HOPE WHEN YOU’RE RUNNING LOW.


The story of a little pot of oil.

A widow’s story.

Here is a widow who is truly running on empty…. she had run out of a whole lot of things.

+ She had run out of marriage, her husband had died.

+ She was not only a widow, but a young widow. We know she was young because she had young children.

+ there was no doubt that life had dealt her a cruel blow.

+ She had also run out of money, she no longer had the means to support herself and her family.

+ Now that her husband was gone, she had no way to pay her husband’s creditors.

SHE HAD NOT ONLY RUN OUT OF CASH… BUT SHE MIGHT ALSO LOSE HER CHILDREN.

+ She was facing the loss of her two precious boys.

+ She no longer had the means to support herself and her family.

+ Her greatest fear was that they would take her children and she would never get them back.

The creditors would take her dependent children to work in the employ of a fellow Israelite. Maybe one day she would get them back, maybe not.

This was her greatest fear. If the creditor took her children, she might never see then again.

PROPHET ELISHA.

She went and complained to the prophet Elisha about her dilemma.
"I have nothing in the house"

“Your servant, my husband, is dead”, was her pointed comment, “and you know he feared the Lord.”

This is the voice of anger that has been held in till it can be held in no longer.

Not only was this women running out of the wherewithal to provide for her children, she was running out of the most of the most precious thing her faith in God.

And make no mistake about it – running out of things that are precious to us often leads to our running out of faith.

SHE HAD THE COURAGE TO CRY OUT.

To her credit, the desperate widow in the 2 Kings story didn’t run away - although she might have wanted to.

But she needed help desperately. One thing had lead to another, and she found herself incapable of being a caregiver anymore.

She was in need of care herself.

Sometimes having to receive instead of give can bring us to the point of running on empty quicker than anything else.

One who is accustomed to giving, finds it almost impossible to receive care, even when she desperately needs it.

For some people it is a whole lot easier to be a caregiver than to be the one cared for.

The widow in this story, however, was driven well beyond pride or embarrassment. She had no problem asking for help.

She was desperate to survive, desperate not to loose what was left of her family.

Someone who could help was within hearing distance …His name was Elisha.

When the widow was running on empty, out of a husband, out of funds, out of faith, this prophet was running on full.

Both were poor in material goods… but Elisha was rich by God's measure.
God is so good when we have run out of what we need.

He delights to arrange to have someone around the corner of our dilemma who is running on full and can pour into our lives just when we need it most. (A grace dispenser.)

But for it to happen, we have to cry out.

SOMEONE WHO WILL BE A DISPENSER OF GRACE.

God often does his work through ordinary people.

When you are running on empty take a look around you. Think of all the people you know.

Who of these has a vibrant faith? Who is a woman or man of prayer?

THAT PERSON IS YOUR ELISHA.

That’s who you need to turn to when you’re running low.

Maybe pride has at some point held you back…or you could not bring yourself to ask.

There is an Elisha there waiting to help…to dispense grace.

I have often heard it said, “I just wish that I had asked for help sooner.”

Don’t be afraid to call out when you run out.

STORY.

Jill Briscoe, a Pastors wife and a Pastor herself.

I well remember a time when I was running on empty. I was a young mother with children under school age. My husband and I were serving a youth mission that required being away from home for long periods of time.

Life was serious and stretching for us in those days. I knew that God had called us to this work, yet I often felt tired, confused, worried, and overworked.
I could certainly relate to the little widow who had lost her husband and was in danger of loosing her children.

Although my husband was alive and well, I felt like a ministry widow.

How could I be both mum and dad to the kids so they wouldn’t grow up to resent the Lord?
I really did feel I was left with “nothing in the house.”

The interesting thing was that I, too, had an Elisha just up the road. She was within walking distance.

But I didn’t walk the distance to talk to her, -at least not at first.

She was within a phone distance, but I didn’t dial her number.

She was in prayer distance, but I didn’t ask her to pray for me.

Why? Pride, maybe. I didn’t want anyone to know that I wasn’t handling things. And I was ashamed of my neediness.

All around me were women who also saw little of their husbands.

