

Elisha 5 - Ministry of Sufficiency and Abundance

We are continuing in 2 Kings 4 examining Elisha's ministry to understand how we can maximize our Christian service. So far we have examined such things as:

- How a calling to ministry can sometimes look merely like a promotion
- How faithfulness and personal involvement are significant in ministry
- How a balanced ministry ranges from blessing to cursing, or judgment, in rebuke, reproof, and exhortation.
- How ministry has to be unbiased, ready to bless whoever God brings to us with what they actually need.

You might hear a TV preacher claiming that God wants us to live in abundance. The suggestion is made that the world will take you more seriously if they see how God blesses you materially. Or worse, that you might have a faith problem if you aren't living an abundant life because the proof of God smiling on you is how well off you are. Life actually *is* filled with the miraculous every day, but the variation that we see in the miracles of 2 Kings 4 give us a more realistic understanding of blessing people in ministry. As channels of God's blessings to others, we sometimes find ourselves wishing we could do more for others. What we are going to address today is a conflict of emotion that people experience in ministering to others.

1. Always sufficiency -

We are presented in chapter 4 with several miracles providing for people's needs. There is a general expectation that the church is here to address the concerns of the needy.

Isa 25:1-4 O LORD, thou *art* my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful *things*; *thy*

counsels of old *are* faithfulness
and truth.

...

3Therefore shall the strong
people glorify thee, the city of the
terrible nations shall fear thee.

4For thou hast been a strength to
the poor, a strength to the needy
in his distress, a refuge from the
storm, a shadow from the heat,
when the blast of the terrible
ones *is* as a storm *against* the
wall.

There are several cases that Elisha is
presented with to bless people's needs.

2Kgs 4:1-7 Now there cried a
certain woman of the wives of
the sons of the prophets unto
Elisha, saying, Thy servant my
husband is dead; and thou
knowest that thy servant did fear
the LORD: and the creditor is
come to take unto him my two
sons to be bondmen.

2And Elisha said unto her, What
shall I do for thee? tell me, what
hast thou in the house? And she
said, Thine handmaid hath not
any thing in the house, save a pot
of oil.

3Then he said, Go, borrow thee
vessels abroad of all thy
neighbours, *even* empty vessels;
borrow not a few.

4And when thou art come in,
thou shalt shut the door upon
thee and upon thy sons, and shalt
pour out into all those vessels,
and thou shalt set aside that
which is full.

5So she went from him, and shut
the door upon her and upon her
sons, who brought *the vessels* to
her; and she poured out.

6And it came to pass, when the
vessels were full, that she said
unto her son, Bring me yet a
vessel. And he said unto her,
There is not a vessel more. And
the oil stayed.

7Then she came and told the man
of God. And he said, Go, sell the

oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

In this case, the woman was given just enough to take care of her bills and her family's needs. The pots were filled that day only. Her bills and her needs were met *sufficiently*.

In this next passage, we are going to

2Kgs 4:38-41 And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and *there was* a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets *were* sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets.

39And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred *them* into the pot of pottage: for they knew *them* not.

[Like wild mushrooms that might be poisonous, they found wild gourds that were poisonous.]

40So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O *thou* man of God, *there is* death **[or poison]** in the pot. And they could not eat *thereof*.

41But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast *it* into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot. **[Elisha healed the pottage and made it edible.]**

Here, there was *only* the pottage for that day taken care of. There was none left over on this occasion. In this case, the needs of the people were met sufficiently with *nothing* left over.

2Kgs 4:42-44 And there came a man from Baalshalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give

unto the people, that they may eat.

43And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave *thereof*.

44So he set *it* before them, and they did eat, and left *thereof*, according to the word of the LORD.

On this occasion, God multiplied the bread and there was so much abundance that the people couldn't eat it all. Their needs were met *abundantly* so that they had *more* than they could *actually use*.

The principle of ministry that we observe is that there are boundaries to God's provision in ministering to people. It ranges from *just* enough, to meeting our immediate and then some, to an abundance of more than we can actually use.

