓ dependence on God's power
  - ✓ discipline
  - ✓ distribution of God's blessings to many

2. His unqualified commitment to God

- **Separation**
- **Sacrifice**
- **Service**
- **Suffering**

3. His unlimited confidence in:

- **The <u>will</u> of God**
- **The <u>word</u> of God**
- **The <u>work</u> of God**

4. His uninterrupted communion with God

5. A universal compassion

- **The <u>source</u> of his compassion**
- **The <u>scope</u> of his compassion**

17. Secrets of effectiveness in the ministry of Elisha

Introduction

We have looked in some detail into the life and ministry of Elisha. We have followed him from being a ploughman, to his deathbed when he was still advising the king. We have told, 'All the great things that Elisha did' (2 Kings 8:4). Clearly his life was a life lived out in the power and presence of God. God's blessing constantly rested on his life and on all that he did.

As we look at Elisha, we are forced to ask, what are the secrets of his life that made him so faithful, fruitful and effective and what are the keys to such an abundant life?

Here are five suggestions as to Elisha's effectiveness.

1. His unblemished character

Elisha is called a "man of God" more times in Scripture than any other person. I think this is not just a title given to him as a professional title, but a personal distinction. The woman from Shunem called him "a holy man of God". So I think holiness was a dominant characteristic of Elisha.

- **The negative characteristics of holiness**
  - ✓ **no contamination** by the world: James 1:27 says, ***"To keep oneself unstained from the world"***. Elisha had been delivered from the idolatry of his age in all its forms.
  - ✓ **no compromise** in his life: Remember when he faced the alliance of the three kings (2 Kings 3). Listen again as he speaks to the apostate King of Israel, ***"What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and your mother."*** He wanted no part in an unholy alliance between Edom, Israel and Judah.
  - ✓ **no cowardice** in his ministry. He faithfully exposed the hidden sinfulness of Hazael's heart - his plan to murder the king and replace him with himself (2 Kings 8:11-12). So direct was Elisha's look, that Hazael knew that Elisha knew what he was going to do and so he was embarrassed.
  - ✓ **no complicity** with evil in any form – Gehazi, his servant, succumbed to temptation for material gain. Elisha stood implacably against this. He uncovered the root of covetousness in Gehazi's heart - a root that produced all sorts of sin (2 Kings 5:20-27). Elisha had no favourites when it came to exposing sin.

- **The positive characteristics of holiness**

  Holiness of life is a life that is well pleasing to God in respect of oneself, other people and God Himself. The very first scene we have of Elisha reveals some of his quality of holiness.
  - ✓ His **devotion** to his parents - he appears hard-working, contented, loving and caring for his parents.
  - ✓ His **diligence** in serving Elijah - when the King of Israel asked to question a prophet, one of the king's servants said that, ***"Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who poured water on the hands of Elijah"*** was present. He did this service for perhaps nine years.
  - ✓ His **spiritual discernment** - he discerned that the mantle Elijah wore was a symbol of Elisha's spiritual power and authority. He needed no verbal explanation. His spiritual discernment was enough.
  - ✓ His **desire for a "double portion"** at the ascension of Elisha so that he would be fully equipped to carry out the ministry of bringing revival to the Northern Kingdom in the power of the Spirit. Elisha put first things first – "a double portion" of Elijah's spirit.

- ✓ His absolute **dependence** on the power of the Lord in every miracle he did. At one of his first miracles he said, ***"Thus says the Lord, I have healed this water ...."*** (2 Kings 3:21). Elisha never claimed any credit for performing the miracles. All the glory was God's.
- ✓ His **discipline** - he had a well-ordered life. His journeys between Gilgal and Carmel – his "School of the Prophets' etc. all clearly had an aim. He was a man of vision and had the discipline to move methodically towards achieving his aim.
- ✓ His **distribution of God's blessing** to many. We see that Elisha travelled a lot. He was mainly in the Northern Kingdom, but we see him on the East Bank of Jordan in Edom and we see him in Damascus. Everywhere he went, the blessing and the wisdom of God came through Elisha. He was a widespread **distributor of God's blessings**. This is what holiness meant to Elisha. He was always approachable by people of any background and then able to meet the needs of those people.

  We need many more such men and women of God.

2. His unqualified commitment to God

One of Elisha's great qualities was his unqualified commitment to God. From the day he put his hand to the plough in the service to God - at the call of Elijah - he never looked back. He always ploughed a straight furrow. He never turned back. This involved four commitments:

- **Separation**

  This unqualified commitment involved separation from family, friends and fortune. Instead it meant lonely days with little company except for his master, Elijah. It is only those who have been separated home and family for years who know something of the cost of such commitment.

