

Small Group Guide: Unexpected Sustaining

1 Kings 17:8-24



Opening Prayer:

Begin by inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and open hearts to what God wants to reveal through this study.

Ice Breaker:

Question: Share about a time when God provided for you in an unexpected way or through an unexpected person. How did that experience affect your faith?

Sermon Recap:

This week's message explored how God sent Elijah to a Gentile widow in Sidon—enemy territory—during a severe drought. Despite having only enough food for one final meal, the widow obeyed God's command through Elijah to give her first portion to God. Through her obedience, God miraculously sustained her household. However, even after experiencing this miracle, she still faced tragedy when her son died. God raised the boy to life, pointing us forward to Jesus, the Word made flesh who brings ultimate life.

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text

1. Why was it significant that God sent Elijah to a widow in Sidon rather than to someone in Israel? What does this tell us about God's character and who He chooses to work through?
2. What does the widow's willingness to give her "first fruits" to God teach us about faith? How is this different from giving God our "leftovers"?
3. The widow experienced a miracle (sustained provision) but still faced tragedy (her son's death). What does this teach us about the Christian life? Does God promise us a life free from suffering?

Personal Reflection

4. The pastor asked: "Are you faithful before you know why God is having you do what He's asking you to do?" Share about a time when God asked you to step out in faith without knowing the outcome. What happened?
5. God provided for the widow daily—just enough flour and oil each day, never in abundance. How does this challenge our desire for security and abundance? What does "daily bread" look like in your life right now?
6. The widow was honest with Elijah about her anger and confusion when her son died. Why is it important to bring our honest emotions—even anger—to God? Have you experienced freedom in being brutally honest with God?

Applying the Message

7. The sermon emphasized putting God first, not giving Him our leftovers. In what areas of your life are you tempted to give God the leftovers (time, finances, energy, attention)? What would it look like to give Him your "first fruits" in those areas?

8. Jesus pointed out that many widows were in Israel, but God chose the one who would respond. What might be preventing you from fully responding to what God is asking of you right now?

9. The pastor shared his own story of unexpected provision through starting this church. How does hearing stories of God's faithfulness in others' lives strengthen your own faith?

Key Takeaways

- God doesn't have to meet us on our terms. He sets the rules of engagement and often works in unexpected ways through unexpected people.

- Faith requires giving God our first, not our leftovers. This applies to our time, resources, worship, and obedience.

- Miracles don't make us immune to suffering. We can experience God's provision and still face tragedy in a broken world.

- Life is found in God's Word. The Old Testament points us to Jesus, the Word made flesh, who offers eternal life.

- God sustains us daily, not always abundantly. His provision may look like "just enough" rather than stockpiles, requiring daily trust.

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge: Choose one of the following to practice this week

1. First Fruits Practice: Identify one area where you've been giving God your leftovers. Commit to putting Him first in that area this week (e.g., prayer time before scrolling social media, giving before budgeting for wants, serving before leisure).

2. Honest Prayer: Set aside time for brutally honest prayer with God. Tell Him exactly how you're feeling about a difficult situation—no religious language, just raw honesty. Journal about the experience.

3. Daily Dependence: Each morning this week, pray specifically for God to provide "daily bread"—what you need for that day only. At the end of each day, record how He provided.

4. Obedience Before Understanding: If God has been prompting you to do something that doesn't make sense, take one concrete step of obedience this week without demanding to know the outcome first.

Accountability:

- Pair up with another group member to check in mid-week about your chosen application.
- Share your phone numbers or preferred contact method.

Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

- Share prayer requests, especially focusing on:
- Areas where group members need God's provision
- Situations where obedience is required without understanding
- Honest struggles and pain that need to be brought before God
- Opportunities to put God first

Close by praying for each person's specific needs and for faith to trust God's unexpected ways of sustaining us.

For Next Week

- Read 1 Kings 18:1-46 (Elijah and the prophets of Baal)
- Reflect on this question: In what areas of my life am I trying to serve two masters?