Before we can go further, we need another spiritual concept. The next problem is defining exactly *what* is *needed*. Pastors are encouraged to preach to people's needs to be a good preacher. That is evident in some of the preaching you might get on TV, but there is something about that raises a little alarm. That's because there is a difference between preaching to people's *perceived* needs and their *actual* need. Paul warned us to be careful to reach people with their *true* need because if they don't respond to that opportunity they will turn to seeking to fulfill what *they perceive* their needs to be.

2Tim 4:2-4 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be

turned unto fables.

Someone might come in thinking they need to overcome depression, social disadvantage, addiction, a new job, relationship problems, etc. When you try to talk to them about the Gospel, they usually think you don't understand them. They already believe that God exists so they think they have their spiritual bases covered. They want to know if you are going to pay their bills or give them a magic answer to their problems. Whatever problem they *think* we need to address, the answer always starts off with getting established *spiritually* with God.

Matt 6:25-34 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? **[Jesus is describing people being consumed with their physical, material needs.]**

26Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith?

[God takes care of all the creatures, and you are more important to Him than they are.]

31Therefore take no thought,

saying, What shall we eat? or,
What shall we drink? or,
Wherewithal shall we be
clothed?

32(For after all these things do
the Gentiles seek:) for your
heavenly Father knoweth that ye
have need of all these things.

33But seek ye first the kingdom
of God, and his righteousness;
and all these things shall be
added unto you. **[Very, very,
regularly I share this verse and
people smile a little, nod, and
say, "So true." Then, they
proceed to put God last, giving
Him the scraps of their life
which never seem to be there.]**

34Take therefore no thought for
the morrow: for the morrow shall
take thought for the things of
itself. Sufficient unto the day *is*
the evil thereof. **[God will
always give us what we actually
need...which does not
necessarily include the
material.**

Even when there *are* physical needs
to be met, there are limitations. In our
joyful love, we would like to be able to
minister abundantly. Sometimes we
sufficiently meet people's needs but we
wish we could do more. The example
here in Elisha was that sometimes you
have to hold back, sometimes you pour it
on. What do you think would happen if
you dropped \$100 in a panhandler's cup?
Is he in the position he is in because he
knows how to use \$100 wisely? Would
you expect him to use it on alcohol or
drugs? Sometimes it *would* be wiser *not*
to be abundant, to not put any money in
that cup, but to take him to dinner
instead if what he truly wants is food. If
you understand the point here *properly*,
though, you might find that giving him
such abundance of money *could* be
appropriate. One undercover video
witnessed a homeless person take such a
gift and share it with the needs of a
bunch of other people in their true need
also!

We exercise ministry as wisely as

God enables us, but there will always be sufficient available even when we have nothing in our hand to offer. This is what Peter had to offer the impotent man:

Acts 3:1-6 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, *being* the ninth *hour*.

2And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

3Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

4And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

5And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

6Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

What we can always have and can give is what is *truly* needed: the Gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus. What we really need to minister is the Word of God, whether we are holding it in our hand or in our heart, and a pair of eyes and a pair of ears listening attentively. We need someone who has ears to hear what God is trying to tell him even though it is through our imperfect tongue and life. Someone might think us a fool and that there is so much of the "good" things of life we will miss out on if we are only about the Gospel. But, our reward is not here on earth. Remember that the rich man had the good things in life but was lost in Hell while Lazarus suffered on this earth but lived on in glory forever.

God doesn't always work in the same way in every situation and neither should we.

2. Never deficiency -

But, what about the times when it seems that God is holding *back*? There is a reason for that. It is closely related to the concept that God's grace is sufficient for us and has to do with an actual problem that could develop if we got too much. If you enjoyed *Fiddler on the Roof*, you might remember poor Tevya as he discovered the goodness of life as it was also mixed with the pains of life. The story starts off, though, with his frustration with God seeming to hold back.

"Oh, Lord, you made many, many poor people
I realize, of course, it's no shame to be poor
But it's no great honor either!
So, what would have been so terrible if I had a small fortune?"

I'd build a big, tall house with rooms by the dozen
Right in the middle of the town
A fine tin roof with real wooden floors below
There would be one long staircase just going up
And one even longer coming down
And one more leading nowhere, just for show

If I were rich, I'd have the time that I lack to sit in the synagogue and pray
And maybe have a seat by the Eastern wall
And I'd discuss the holy books with the learned men, several hours every day
And that would be the sweetest thing of all

Lord, who made the lion and the lamb
You decreed I should be what I am
Would it spoil some vast eternal plan
If I were a wealthy man?