- **Sacrifice**

  For Elisha, his commitment to the call of God on his life meant sacrifice. He had to sacrifice his life on the farm, his fortune and his future. For him there was no wife, no family, no home and few comforts. In his day, material possessions - wealth and fine clothes - were status symbols of the day. Elisha appeared to be a pauper. This spirit of sacrifice was wonderfully illustrated in his offering the bullocks that he had been ploughing with as a whole burnt offering to God. His 'all' was on the altar.

- **Service**

  His commitment meant service. He was both a servant and an apprentice to Elijah. All his time, his energies and his interest had to be focused on being Elijah's "gopher". He had to learn to serve before he could lead.

- **Suffering**

  When he left home to serve Elijah, he began an association with Elijah who was considered a dangerous criminal (a terrorist) in the Northern Kingdom. Elijah was hunted and hounded by the authorities. The ordinary people would have thought of Elisha as being in the same situation. He became a target for ridicule and reproach and possibly for even worse.

3. His unlimited confidence in God

I think this is one of the greatest characteristics of Elisha's life. It should be a characteristic of our lives as well.

- **Unlimited confidence in the <u>will</u> of God**

  When Elijah's mantle was thrown over his shoulders, he recognised that this was God's call to him for his life – a life where he would always "play second fiddle" - a life where he

could only seek the things of God and never his own things. Like Abraham, he was literally going out not knowing where he was going.

- **Unlimited confidence in the <u>word</u> of God**

  How often did Elisha say, ***"Thus says the Lord"*** ! Elisha knew that God's word had power. God's word was always effective in accomplishing God's purposes. Elisha knew that no word of God would ever be fruitless. To him it was a small thing for the Lord to fill a very large number of deep ditches in the desert with water!

- **Unlimited confidence in the <u>work</u> of God**

  Elisha lived and laboured in a difficult time in the Middle East - war and famine were common. He faced apostasy and a dominant 'other religion'. But in giving his life to the work and service of God, he did so fully believing that God would enable the work of God in the world to progress. He was gloriously confident that the cause of God would triumph. He knew that the ultimate victory over error and evil lay with God.

  The result of this unlimited confidence in God produced in Elisha:

  - ✓ rest in the midst of rush
  - ✓ peace in the midst of pressure
  - ✓ calm in the midst of crisis

  This was possible because he trusted in God.

4. His uninterrupted communion with God

There are not many references that refer directly to this, but it is clear that Elisha was a man who

"Dwelt in the secret place of the most high God" (Ps. 91:1).

Perhaps this is best symbolised by his visits to Mount Carmel - a place to him of vision, victory and vitality. It is only mentioned directly twice that he went there (2 Kings 2:25 and 4:25). But the woman of Shunem noticed that he often passed by her house the way to Mount Carmel from Gilgal. This was why she offered to build him a room. I think he often went there for rest and personal renewing in his communion with God.

The result of this fellowship with God was that Elisha was never at a loss when faced with human need. He always had God's remedy. He knew exactly how to bring God's power to bear on human problems. So he was never in a panic! Examples include the time when he was summoned by the three kings in the desert. He was calm and fearless. Another example was when he was surrounded by the Syrian army. He said that his confidence was in the Lord of heaven's armies of angels! So moment by moment he was sustained by his fellowship with God!

5. A universal compassion

Elisha was a man in whom God's love and compassion ruled.

- **The source of his compassion**

  Elisha's love had its source in God, ***"God so loved the world"*** is found in the New Testament (Jn. 3:16). But God has **always** loved the world. This is why He created it, sustains it and will one day create new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

- **The scope of his compassion**

  Elisha's compassion knew few limits. He had compassion on the rich and the poor, on the ignorant and on the wise, on his friends and on his enemies. He exercised his compassion in the city, in the fields, in the desert, in the palaces of kings and in small cottages. There were no racial or cultural barriers.

It was said of the Lord Jesus that he had compassion on the multitudes because they were like sheep who had no shepherd. And this characterised Elisha's ministry. He demonstrated this compassion in so many ways, bringing blessing to those in need and caring for their welfare. He was truly a pastor-prophet caring for his flock with devotion.

So how are we to be effective for God in what we have been called to do? In Elisha - a holy man of God - there is a pattern of effective service. Elisha was used by God because of his:

- unblemished character
- unqualified commitment
- unlimited confidence in God
- uninterrupted communion with God
- universal love for the people to whom he was called

May what was true of Elisha also be true of us!