



MIRACLES FOR MOTHERS ... AND DAUGHTERS TOO

(1 Kings 16:29-33, 1 Kings 17:1, 7-24, 1 Kings 18:17-18,

2 Kings 4:1-7, Mark 5:22-43)

God is never unaware of our struggles, and He is moved by compassion. We see that truth over and over again in both the Old and New Testaments. We should be encouraged by His unlimited supply of grace and mercy for His children. All throughout Scripture, there are stories of God's willingness to step into human heartbreak and turn it to rejoicing. He transforms suffering into purpose and sorrow into joy.

Some of the most beautiful, encouraging moments in the Bible come when we see God reach into the lives of people in the depths of their need. It's a picture that points us to the reality that He is still working in our lives all these centuries later. The stories take us into moments of grief and places where there seemed to be no hope—where we can watch as God delivers a miracle. In our current environment of tumult and uncertainty, who doesn't need that reminder? I know I do, and it's why I take such inspiration and courage in studying the journeys of these mothers and daughters and seeing the deeply compassionate heart of our heavenly Father, who met each of their needs with a

miracle. Over and over, we see it was faith that paved the way for divine intervention.

MIRACLES FOR MOTHERS

A pair of Old Testament prophets offers the perfect illustration of how God showed up for two widows in desperate need. Elijah came first to the people of Israel, followed later by his protégé, Elisha. Each was the vehicle for God's miracles to women in crisis. When we meet Elijah, Israel is once again floundering under the leadership of yet another ungodly king.

In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him. (1 Kings 16:29-33)

King Ahab was choosing idolatry and wickedness in direct conflict with God's commands for His people. Ahab married Jezebel, a woman who worshipped the pagan god Baal, and then he embraced the abominable practice himself. He also built a temple to Baal for the people of Israel to join in the blasphemous worship. Ahab not only failed to guide the Israelites in the path

of righteousness, but the corrupt king actually led the people directly to a false god. God sent Elijah to announce His judgment.

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." (1 Kings 17:1)

In Luke 4:25, we learn this drought lasted three and a half years and led to "severe famine" across the land. During much of this time, Elijah was on the run because Ahab blamed him for the drought and wanted him dead. When these two men met face-to-face three years into the crisis, Ahab pointed his finger at Elijah, and the prophet gave the king a dose of straight talk.

When [Ahab] saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"

"I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals." (1 Kings 18:17-18)

Elijah made clear that the pain Israel was experiencing was a direct result of Ahab's sin of worshipping false gods. There was an epic showdown that followed, in which God revealed Himself to the people of Israel in a dramatic way, but tucked inside this blockbuster is the quiet story of a widow and single mother at the end of her rope.

During the time of crushing famine, and before his confrontation with Ahab, God directed Elijah to head to the town of Zare-

phath, a town that served as a center for Baal worship. The Lord told His prophet that he would meet a widow there who would provide for him. So Elijah headed to the town and happened upon a woman who was gathering sticks. Keep in mind that, during that time, widows were exceptionally vulnerable if they had no male provider in what was a mostly agrarian economy. Elijah began his conversation with the woman by asking her for the one thing that was in incredibly short supply at that time: water.

"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." (1 Kings 17:10)

The widow, who was a Gentile, didn't hesitate to go in search of some water for this unknown traveler, but his request didn't stop there. Elijah also asked for something to eat. Yet everyone in the land was desperate for food, including this widow.

"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 olive 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." (1 Kings 17:12)

The woman had no way to know she was part of God's plan for sustaining Elijah at this point, but she did know just how dire her personal circumstances were. She laid it out for Elijah without sugarcoating the reality. *I'm going to use what I have for a last meal and then my son and I are going to perish.* This mother had the same concern any mother would have: giving away the very

last of the resources she had to sustain her son's life, however briefly. Had she thought through how these final morsels with her son would taste, knowing it was the end for them? Suddenly a stranger was on the scene asking that she abandon her plan in order to meet his needs.

But Elijah knew God was working, and he quickly reassured the widow.

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf 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 sends rain on the land.'" (1 Kings 17:13-14)

Elijah made this desperate mother a promise she had no idea if he'd be able to keep. He would have to be a legitimate prophet and miracle worker for any of this to come true. Elijah was asking her to step out in faith. Even though she did not know Elijah's God, He was about to show up for her in a very real way. Notice Elijah was saying to her: *Make me something to eat first. Then, you're free to make a meal for you and your son.* How many times have you found yourself in a similar situation—your resources are limited, but God is calling you to act? Do you struggle to trust in His plans when you can't see the end result?