But they seemed to have everything under control, while I was falling apart.

I can’t believe I wasted so much time being miserable when the help I needed was just so close.

But I couldn't bring myself to ask for help until I was absolutely desperate.

But only when I finally cried out did things start to get better.

SO DON’T BE AFRAID TO CRY OUT WHEN YOU RUN OUT.

REMEMBERING WHAT YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN.

After she cried out to him, Elisha’s immediate response was, “How can I help you?”

But his approach to helping her was a little surprising.

He didn’t give her money, and he didn’t help her with her accounting. Instead he asked, “WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN THE HOUSE?”
“Nothing,” she replied.

That was the problem she was running on empty.

But then she remembered that the cupboard wasn’t completely bare.

“Nothing”, she corrected herself, “but a little pot of oil.”

In her hour of need she had forgotten all about that oil.

And I wonder if that is what happens to all of us.

HOLY SPIRIT.

We have within us, all that we need in the person of the Holy Spirit, represented by the little pot of oil.

But when trouble with a capital “T” comes we forget our all­sufficient resource.

We forget that He is here to give us the wisdom we lack, the words to speak, the actions to take.

The bible says we can draw on His comfort and rely on Him to fill us up when we run low.

It’s the Holy Spirit that comforts our hearts with peace in the most impossible circumstances.

And because He is always there and available, we are never really running on empty.

You may have no family, no food, no clothes, no future, no spouse, no health, or no children, yet be rich beyond your wildest dreams because you have the Holy Spirit.

REMEMBER THE RESOURCES YOU HAVE.

That’s what Elisha helped the widow do.

Instead of simply giving her what she needed, he persisted in directing her toward where her help…until she finally remembered what she had forgotten.

+ The prophet could have used that widow’s need as an opportunity to show his own wisdom and goodness.
+ He could have gone out and collected donations or negotiated with the woman’s creditors and then taken all the recognition for helping her.

+ Instead, he turned her back to God. He asked her what she had and showed her how to draw on that resource. Elisha told the women what she needed to hear.

THROUGH HER OBEDIENCE CAME A MIRACLE.

First, she sent her sons out to collect jars from her neighbours, just as Elisha had told her to do.

She began to pour the oil, and from one little jar she filled container after container, until she had enough to sell and satisfy her debts.

Shut the door on the world and throw yourself on God.

It is fine to cry out for help - and God may well provide for you through other people. (A grace dispenser).

But even, your primary source of sustenance still needs to be the Lord.

If Elisha had invited himself into the widow’s house and worked the miracle then no one would have been surprised. After all, this was a mighty man of God.

But this time, wisely, Elisha insisted the miracle be between the widow and God.

Elisha wanted her to experience firsthand the all-sufficiency of God’s provision, to remember that as long as God is present, our lives will never be truly empty.

THE POURING OUT PRINCIPLE.

Jill Briscoe.

I spilled out my frustrations to that loving women.

I know there was resentment in my voice as I talked about my situation, just as there was in the widow’s voice as she complained to Elisha about the unfairness of it all.

My mentor did for me exactly what Elisha did for the little widow.
First she listened.

And then she firmly directed my attention toward the little pot of oil.

In my stress, I had forgotten my greatest resource.

I had discounted the work of the Holy Spirit in my life.

“You have all that you need within you, Jill,” my Elisha reminded me, “in the person of the Holy Spirit.”

You have heavenly help a heartbeat away.

“How?”

“Go home, shut the door, and spend time with the Lord.”

“Then begin to pour out whatever you have into the empty vessels of your neighbours.”

That’s not what I wanted to hear

My friend and mentor knew that one of the most fundamental principals of living in Christ – that we empty ourselves in order to be filled.

One of the things that Jesus said….“The first will be last, those of us who loose our lives will find them…and we only truly begin to be filled as we pour ourselves out to others.

BE A DISPENSER OF GRACE.

My Elisha knew, in other words, that the answer to my emptiness would come not seeking fulfillment, but in losing my life in service.

It would come as I ministered to people who were hurting a whole lot more than I was.

I needed to put my troubles aside and start attending to the bigger troubles in other peoples lives.

