

ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW'S SON

I Kings 17:17-24

Lesson Aim

To show students the importance of a prayer that is prayed persistently, and with faith in God's ability and willingness to answer.

Memory Verse

Isaiah 45:17 - "But Israel will be saved with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame of disgraced, to ages everlasting."

Lesson Background

How passionate is your prayer life? We have already seen that Elijah was a man of great passion, but he was also a man of great prayer. He prayed that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't rain for three and a half years. He prayed for the widow's son to come back to life - our lesson this week - and the Lord raised the boy to life again. He prayed for the Lord to send down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel, and he prayed for the rains to return until a small cloud the size of a man's hand was seen (I Kings 18). Elijah's prayers are marked by faith and persistence - two indications that he was a passionate man, even in his prayers. As we teach this lesson on the power and importance of prayer, let's examine our own prayer lives to learn what kind of power and persistence we have ourselves.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by reviewing with your students how God had been providing for Elijah, the widow, and her son through the drought (I Kings 17:7-16). While many others were suffering and dying because there was no food and little water, God had promised that the widow's flour and oil would not run out until rain fell on the land once more. Elijah and this little family were being protected and cared for in a miraculous way. "Just think - every day, this family saw a miracle occur! Every day they discovered a little more flour in the jar, and a little more oil in the jug. God's care for Elijah, the widow, and her son could be seen on a daily basis as He took care of their needs."

1. The Widow's Son Becomes Ill and Dies (I Kings 17:17-19).

Very suddenly, the situation changed. The widow's son became ill; his sickness steadily progressed until he stopped breathing and died. This boy was the widow's only family; he was her only hope for support in the years to come. Every joy and every dream she had for the future was bound up in this child. And suddenly, he was taken away from her. Where was the promise of life and blessing now? Why did God allow this to happen to her?

Certainly this widow knew that God's special protection and care had been given to her family when she took in Elijah. But in her grief and confusion, she lashed out at the prophet. "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" Her cry showed her grief, as well as a mistaken view of the Lord. Elijah was also confused; he did not attempt to correct the woman's theology, or even console her in her grief. He took the boy in his arms and brought him before the Lord.

2. Elijah Prays for the Widow's Son (I Kings 17:19-23).

Elijah carried the boy to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on the bed. He brought his own confusion to the Lord, but, unlike the widow, did not accuse God or cry out against Him. The boy's death seemed to contradict the life that God had promised by sustaining the widow and her son. Because of this, Elijah was bold enough to ask for an unheard-of miracle. Let's take a look at Elijah's prayer.

A. Elijah's Prayer is in Faith.

There is no other record of someone being brought back to life before this incident. Yet Elijah not only believes that God is able to restore the boy's life, he also believes that God is willing to do so. Elijah is not afraid to ask for something that others would call "impossible." He knows that there is nothing too hard for God.

B. Elijah's Prayer is Persistent.

In verse 21, we see that Elijah stretched himself over the boy three times (perhaps to warm his body?), and cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him." He didn't just ask once, and then say, "Oh, well, I guess the Lord doesn't want to raise this boy back to life." He prayed again and again, showing his faith that the Lord was listening, and willing and able to answer his prayer.

C. Elijah's Prayer is Powerful.

Verse 22 says, "The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived." Elijah's prayer was powerful because His God is all-powerful. He asked God for the impossible, and it became reality. Have your students look up James 5:16b - "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." Elijah's prayer was powerful and effective because he was a righteous man who prayed persistently and in faith. What joy he must have had, to bring the living boy down to his grieving mother and announce, "Look, your son is alive!"

Remaining in James 5, ask your students, "Was this the first time Elijah asked the Lord to do something difficult? Can you think of another time when Elijah prayed for a miracle?" Read James 5:17-18 to remind your students that Elijah had prayed that it wouldn't rain, and God withheld rain for three and a half years. Elijah was used to asking the Lord for impossible things - and he was used to having the Lord hear and answer those prayers!

3. The Son's Recovery Causes the Widow's Faith to Grow (I Kings 17:24).

When the widow saw that her son was alive again, she told Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is true." She no longer doubted Elijah's integrity, or the goodness of God. This woman from the land of Baal worship made a confession that the people of Israel should have made. The people of Israel should have been willing to listen to Elijah and his message from the Lord. Because of their unwillingness to do so, God was revealed to this Sidonian widow, and she received the blessing of life for her and her son.

Conclusion

Certainly there is much that we can learn from Elijah's prayer. Ask your students to think about their own prayer lives. Do they really bring their problems and concerns to the Lord? Do they talk with Him every day in prayer? Do they believe that God is listening to them? Do they believe that He is able to answer their prayers - if even it takes a miracle to do so? Do they persist in their prayers, or do they give up too easily? And do they thank the Lord when their prayers are answered? Perhaps your congregation has recently seen an answer to prayer. Perhaps someone's health has been restored, or someone's family member has recently come to Christ. Be certain to point out these as instances of God's ability to answer the prayers of His people, and His willingness to do so. Before you close the lesson, you may wish to ask for prayer requests from your students that you can pray about together as a class.

Worksheet

This week's page in the Elijah Book is supposed to resemble the front page of a newspaper. "Because Elijah was hiding from King Ahab, this miracle was probably kept quiet for quite a while. But let's pretend that you're a reporter for the *Sidonian Sentinel*. How would you report this miracle to your readers?" Give the students time to compose their stories, and then have them share their articles with the class. The box for the "photo" may be used to draw a picture of the recovered boy, or the prophet Elijah, or the happy mother - or perhaps one of your students will have another idea.

Related Music

"What a Friend We Have in Jesus" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #533).

