

Wanting The Best For Others

1 Kings 17:1 [NIV] *“Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”*

Elijah had followed God’s instructions and the effects were devastating.

Drought was widespread, crops were failing and animal herds were gradually being killed off as the months of rainless skies took their toll.

Fortunately there was still some precious water in the well at Zarephath, where God had told Elijah to go. [**1 Kings 17:8-9**]

As the prophet Elijah stopped to rest by the well, he asked a passing woman to fetch him a drink.

1 Kings 17:10-11 [NIV] *“So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”*

The second request seemed difficult for the woman, a widow, to fulfil, after all, the drought had caused a famine, food was **not** readily available.

1 Kings 17:12 [NIV] *“As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread — only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it — and die.”*

Here was a woman suffering from the very worst of the famine. Weak and exhausted, she just wanted to prepare one final treat for herself and her son, yet, as she was going about collecting wood to cook her last meal, here was a stranger asking for a share of the meagre meal.

Then Elijah had some comforting and rather surprising message for the widow.

1 Kings 17:13-14 [NIV] *“Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.’”*

It would have been easy for the widow to tell Elijah that he was being very unreasonable. She was facing certain death by starvation. Couldn’t this traveller understand what it meant to watch a loved son wasting away before her eyes?

But the widow did **not** react in this natural human way. She had faith to believe that this man, resting against the side of the well, was a servant of God. Because of that belief, she did as she had been asked.

What was the result?

1 Kings 17:15-16 [NIV] *“She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.”*

What God had promised became a reality

The story only occupies a few short verses in the Christian Bible, yet it is a striking example of living faith in the Promises of God.

Luke 4:25-26 [NIV] *“I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.”*

This episode ranked high in the mind of Jesus Christ for He used it as an example.

This is not only an example of living by faith in God’s Promises, it is also a fine example of living the “give” way of life that every Christian should follow.

Philippians 2:1-4 [NIV] *“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

Paul was reminding the church at Philippi of the Christian “give” way of life.

In contrast this attitude of sharing was missing from the mind of a rich farmer Christ talked of in a parable.

Luke 12:16-21 [NIV] *“And he told them this parable: ‘The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ ‘Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ ‘But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ ‘This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.’”*

This man’s good fortune blinded him to the plight of the poor in the society around him.

Instead of sharing his wealth with the needy, he planned to build bigger barns in which to store his produce, far more than his personal needs for many years ahead.

This was quite a contrast to the account of the hungry widow!

Yet, sad to say, this farmer displayed a common trait among human beings.

It is all too easy for all of us to give in to the natural selfish human mind that tells us that our happiness in life is dependent on how much we have.

Give me more money, goods or status in life and I will be happy and content.

Yet the very things that are needful for life, food, clothing and shelter, are promised by God if we are willing to put the interests of others first.

Luke 12:22-23, 29-31 [NIV] *“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.’ ... ‘And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.’”*

The thing that all humanity needs, what is making the vast majority of people poor and starving spiritually, is the famine of God’s Word and ignorance of the very reason we have been given human existence by the Creator God.

Amos 8:11 [NIV] *“The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “when I will send a famine through the land — not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.”*

We are in the centre of such a famine today when there is a lack of even the existence of a Creator God in the minds and lives of the vast majority of human beings.

As we have just read in **Luke 12:23**, life is more than physical possessions, it is a training ground to prepare us to receive the gift of eternal life and a place in the Kingdom, created family, of God.

1 John 3:16-18 [NIV] *“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”*

Of course, the ultimate solution to this world’s poverty, both physical and spiritual, will **not** occur until Jesus Christ intervenes at His second coming to this earth.

We as disciples of Jesus Christ have been commanded to pray for the coming of this Kingdom of God. **[Matthew 6:10]**

This must **not** stop us from preparing ourselves and as many other people as we can, for this great event by learning to love our neighbour as we naturally love ourselves.

Matthew 19:16-22 [NIV] *“Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” “Which ones?” the man enquired. Jesus replied, “‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honour your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbour as yourself.’” “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.”*

Part of loving our neighbour, is giving to the poor, both physically and spiritually poor, thus following the example of Jesus Christ.

We all need to ask ourselves the question, *“whose interests do we serve?”*

Galatians 6:1-2, 7-10 [NIV] *“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.” ... “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*

When we show and express concern for others in practical ways we are then preparing to receive the gift of eternal life for ourselves.

Our natural human nature says *“take from others and I will have more.”*

God’s way of life tells us –

Luke 6:38 [NIV] *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

God's way is the **only** way that is guaranteed to work.