



2 Kings 4:8-37 | Break

15 Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. 16 "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms." "No, my lord!" she objected. "Please, man of God, don't mislead your servant!" 17 But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.

27 When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me why." 28 "Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'?"

36 Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite." And he did. When she came, he said, "Take your son." 37 She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.

Fear. It can keep a person trapped in a complex web of denial and deferment, preventing someone in deep need to reach out for help – or even keep them from believing that help exists.

The woman from Shunem is a poster-child example of a life stifled by fear. On the outside, she appeared to have it all together. Married to a well-to-do landowner, she had no need to worry about where her next meal was coming from or if she would have a safe place to sleep that night. She was likable, caring, hospitable, and able to make good relationships with quality people like Elisha. All her needs seemed to be provided for – except for one crucial, core need: she had no children.

In those pre-Social Security days, children were the only support an older person would have after they could no longer work. Worse, being barren was a strong social stigma – it carried the idea of being cursed due to some wrongdoing in the past. One can imagine the sideways looks she may have gotten from the neighbors, and the half-whispered comments about the poor man bonded to a barren wife. Small wonder why being childless could lead to deep fears for both the present – and the uncertain future.

Into this psychological and spiritual minefield steps Elisha and his worldly sidekick, Gehazi. One day, relaxing in the special suite provided for him, Elisha wanted to recognize the woman for her above and beyond kindness to them. Finding out through Gehazi that she was barren, he told her that she would have a child at this time the next year. Her reply should have been an exclamation of praise, or tears of gratitude, or a cry of joy. Instead, she nearly rebukes the man of God for trying to mislead her.

What could have caused her to act in such a way? We humans have a way of turning our deepest, unfulfilled need into evidences that we are forgotten by God; and we fear that even to wish for them is futile. We end up substituting the visible need - no child, no spouse, no job – for the real need – to believe that God sees our despair, and cares.

It would seem that the woman's fears are justified, for just when things seem to finally be going the right way, the child is snatched away from his mother by death's finality. Not even taking the time to tell her husband, the woman saddles up a donkey & takes a servant with her to confront the man of God (& by extension, God Himself). To communicate the extreme need of the situation, God withholds the reason for her visit from Elisha until she blurts out her accusation: How could he have done this? Didn't he know how deeply she needed a son, and how just as deep was her fear that it wouldn't happen? Why raise her hopes only to dash them?

God sometimes allows tragedy to happen in order to show the depths of His love and how trustworthy He really is. When the woman received her son from the dead, she was able to see that God knew her deepest needs and fears, and was the true answer for them. He was her real Provider, her real answer for an uncertain future.

Isn't God bigger than your fear?