Elisha and the Widow’s Oil



Scripture Reference: 2 Kings 4:1-7

Suggested Theme: God is compassionate. We can show compassion too, especially to those who are grieving.

Memory Verse: “He comforts us every time we have trouble so that we can comfort others when they have trouble. We can comfort them with the same comfort that God gives us.” 2 Corinthians 1:4, ICB

Story Overview:

A prophet died, leaving debts his widow and two sons could not pay. The creditor decided to take the two sons as slaves to pay the debt. When the widow begged for Elisha’s help, the Lord miraculously provided them with enough oil to sell and pay off the debt.

Background Study:

After the prophet Elijah was taken to heaven (2 Kings 2:11), his disciple and successor, Elisha, became the chief prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel. He faithfully continued the work of the Lord as Elijah had done. He travelled on his own throughout the countryside, probably on a donkey led by a servant. He became known for his miracles (2 Kings 2:19-22).

In one town, a poor widow approached Elisha. Her husband had been a prophet.

This poor widow was unable to pay the debts that her husband had left her with. She had only a small amount of olive oil in her home – nothing else of value. As was the common practice of the time, her two sons would have to work for the lender until the money was paid back. In this case, he was going to exact a more harsh payment. They were to become his slaves.

God’s servant, Elisha, told the woman to borrow all the empty jars from her neighbours that she could possibly get, close her doors, and begin pouring the oil from her jar into the borrowed jars. As she obeyed, the widow saw that God provided enough oil to fill all the jars.

Almost every time the bible mentions oil, it refers to olive oil. The oil pressed from the fruit of olive trees had many uses in biblical times. It was a dietary staple. It was spread on bread, used in cooking, and mixed with flour to make bread.

Oil was used as a religious offering (Leviticus 2:4), a remedy for stomach distress, and a balm to heal wounds. It was also used as a fuel for lamps in homes. Soldiers often worked the oil into the leather shields they used in battle, keeping them from becoming brittle.

Oil was also the base for making perfumes and fragrant ointments. When perfumers boiled oil and added secret blends of root and bark powders, tree resins and spices, they could make a very expensive ointment.

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One jar of oil-based myrrh, frankincense, cinnamon and aloe ointment could sell for as much as one labourer's yearly salary.

Oil was a precious item in international trade. Solomon had used it years before to pay for some of the supplies he used to build the temple (2 Chronicles 2:10).

When the widow told Elisha what had happened, he instructed her to sell the oil and pay off her husband's debts. The woman and her sons could then live on the money that was left over. Truly, God provided Elisha to be a friend to this family in their time of need.
Background Information on the Divided Kingdom.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Bring some olives and olive oil to class today. Talk about some of the uses of olive oil. Let the children taste them. They could dip a little bread in the oil. Put a drop on each child's hand and let them use it as a hand lotion. "Olive oil was very precious in Old Testament times. People would spend a lot of money to buy olive oil. If you were poor, you would be very happy if you had some olive oil to sell. Let's find out about how people in our story today used olive oil."

The Story:

Elisha was a prophet of God. God would give him important truths to tell the people, and Elisha would preach those to them.

Once, when Elisha passed through a town, he saw a woman with two sons. "Please, sir," the woman said, "I am a widow. My husband was a prophet who served God. When he was alive, he borrowed money from someone. He knew he could work and pay the man back. But then a terrible thing happened – my husband died.

Now that he is gone, we can never pay back the money. I do not have any money left. All I have in my house is a little olive oil. If I had a lot of oil, I could sell it and earn some money, but I do not have enough to sell.

The man that my husband borrowed from said that if I did not pay him back, he would take my sons away to be his slaves. I love my sons and don't want anything bad to happen to them. Please help me!"

Elisha felt sorry for the woman and wanted to help her. He told her, "Tell your sons to go out and gather all the empty jars that they can find. Tell them to borrow jars from your neighbours and friends. They should borrow as many as they can."