I cannot tell you how many times I've seen my mom model this. We didn't have much when I was growing up, yet she always found the resources to bless others: taking someone a meal, donating to a missionary raising support, finding a way to work

volunteer tutoring into her already jam-packed schedule. If my mom felt moved by the Lord to meet someone else's need, I never saw her hesitate or question how God would make up the deficit. I have no doubt that if my mom was the widow in this story, that bread for Elijah would have been made pronto! By the way, her homemade bread is one of the most delicious things you will ever taste, so be sure she knows you need a loaf.

The widowed mother in Zarephath was just as faithful.

She went away and did as Elijah had told her. (1 Kings 17:15)

Guess what? God is infinitely more faithful than we could ever be, and what Elijah pledged to that desperate mother came to fruition.

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. (1 Kings 17:15-16)

Here the entire region was gripped by crippling famine and starvation, but the faith and sacrifice of a mother wound up providing everything she and her son needed until God lifted His hand of judgment from Israel—three and a half years!

God's provision for this mother in need wasn't over yet. We're told in 1 Kings 17:17 that her son later became very ill.

He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of

God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" (1 Kings 17:17-18)

My first reaction to this passage was, "You've seen the miracles of Elijah's God, saving both you and your son, and now you're accusing him of this?" Then I remembered: I myself have seen God's provision and intervention, and I have also panicked in the face of tragedy. Our faith is imperfect at times, but God is faithful regardless.

"Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"

Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth." (1 Kings 17:19-24)

I can't condemn this woman for doubting when I've done it myself. She must have been in great despair, and God heard Elijah's powerful cries on her behalf. Remember, she referred to God as "your God" (1 Kings 17:12) when they first met. By the

end of her story, this mother was no longer keeping God at arm's length. Her language shifted; she believed.

Elijah's successor, Elisha, was also a conduit for God's mercy on a struggling mother during his time of prophecy and ministry. This widow had been the wife of a prophet as well and she cried out to Elisha for help when it appeared she was about to lose her sons too.

"Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves." Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?"

"Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a small jar of olive oil." (2 Kings 4:1-2)

This woman had been left with no male provider or protector, and she was about to have her sons stripped away from her as well. Elisha saw this distraught mother's plight and immediately launched into action. He began by asking her how he could help her. I think that is one of the most important questions we can utter when someone is in crisis. Meaning well, we often default to saying, "Just let me know if I can help." But by directly asking this mother to tell him how he could make things better for her, Elisha let her know he was about helping her find a concrete solution.

The widow had nothing to offer to the effort, other than a little bit of olive oil. That, plus her faith, wound up being more than enough. God will never ask more of us than we have to give. Throughout the Bible we see how He multiplied what humans offered to Him. He created everything we know (and more!) out

of nothing. He doesn't *need* what we have. What He wants is our faith. In every one of the stories in this chapter, faith and trust precede the miracle God delivers. It's the key ingredient that only we can offer.

The prophet prepared them both for a miracle.

Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side." (2 Kings 4:3-4)

This wondrous, supernatural provision was going to be a community effort. This frantic mother, herself once married to a prophet like Elisha, knew the power of his words and didn't hesitate to follow his directions.

She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one."

But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing.

She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left." (2 Kings 4:5-7)

What a story this mother had to tell! Frightened and with virtually no options left for her family, she cried out for help. I love that the miracle God delivered through Elisha wasn't just

isolated to this widow and her two sons. It involved everyone who knew their plight and was willing to hand over a jug or container for the oil-collecting endeavor. The widow anticipated divine deliverance, and she communicated that to everyone else by collecting all those vessels. She was then able to testify to each and every one of them as she returned their vessels empty, having sold the oil they miraculously contained at one point.

I don't know about you, but I love rejoicing in seeing someone else's suffering turn into joy, their need into a solution, and their deficit into abundance. We rarely know exactly how God is going to work in any given situation, but we will never be wrong if we go to Him and ask Him for help. Occasionally, God's answer to our prayers comes in the way we hope. More often the resolution arrives via an unexpected path, but always in a way that grows our faith and gives God the glory. The brightest examples of hope in my life right now are people who are walking through dark valleys. Their reliance on God and deliberate choice to dig their foundations even deeper into His promises, despite their circumstances, is both a challenge and an inspiration to me. I pray that, just as He was in the stories of these obedient widowed mothers, God will be so clearly evident in my friends' journeys.

