

TAKEAWAY:

God's provision often waits on the other side of simple obedience.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

- When have you had to give something away when you felt like you didn't have enough? What happened?
- What simple practices/disciplines do you have that draw you closer to the Lord?

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a group member read 1 Kings 17:8-16

- How did this sermon help you better understand this passage of scripture? Is there anything that was mentioned during the sermon that stuck out to you?
- Why do you think God sent Elijah to a widow in Zarephath (a Gentile town) instead of keeping him in Israel?
- What made the widow's obedience so costly? What was at stake for her?
- The widow had to act first before seeing the miracle. Why does God often ask for obedience before provision?

APPLICATION:

- What would it look like to surrender something precious to God this week?
- How can you practice open-handed living in your daily decisions? How can our group practice open-handed living this week/month?

GO DEEPER:

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material.

You can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of our text from this week. Here are two "Going Deeper" discussion prompts that build upon the above provided questions without repeating them:

- **Faith and Obedience:** Read Gen 12:1-3; 22:1-19; Heb 6:9-12. Abraham's complete obedience in the face of extreme testing (Gen 22) appears to be the catalyst that makes God's initial promise to him (Gen 12) unchangeable. Thus, for him, faith in God's promise and obedience to God were interrelated to the provision of God. Similarly, the entire book of Hebrews (and Heb 6:11-12 in particular) exhort Christians to an enduring lifestyle of faith, obedience, and patience. In Hebrews, the "inheritance" isn't just physical blessings (like land or descendants) but the assurance of salvation and God's presence.

- How do we handle situations where obedience to God seems illogical or appears to threaten the very blessings we thought God gave us? What do these passages teach us about the difference between trusting God's promise versus trusting the Promiser?
- Faith is often viewed as a passive belief but Hebrews combines it with "diligence" (Heb 6:11)—that is, careful and persistent work or effort. What does this type of diligence look like? How is it distinguished from striving in your own strength? Why is the element of *time* (patience) essential to the development of your character? If God gave you the "inheritance" immediately upon your first act of obedience, what might you miss out on spiritually?
- Since God is all-knowing, God already knew Abraham's heart. Why then was Abraham's act of obedience necessary? Does Genesis 12-22 suggest that our faith is not fully "real" or "complete" until it is fully manifested in a tangible action?
- God's initial promise to Abraham was contingent upon him leaving all that was familiar to him. At times, why does God require us to "leave" something familiar before we can "inherit" the promised new thing? Was there a time when your obedience required you to step away from a source of security?
- **Scarcity, Generosity, and Trust:** What comes to mind when you think of generosity? Is it sharing your money, resources, or even time with others? For the biblical authors, generosity is much more than an act of kindness—it's a reality woven into the universe, starting with the generous Creator.
 - Read Luke 12:22-34
 - When Jesus looks at birds and flowers and grass what does he see? Jesus' words may sound somewhat irresponsible to a Type A, hard-working person. What kind of tradition forms a person to speak like Jesus does? (You can't just say, "Well, he's Jesus!")
 - "God's grace is the lightning and our giving is the thunder. Just like thunder follows lightning, giving follows grace. It is possible to give without a deep understanding of God's grace. It is impossible to have a deep understanding of grace and not give." (Randy Alcorn)
 - If we look at giving statistics in America (giving as a percentage of income is lower than it was during the Great Depression) through this insight from Alcorn, we arrive at a startling truth: rather than a generosity problem, we have an understanding-of-grace problem.
 - Think of the act of radical generosity. It's easy to view giving as an obligation rather than a *thunderous clap* in response to God's grace. In fact, it may feel irresponsible—shouldn't we be saving to secure a solid future for ourselves and our families?
 - What do you think happens to our hearts when we choose to hold on to our resources as opposed to giving them away?
 - Back in 1 Kings 17, the widow's choice was an act of radical trust *in the face of certain death*. How does a society of relative abundance (where we rarely face true, imminent starvation) make this kind of "simple obedience" harder or easier? What is the *equivalent* of the "last bit of flour" in our lives today (time, comfort, financial margin, reputation, etc.)?

- **Quotes:**

- "The widow of Zarephath... gave all she had, even the last morsel which she had intended for herself and her son. This is the nature of faith: it looks for that which is not yet present.... It dares to [follow God's guidance and] give away the present certainty for the hope of the future promise" (Martin Luther).
- "The meal did not multiply... it just did not diminish. It was as much a miracle to keep the meal in the barrel as it would have been to fill the barrel... God may not give you a store of grace, but He will give you grace for the day" (Charles Spurgeon).

- "God's time to help is when all other help is cut off. The meal was almost gone; the oil was nearly spent... It is not until we are brought to the end of our own resources that we are ready to really appreciate and accept God's provision" (A. W. Pink).
- "Disobedience is the refusal to accept that God knows best" (J. I. Packer).
- "The simple life is not simple in terms of location or possessions, but is a spiritual posture of open-handedness" (Richard Foster). The widow's simple obedience is the ultimate act of "open-handedness."

PRAYER:

Pray for courage to obey God's prompts even when they don't make financial or practical sense, and for eyes to see how God provides through the week.

PRACTICAL EXERCISE:

The First Fruits Test: Give something first this week before you feel you can afford to—time, money, encouragement, or resources. Prepare to share next week about what you were able to do.