And as I began to do that, my life would begin to fill up again.
Well, I was desperate enough to do what she told me. I went home, shut the door, and got on my knees before God.

I asked Him to show me where to start pouring out.

Give me an idea Lord, I prayed.

He did. He had been waiting to hear me ask that.

Then I got up off my knees, called a babysitter for the evening, and took off on my own to the town center.

I went to one of the trouble spots where teenagers liked to hang out and just started talking to kids.

And as I started to connect with a few of those at-risk teens…I began in effect to pour into some empty teenage lives.

Grace dispensing?

I had thought I had nothing in the house. I certainly had nothing left in myself to give.

But as I began to talk to these beautiful kids, I was able to draw on the limitless power of the Holy Spirit, as I poured out, He poured it in.

It was one of the most incredible evenings of my life.

And the more I poured myself out into these “vessels,” the more love and faith and hope there seemed to be in my life.

Her own children became involved…. they helped collect the jars. They watched the oil begin to flow.

They saw vessels fill up one by one.

+ They watched as boys and girls came off drugs.

+ They saw girls who were pregnant choose to keep their babies…instead of aborting.
THEY SAW THE OIL KEEP ON FLOWING, AND MY MIRACLE BECAME THEIR MIRACLE TOO.

It is no surprise to me, in fact, that our children are in ministry today.

Once you have been part of such a life-changing experience, you will never be the same again.

WHAT’S MY JOB?

While we are here on earth, till we breathe our last, we will never run out of opportunities to pour out into the lives of others.

In fact, pouring out to others is the reason we are here on earth in the first place.

If we are believers, pouring out is our job - and the Spirit’s filling is what makes in humanly possible.

OUR JOB IS TO POUR OUT FOR OTHERS THE LOVE THAT HAS TRANSFORMED OUR OWN LIVES.

Love is God’s signature….grace that makes love strong.

My job is to be a blessing even when I could do with someone being a blessing to me.

+ It could be a word to a neighbour who has just lost a job.

+ It could be someone who is just struggling to survive.

+ It could be someone who has just had to cope with a major loss.

+ It could be someone needing a word of encouragement.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT…WHEN CHRISTAINS ARE SAD, JOYLESS…CHRISTIANITY DIES A THOUSAND DEATHS.

And make no mistake, a smile can be a vital form of ministry.

A genuine smile promises safety and invites conversation.

It’s yet another way of pouring out to others.
But once again, the pouring comes from the spirit within us.

No matter what our circumstances, our type of employment or whatever….. your basic job description is the same as mine.

It is to be full of the Holy Spirit and to pour yourself out to others in love and ministry, trusting in the spirit to make that possible.

Jesus wants me in people’s lives, and what Jesus wants is far more important than what I want.

And once I have the Holy Spirit in my life, though I may run low, there will always be more oil in my pot.

When you are poured out, the Holy Spirit has only just begun His work in you.

He will pour in all you need on a moment by moment basis - and day by day and hour by hour.

If you’re feeling empty, depleted, or out of steam, if you’re waiting for the wind, first cry out for help.

THEN START POURING AND FEEL THE GOODNESS START TO FLOW.
All my ransomed powers and all the things I own,

All my life’s ambitions I lay down at your thrown,

All my love and laughter and all my pain and tears,

All my apprehension and all my doubts and fears.

All my painful failures and all my gains and loss,

All my small shortcomings I lay down at your cross,

All my lies and boasting and all my sin and pride,

All the guile I practice and all the hate I hide.

Give all the grace I plead for, and all forgiveness brings,
Send all the peace I long for until my spirit sings,
Till all the tears forgotten and sins I can’t recall,
Till Jesus, all is Jesus, and He is all in all.

Fill my empty spaces, heal all the hurts I’ve borne.
Give me the power to change my life, I need to be reborn.
So take my life, Lord Jesus, know all my days I’ll spend
Investing in your kingdom work till life itself shall end.

Send all the power I ask for, give all the grace and peace,
All your present presence, the spirit’s sweet release.
Give me all your grand dynamic You want me to impart,
All this sweet enabling, please pour into my heart.