

1  **God & Prosperity**

2 Kings 4:1-7

2  **2 Kings 4:1-7**

• *Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves." And Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me; what have you in the house?" And she said, "Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil."* (2Ki 4:1-2)

3  **The impoverished widow**

- The "sons of the prophets" – These were a group of men who had committed themselves to ministry.
- In essence, they were seminarians who had given themselves both to preaching and to supporting the ministry of more conspicuous prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha.

4  **The impoverished widow**

- This widow is the wife of one of the sons of the prophets, who appears to have died young and left her with two sons and no means of provision.
- The man's legacy consisted solely of debts which the widow woman was unable to pay.
- Although in the ministry, this man managed to violate the biblical mandate to care for his family.

5  **Biblical provision**

- *But if anyone does not provide for his relatives [speaking specifically in the context of women and children], and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* (1Ti 5:8)
- A number of so-called "giants" of the faith (Tozer, Wesley, Carey, and others) have abandoned the care of the family for the idol of ministry.

6  **Destitute**

- This widow and her two sons have, in any case, been left destitute.
- As such, her sons must become slaves for the next seven years to work out the debt (Exodus 21:2).
- However, if they do so, the widow herself will be left destitute, with no means of provision.

7  **2 Kings 4:1-7**

• *Then he said, "Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few. Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside."* (2Ki 4:3-4)

8  **2 Kings 4:1-7**

• *So she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons. And as she poured they brought the vessels to her. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another." Then the oil stopped flowing. She came and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest."* (2Ki 4:5-7)

9  **Biblical prosperity**

- There is more in Scripture dealing with the question of material prosperity (and

how to appropriately steward it) then there is on the subject of marriage.

- A lack of balance in teaching has led to two equally extreme and equally inappropriate views of how to treat prosperity:
 - Prosperity Theology and Poverty Theology.

10  **Prosperity Theology**

- Prosperity theology considers those who are rich to be more righteous than those who are poor.
- At its core is a belief that it is God's plan for every believer to be healthy, prosperous, with a happy home life and no money problems.
- Extreme versions of this theology teach that those who are lacking in one of these areas are in sin or do not have enough faith.

11  **Prosperity Theology**

- Prosperity Theology usually has its roots in Old Testament passages that are taken out of context, along with a couple of New Testament passages.
- Of the two errors, Prosperity Theology is most popular in our day and age.

12  **Poverty Theology**

- Poverty Theology is the belief that those who are poor are more righteous than those who are rich.
- It includes the belief that material wealth keeps you from serving God and that those who choose to live in poverty are more particularly devoted to God than those who do not.

13  **Poverty Theology**

- Poverty Theology has its roots in several New Testament passages that are taken out of context, as well as Catholic and Orthodox monasticism.
- Poverty Theology was extremely popular from the 1800's to the early 1900's.

14  **Poverty or prosperity?**

- Ultimately, both of these theologies of money have two important shortcomings:
 - They focus on material things as the source or cause of righteousness or spirituality
 - They fail to take the whole teachings of Scripture into balance
- More important (and more helpful) is what the Bible has to say about prosperity.

15  **1) Money exists for God's glory**

- Money, like all material possessions, exists as a gift from God and is to be used ultimately for his glory.
- In the case of the widow, God is able to use the widow's lack of prosperity to His glory by blessing her in a way that is clearly supernatural.

16  **James 4:2-3**

- *You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, **because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.***
- God is in the business of bringing glory to Himself – not indulging our lust and greed.

17  **2) Money exists for our edification**

- Money is discussed so frequently in the Bible because money is the most obvious representation of our stewardship.
- In dealing with his children – whether through their lack or through their surplus – God's intent is to draw us closer to Himself.

18  **Prosperity through work**

- It is God's design that *generally*, earthly prosperity should come through work – whether our own or the work of others.
- This is so much so that Scripture repeatedly condemns those who want to enjoy the benefits of money without doing the necessary work.

19  **Prosperity through work**

- *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.* (2Th 3:10)
- While this command should be kept in balance, it is an important principle for governing Christian benevolence.

20  **Prosperity through work**

- In the case of this widow, God supernaturally meets her needs – but He does so by giving her a series of tasks. This is a reoccurring theme in miracles of financial blessing (Peter, the disciples, etc.).
- This is not done to “let her keep her pride.”
- There is no way the widow could take credit for what happened next.

21  **Prosperity through work**


- The widow's task was intended to teach a number of important character lessons:
 - Humility (the borrowing of vessels from her neighbors)
 - Faith (the act of “preparing for rain” and trusting that God will provide)
 - By involving her children, their lack of resources became an important faith-growing experience for the whole family

22  **3) God's blessing is enough**

- The blessings of God are somewhat paradoxical in nature, in that they are both exactly enough for God's purposes and often beyond what we would dare to ask or think.
- Although she is blessed with far more than she could have asked for, what the widow Woman actually gets is enough to pay off her husband's debts and live on until her sons are old enough to work.

23  **Enough**

- God's blessing is always going to be enough to accomplish His purpose.
- This doesn't mean that you can't work harder if you want to make more money.
- But it does mean that God, in His infinite wisdom, knows better what is best for his children than they do.

24  **4) God's blessing meets needs, not egos**

- Both prosperity and poverty theology are ultimately rooted in pride – pride about our wealth and success, or pride about our lack of worldly possessions.
- God's intent for earthly possessions is that they meet our needs and ultimately bring glory to Himself – not stroke our egos or make us feel good about our spirituality.

25  **Stewardship**

- God's purpose for physical possessions can be summed up a single word: Stewardship. God gives each of us different amounts of wealth, but He intends us to be good stewards of what we are given.
- The widow's husband was a poor steward of his assets and his family.
- The widow was a good steward of the opportunities that God provided her.

26  **Stewardship**