Leader Notes

- Be prepared to share your own story of unexpected provision or having to give God your first fruits.
- Create space for honest emotions. If someone shares about anger or disappointment with God, affirm that God can handle our honesty.
- Watch the time on discussion questions—they can generate deep conversation. Prioritize questions 5, 7, and 8 if you need to skip some.
- Encourage participation from quieter members, but don't force it. Some may need time to process.
- Follow up during the week with anyone who shared significant struggles or prayer requests.

5-Day Devotional: Trusting God's Unexpected Provision



Day 1: God Sets the Terms of Engagement

Reading: 1 Kings 17:1-7

Devotional:

God doesn't meet us on our terms—He invites us to meet Him on His. When Elijah proclaimed drought over Israel, God didn't send him to a palace or comfortable hiding place. He sent him to a brook where ravens brought food. This seems absurd by human standards, yet it reveals a profound truth: God's provision often comes through unexpected channels that require our trust.

Are you demanding God work within your comfort zone? Sometimes He removes our safety nets not to punish us, but to teach us radical dependence. The brook will eventually dry up, but God's faithfulness never does. Today, surrender your expectations about how God should work. Trust that He knows exactly what you need and how to provide it, even when His methods seem unconventional.

Day 2: Giving God Your First, Not Your Leftovers

Reading: 1 Kings 17:8-16; Malachi 3:8-12

Devotional:

The widow of Zarephath faced an impossible choice: feed the prophet first or feed her dying son. God asked for her first portion, not her leftovers. This wasn't cruelty—it was an invitation to participate in a miracle. When she gave God her best in faith, the flour and oil never ran out.

What are you holding back from God? Your time, talents, finances, or dreams? God's economy functions differently than ours. He multiplies what we surrender, but He wants our first fruits, not what remains after we've satisfied ourselves. This isn't about earning God's favor—it's about positioning ourselves to receive His abundance. When you prioritize God first, you discover He provides exactly what you need, day by day. Practice putting God first today in one specific area of your life.

Day 3: Miracles Don't Exempt Us from Suffering

Reading: 1 Kings 17:17-24; John 16:33

Devotional:

The widow experienced a sustained miracle—flour and oil that never depleted. Yet tragedy still struck when her son died. This painful reality confronts our prosperity theology: faithfulness doesn't guarantee ease. Following God doesn't make you immune to a broken world's suffering.

Jeremy Camp experienced a miracle when his fiancée's cancer disappeared, only to lose her shortly after marriage. Yet through his grief came the song "I Still Believe"—a declaration that faith persists even when circumstances devastate. The widow's son was raised to life, but first she had to walk through the valley of death. God doesn't promise to remove all pain; He promises to walk through it with us. Your suffering isn't evidence of God's absence—sometimes it's the very place where His power becomes most evident. What pain are you facing today? Invite God into it honestly.

Day 4: Life Is Found in God's Word

Reading: John 1:1-14; 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Devotional:

The widow recognized truth when her son was raised to life: "The word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." Life comes through God's Word. John identifies Jesus as "the Word made flesh"—God's ultimate revelation and source of eternal life.

Scripture isn't just ancient text; it's living and active, breathing life into dead places. When you feel spiritually dry, disconnected, or confused, return to the Word. Not as religious obligation, but as desperate pursuit of the life-giver Himself. The Bible isn't primarily about moral lessons or historical facts—it's about Jesus, from Genesis to Revelation. Every story points to the One who traded His righteousness for your sin on the cross. Are you treating Scripture as optional reading or as essential nourishment? Commit today to let God's Word truly come alive in your daily life.

Day 5: Honesty with God Brings Breakthrough

Reading: Psalm 62:8; Lamentations 3:19-26

Devotional:

When the widow's son died, she didn't pretend everything was fine. She confronted Elijah with raw honesty: "Have you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" Her anger was real, and she brought it directly to God's representative. God can handle your honest emotions.

Holding bitterness while maintaining religious appearances creates spiritual death. But pouring out your true heart—your anger, confusion, disappointment—to God opens the door for healing. He already knows what you're feeling; pretending otherwise only distances you from the One who can heal you. The Psalms are filled with brutal honesty before God, yet they consistently end in trust. Your breakthrough may be on the other side of your honesty.

Stop performing for God. Tell Him what you're really feeling. Confess your doubts, fears, and frustrations. He's not intimidated by your humanity—He became human to redeem it. Where do you need to get honest with God today?