Centuries ago, and in many places still today, widows were incredibly vulnerable without a husband to protect and provide for them. All throughout the Bible, God makes clear that we are to care for mothers in distress.

Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. (Exodus 22:22)

**A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling. (Psalm 68:5)**

**Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in
need. (1 Timothy 5:3)**

**Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless
is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.
(James 1:27)**

These priorities are perfectly illustrated in the story of the widow of Nain in Luke 7. When Jesus encountered her, this woman had not only lost her husband but was also walking in the funeral procession for her own son. The Bible tells us Jesus's heart broke for this woman and He immediately brought her son back to life (Luke 7:14-15). There was enormous rejoicing that also led to the spread of the Gospel message throughout the region (Luke 7:17). May we also be His instrument to mothers in need. That can show up in countless ways from carpools to casseroles. If you sense God leading you to reach out, follow His prompts. Trust me, you'll both end up blessed!

MIRACLES FOR DAUGHTERS

The Gospels also bring us the story of a daughter (or two) in need of a miracle. The initial request for help came during the period in Jesus's ministry when word of His healings and supernatural power was spreading far and wide. That often meant He was surrounded by crowds, pressing on him literally and figuratively. It's amid one of these masses of people that we see a father's frantic plea for his daughter.

Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." (Mark 5:22-23)

Who was this man begging Jesus to help him? Well, we know Jairus was a man in a position of power. Not only that, but Jairus was a religious leader. Remember, many of the religious leaders in Jesus's day did not believe He was divine or sent by God the Father. In fact, they thought Jesus was a heretic and wanted to shut Him up. Jairus had apparently become convinced otherwise, or else he was so desperate to save his daughter that he was willing to humble himself before Jesus and take a chance. In either case, he took action on behalf of his beloved daughter, who was dying.

Amid the throngs of people gathered around Jesus that day, this elevated religious dignitary literally threw himself at Jesus's feet. Jairus wasn't worried about impressing the crowds that were pressing in on Jesus. Jairus wasn't trying to save face or distance himself from this controversial man who made astounding claims. With his precious daughter close to death, Jairus humbled himself and showed faith that Jesus could save her simply by putting His hands on her. No doubt there were countless other people asking Him for help, but Jesus immediately responded to the unpretentious, direct request of a man who may have been risking his own position in order to save his daughter.

So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. (Mark 5:24)

Imagine how Jairus must have felt, flooded with enormous hope! Time was of the essence, yet Jairus had been able not only to get to Jesus, but also to convince Him to rush to his dying daughter's bedside. Not so fast.

With the clock ticking, Jesus hit a detour. It's a story I've visited many times before—and one of my favorites. A woman who'd been suffering with an "issue of bleeding" for twelve years was desperate for help. No one had been able to cure her. In fact, she'd only gotten worse. Plus, she'd spent every penny she had looking for a solution. She'd heard of Jesus and decided if she could just touch the hem of His garment that would be enough to heal her. This wasn't without risk, though. According to Old Testament law, this continuous bleeding would have made her ceremonially unclean, meaning she shouldn't have been around other people. Like Jairus, she humbled herself and took her case straight to the One she believed could make her whole.

This woman's miraculous healing did happen with her simple touch of Jesus's cloak. He knew it, and she knew it. When he turned around and asked who'd touched Him, the woman fell down before him in fear and trembling and "told him the whole truth" (Mark 5:33). Jesus would have had every right to chastise or berate her, but He did exactly the opposite. In every account in the Gospels, the first thing He did was address her with the tender word *daughter* (Matthew 9:22; Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48), and then He credited her faith as the source of her healing.

We have no idea how long this interaction took. Exactly how much of her twelve years of sorrow and despair did this woman pour out when she was sharing her "whole truth" with Jesus? There was a distraught father standing by, a respected synagogue leader waiting to whisk Jesus straight to his dying daughter.

ter, yet Christ chose to interact with this woman many in the crowd probably viewed as a rule-breaking distraction. Even in light of the emergency with Jairus's daughter, Jesus was purposeful in stopping to see a "daughter" of His own. He is never too busy for us, and He knows our suffering. The Bible tells us that by coming to earth, Christ experienced all our human frailties, yet without sin.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses. (Hebrews 4:15)

God isn't too busy to handle multiple crises at a time, as that crowd was about to discover.

Not everyone could see Jesus's divine plan, though, and the update from Jairus's home was crushing.