The boys went out and did just as their mother said. They asked all the neighbours and all of their friends to give them their empty jars. Finally, there were no more jars left to find or borrow.

Now, Elisha told the woman and her sons to go inside her house and shut the door. "Use the little bit of oil that you have to fill the first jar and then set it aside. Then, fill the next jar with your little bit of oil. Keep using that same oil to fill your collected jars."

"How could a little jar of oil fill so many other jars?" the woman thought, "That does not make sense. I will run out of oil."

But the woman knew that Elisha was a prophet of God, so she trusted that he was speaking the truth. She and her sons did exactly what Elisha told her to. They went inside the house and shut the door. She filled one jar and set it aside. Then she filled another and set it aside. Her sons continued to pass her empty jars to fill. Over and over, she poured from her jar and filled another jar with oil. Her jar always had enough oil, and it did not run out.

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Finally, when she asked her sons to pass her another jar, they had to tell her that no more jars were left to fill. The woman and her sons looked around their house and saw all the jars full of oil. What an amazing sight!

The woman rushed outside and told Elisha.

“Now you have enough oil!” said Elisha, “Take the oil and sell it. Soon you will have enough money to pay back all of the debts. In fact, you will have enough money left over. You can use that money to make sure you can always buy food and have a place to live.”

The woman and her sons were so happy that Elisha had come to visit them. They used to think their situation was so bad that there was no hope. But Elisha had helped them when they needed it the very most. Now, they did not have to worry about food or a place to stay. The best thing was that now her sons would not be taken away from her!

God had blessed this family through the prophet Elisha.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child’s spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What was Elisha’s job? (He was a prophet of God)
- Why was the widow with two sons so sad? (She could not pay her husband’s debts, so the person they owed was going to take her sons as slaves)
- What did Elisha tell the woman to send her sons to find and borrow from their neighbors? (Empty jars)
- The widow only had a little oil. What did Elisha tell her to do with it? (Fill all the rest of the jars with her oil)
- What did the widow do with all the olive oil? (Sold it and paid off her husband’s debt)
- Did the widow’s sons become slaves? (No)
- What do you think the widow’s sons or the widow learned from this miracle?
- What did this story teach you about God?

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Reflection:

- What question do you have for God about this story?
- What part of this story is most interesting to you?
- How old do you think the widow's two sons were?
- How do you think the widow's sons felt when they learned that they would have to become slaves?
- If you were one of the widow's sons, would you have believed Elisha would help your family and do a miracle?
- How do you think the widow felt when she saw that her oil did not run out?
- What do you think the widow's house looked and smelled like when it was full of jars of oil?
- How many jars do you think the two sons collected?
- Elisha and God had compassion on the widow and her two sons. What kind of people do you see or know and have compassion on? (People who are sick, homeless, poor, people whose family member died, etc.)

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Give Me Oil in My Lamp Song
- Love is Something If You Give It Away Song
- L-O-V-E Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Read and discuss James 1:27.
- Arrange to visit a widow/widower and do some jobs around their house.
- Invite a widow, widower, or orphan (or someone who has been in that position) to join your gathering today and talk about what it is like to live in that situation.
- Bring olive oil to the session so the children can feel and smell it. Pour a little into a saucer and let the children dip some bread in it to taste.

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- How about taste-testing some olives?
- Research online or use a bible encyclopaedia to find ways olive oil was used in Old Testament times.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Make a card or gift basket for a widow/widower in the congregation or community.
- Collect small jars and lids. Help the children pour olive oil into each one and secure the lid tightly. Decorate the jars with ribbons, labels, etc. Add a label or tag that says “Elisha and the Widow’s Oil: 2 Kings 4:1-7.” Create your own labels or print label strips in the following paper sizes:

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring sheet and puzzle pages (Calvary Curriculum)
- Video: A good video on YouTube depicting this story (Gracelink)
- Nice (single) illustration for this story at free-illustration Blogspot
- Daily devotional (Bible lessons 4 kids)
- Lesson Plan for 3rd-5th graders (Ministry to children)

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