The answer to that last question is that, *yes*, it could spoil God's plan for the best for you if you had all your *perceived* needs met. Any one thing might seem innocent enough, but man is never satisfied with that. This wouldn't hurt to

have, would it? And this, and that, and this, and that. Each one by itself might not be a problem, but the cumulative effect of getting everything we want is how we raise spoiled children. We are sure that if we get whatever we want we would then be free to sit in the synagogue and pray, and discuss the holy books with the learned men several hours every day, *but that does not necessarily follow*. God knows what is best for us and sometimes His best is what *seems* like unanswered prayer. It has been said to be careful what you pray for because you just might get it to prove to you that you should have just trusted God that he knew best when He answered "No" the first time.

What always has to be kept in mind is the most basic problem of our human nature addressed in the Tenth Commandment.

Exod 20:17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour's.

Jas 4:1-6 From whence *come* wars and fightings among you? *come they* not hence, *even* of your lusts that war in your members?

2Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

3Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* upon your lusts.

4Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

5Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

6But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth

the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Covetousness turns the problem of disparity into discrimination, protests into riots, and gratitude into entitlement. God will bless us with abundance sometimes, with sufficiency sometimes, and with *holding back* sometimes. Holding back is not a *deficiency*, it is God sufficing us with what we truly need, even if it is "only" His *grace*.

2Cor 12:7-9 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

What Paul needed was spiritual. He needed humility to be dependent on God alone.

Yet, we are told that God will give us the desires of our heart. When we are spiritually lined up with God and desire the things that He desires, that will be true. That is why you have to take the entire context of Scripture into account where the further admonition is given in 1John 5:14-15,

1John 5:14-15 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

If you have Christ in you and are one in your will with God's will, then what you ask will be what pleases Him. We ask and bless others not according to *our* agenda, but God's. We pray not *my* will on earth be done, but *Thy* will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

3. Always proficiency -

There is yet one more concern of ours that we need to address. We don't have to worry if we will have what we need to serve God. There is always the proficiency of God to minister to people. He is proficient, or perfectly capable to provide. He is proficient, an expert at handling our needs. We don't ever minister out of our *own* abundance of what we have. We minister according to the abundance of the riches of God's grace. Paul pointed this out to the Philippians.

Phil 4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Mal 3:8-11 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. **[One tenth of all belongs to God and then we add on offerings as God leads us.]**

9Ye *are* cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, *even* this whole nation.

10Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it.* **[People worry about not having enough to tithe. This is misplaced. When we are faithful to God He is faithful to bless us abundantly one way or another.]**

11And I will rebuke the devourer

for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.

2Cor 9:5-8 Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as *a matter of* bounty, and not as *of* covetousness.

6But this *I say*, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

7Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

8And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may abound to every good work:

If you are saved, don't worry about what you are going to lose if you get involved in ministry. You started off already lost in this world and now have the abundance of God in you to serve Him and the lost world. Step out and serve Him. Sometimes you will have nothing physical to offer, but you will always have something spiritual to offer. Sometimes it will seem like nothing, sometimes you will have only just enough to give of yourself, other times you will have the joy of sharing abundantly. Stay out of the comfort zone of covetousness, grasping and clinging in fear of what you might not have. Live in the joy of the true abundance of grace and God's provision.

This all made possible because of the abundance of Christ for us when He gave Himself on the cross for our sins and sinfulness.

Rom 5:17-19 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

18Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life.

19For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Jesus gave Himself completely, abundantly, and infinitely to cover your, and the world's, judgment of Hell. The abundance of Christ is available to supply all your *true* needs and to enable you to share His abundance with others in *their* true needs. Ask Jesus to take your sin and judgment of Hell today. He is infinite to be able to take it all.

1. Always sufficiency - Isa 25:1-4, 2Kgs 4:1-44 2Tim 4:2-4, Matt 6:25-34, Acts 3:1-6
2. Never deficiency - Exod 20:17, Jas 4:1-6, 2Cor 12:7-9, 1John 5:14-15
3. Always proficiency - Phil 4:19, Mal 3:8-11, 2Cor 9:5-8, Rom 5:17-19