While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?" Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe." (Mark 5:35-36)

There was clearly a limit to what the people who came from Jairus's house were willing to believe about Jesus. But what about Jairus, the religious leader? He'd already made clear he thought Jesus could lay hands on his daughter and heal her, but what about raising her from the dead? Before we can find out what this grieving father must have been thinking, Jesus told him to reject fear and embrace faith.

We will all have shocking moments in life: a heartbreaking phone call, an unexpected loss, news that shakes our deepest foundations. It's natural for us, as fallible human beings, to react in panic or doubt. Jesus asks us to cast away both options. Sometimes it's as simple as a whispered prayer: "*Lord, I can't handle this. Please help me.*" It doesn't have to be poetic or fancy. He knows our hearts and the struggles we're wrestling with. Jesus was direct with Jairus—*Don't let fear creep in; keep believing in Me*. That must be what Jairus did, because he didn't say, "*No, it's too late. I shouldn't waste any more of Your time.*" Instead, they went straight to his daughter's bedside.

Jesus took only His closest companions inside Jairus's house, and they found what you'd expect at the home of a young girl who had just died.

Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. (Mark 5:38-41)

The mourning was underway, but Jesus knew what was coming. He would soon escape death Himself; it had no power over Him. Whether He was waking up someone from a nap or raising them from the dead, both were equally possible for Jesus. Yet when He suggested the girl would be fine, those sobs turned to laughter. Was it an expression of disbelief or mocking? In any

case, God is not unfamiliar with doubting humans who chuckle over His miraculous plans.

Remember Abraham and Sarah and their reaction when God told them they'd have a son at an extremely advanced age?

Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" (Genesis 17:17)

So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."

But he said, "Yes, you did laugh." (Genesis 18:12-15)

Just as God called out Sarah for trying to hide her faithless reaction to His promise, Jesus told the skeptical mourners at Jairus's home to get out. I love how direct Jesus was in this story; the Bible tells us He "put them all out" (Matthew 5:40). He wasn't having it. Jesus was about His Father's business.

He took her by the hand and said to her, "*Talitha kumi!*" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. (Mark 5:41-42)

In a single passage, Jesus had healed two daughters in desperate need. In both cases, faith preceded the miracles. I also believe both cases turned deep suffering into glorious testimonies to the truth of who Jesus Christ was—and is. I often think about the woman who had suffered so much with her crippling illness, and how her entire life would become proof of Jesus's divinity as she shared her story. And what about Jairus? He was a leader in the synagogue, a place where there were not just doubters but also outright enemies of Jesus. Jairus would be able to tell them face-to-face about the miracle he'd witnessed from Jesus. As we saw Christ do following other miracles He'd performed, Mark 5:43 tells us He gave everyone who witnessed the resurrection of Jairus's daughter "strict orders" not to tell anyone else. Did they obey? The leper Jesus healed in Mark 1:42 sure didn't follow those orders.

Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. (Mark 1:45)

Was Jesus concerned that word of His miracles would detract from the more important underlying mission He was on: to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10)? Miracles were certainly part of His ministry, and we often read that Jesus was moved with compassion for those He encountered who were despondent and hopeless (Matthew 9:36). But if the crowds were only interested in seeing Jesus do "magic tricks," then there was a danger they'd miss the real message.

Jesus was sent to redeem us all, not just show up as a good luck charm when we need Him. God is driven by compassion not only to meet our physical, earthly needs, but He's also about delivering an even bigger gift: salvation. Sometimes the growth He knows we need comes as the result of pruning we likely don't want. There is purpose in all of it. As in the stories of these mothers and daughters who received miracles, their faith was strengthened and God was glorified.

Lord, give us the courage to reject fear and to cling to You when life is uncertain and difficult. Help us to step forward in faith when You direct us to trust and believe. Grant us the ability to turn away from doubt and doubters, when they call us to question Your goodness and Your plans. Remind us that while life will not be without suffering, You are always working in the seasons of struggle. Help us to remember to turn to You every day, not only when we are in peril. May we tend to our relationship with You through every season.

Miracles for Mothers... and Daughters Too

Study Questions

1. What role did faith play in the miracles in this chapter?
2. What did Jairus risk in throwing himself before Jesus for help?
3. Have you felt compelled to obey God when it didn't make sense? Have you found yourself doubting, even when you've seen God work in the past? How did you overcome any hesitation or learn from the trial? What does God tell us about confronting fear? (Mark 5:36)
4. How did Jesus react to those who mocked or displayed disbelief? (Mark 5:40) How can His reaction guide the way we respond to those who question our faith?
5. How can you see in these stories that a delay in response to a request for help wound up serving a greater purpose?