

Effective integral mission

Vision: to understand how God likes to work and how He likes us to work in our community; as facilitators of the process, we equip and train but then get out of the way (like Elisha); we take time to listen and find out people's needs.

2 Kings 4:1-7 – the widow and the jars of oil

Optional video: Watch this creative retelling of the story <https://youtu.be/bTjzMjd1cQs> (9:18)

Questions to discuss:

1. What were the key events in this story? Who played what role?
2. What problems was the widow facing at the beginning of the story?
3. What were the resources available to the widow and her sons? List as many as you can.
4. What does Elisha's response tell us about his character? What can we learn from this?
5. What changes occurred by the end of the story?
6. What can we learn from this story about how God works? When did the miracle happen? Why do you think God chose to do the miracle in this way?
7. What can we learn from this about the most effective ways to help people in our communities?

Act of Love: ask participants to consider prayerfully together how they can show God's care to someone who is struggling with their basic needs in our community by enabling them to support themselves, as Elijah did for this widow.

Going deeper:

Ask two volunteers to read the drama (see end) before answering the questions above. It is a retelling of the Bible passage as a modern-day interview, in the style of a radio broadcast.

Extra resource: Christians Against Poverty Bible provides free debt help and practical and emotional support: <https://capuk.org/i-want-help>

Notes for facilitator: see over page

Notes for facilitator:

- *In this story, the husband dies, so the widow asks Elijah for help. Elisha asked questions and listened, then gave advice and encouraged the widow to do what she could using what she had. The widow and her sons were active agents in the story: the sons collected jars from her neighbours; the widow poured oil into them, sold the oil and can go on selling the oil, so she and her sons can live on it the rest of her life (saving and/or buying and selling more oil). The neighbours helped. God performed the miracle.*
- *At the start of the story, the widow was very poor to the extent that she had gone into debt and her sons were about to be taken into slavery.*
- *The resources available to them included: prayer, advice from Elisha, oil, jars, sons to help, the community around them, physical ability, health, the reputation of her husband, the skills to sell the oil and to manage the money well.*
- *Elisha was humble, not wanting to take the glory but wanting her to become independent.*
- *By the end of the story, we see positive changes in increased faith; a greater sense of community among the neighbours; long-term income for the widow, using her business skills to steward the money that God had given her.*
- *We learn that God wants us to use everything that we have first and for people to participate and lead the transformation of their own lives, through his power. We also learn that He wants us to live in community: to ask for help and to help one another.*
- *God wants us to work with our community in a way that envisions them to identify and use the resources they already have to overcome the problems in their life; to support each other; and to see that there is a God who can do real miracles.*

The Bible shows us that effective integral mission involves having the right attitude to our resources; and helping others to recognise what they have. God asks each of us: "What do you have?" and He expects us to start using it. God's kingdom people have a responsibility to reach out to others who are poor and vulnerable, whether or not we think we have much – as churches, individuals and families. "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you" (Luke 12:31). He also expects us to work with others in the same way, not treating them as useless but finding out what they have and encouraging them to look for their resources

The story of Elisha and the widow reinforces the principles necessary for effective mission: long-term change; local ownership; everyone playing their part; holistic approach; and God's power and love. These are confirmed throughout the Bible.

Drama: see over page

Drama: (I = interviewee; R = reporter)

R – Yes thank you, – I'm here in the village of And with me is a very excited lady – her name is and she has quite a story to tell.

I – Oh, excited is an understatement! I can't believe how my life has changed so dramatically. This time last week I was in the depths of despair! But now everything has changed for me and my sons!

R – Tell us what life was like a week ago.

I – The worst possible situation. My poor husband Obadiah died a few months ago leaving a large debt dating back to the famine. And suddenly the man who had loaned the money wanted it back! Of course, after the funeral expenses and without Obadiah to earn any money, we had absolutely nothing! How could I repay him? So he said he was going to take my two poor sons, Daniel and Joshua, away from me to be slaves! Can you imagine?

R – That must have been terrible... what did you do?

I – Well my husband was training to be a priest before he died – he was so young. While training he spent time with the great prophet Elisha – Obadiah said he was the most wonderful man and has done some amazing things so I thought maybe he could help me.

R – Yes, I've heard of Elisha – he seems to be in much demand - did he have time to see you?

I – He did! He was so kind. I told him all of my troubles and he was so compassionate!

R – And was he able to help you pay your debts? You said you had nothing...Is he very wealthy?

I – Oh, I certainly thought I had nothing! And he is as poor as I – wonderful man, he never asks for anything for himself! He asked me what I had in the house, and I told him in despair that I had nothing at all. He asked, "Nothing?". Then he waited. At last I said: "Well, nothing of any use. Just a small amount of anointing oil in a jar." Then he looked at me so kindly: "Don't dismiss what God has given you. Use it and see what happens. Go to all your friends and neighbours and ask them to give you all the spare empty jars they have in their house. Then when you have gathered them all, shut the door of your house and pour your oil into the jars – setting aside the jars that are full."

R – What a strange instruction! I think I would have been angry – or assumed that Elisha was mad! You told him you didn't even have one jarful of oil, and he was telling you to pour it into more?

I – Well yes – to be honest I was a bit angry – no not angry – more confused really... because I knew how much Obadiah had trusted him... So, crazy as it sounds, my sons went round to all our neighbours and asked them for their empty jars and pots.

R – What did they think of that?

I – Oh, I think they thought I had gone mad! They knew what a mess I was in, but we'd shut ourselves away ... I hate taking charity. But the last few days forced me to accept a little grain that someone kindly left on our doorstep - Daniel and Joshua hadn't eaten for two days. But that made me more ashamed so I hid away even more... They are very kind people and I think most were just delighted that I was asking them for help, even if they couldn't understand the point of it!

R – So then what happened?

I – Well this is the amazing part. As you know I just had a small amount of anointing oil in a jar so I did what the prophet said and started to pour it... and to my complete amazement, the oil just kept pouring until the empty jar, 10 times the size of my original one, was full!

R – *That’s unbelievable!*

I – *Yes! I nearly dropped the jar, I was so shocked! Especially when I looked back in the original one, and saw that there was still oil in it! So then I started on another jar – the same thing happened, again and again! I would say: “bring me another jar Daniel”; “Joshua bring those pots from the corner”. And they helped me fill all the spare jars and pots with oil. it just went on and on!*

R – *Did you manage to fill all the empty jars?*

I – *Yes, yes – we did! And guess what? When we had filled the last jar, I glanced back in the original and saw that all the oil was finally gone!*

R – *So incredible – so what did you do then?*

I – *Well I sold it – of course I did. And it fetched such a lot of money! I not only had enough to pay off my debts but there is plenty to live on, so my Daniel and Joshua they can stay with me forever – well of course until they want to get married!*

R – *What a fantastic story that is! Is there any last message that you want to leave with our viewers?*

I – *Oh yes! I learned such a lesson from Elisha – I was waiting for someone else to do something, to jump in and save me! I thought I had nothing. But God showed me He had already given me enough, and used what I had to save my sons – with the support of my neighbours!*

R – *Thank you so much. So, there you have it – what a story! Back to the studio...*