



# MULTIPLYING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Study Notes by Thomas Hale

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## COMPASSION FROM CAVE ADULLAM

Taken from the book, *Training for Reigning* by Dr. Ron Cottle

*David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither with him. (1 Samuel 22: 1)*

Once again, David was on the run. Saul had been throwing his javelins indoors again and in David's direction. Jonathan sent David into hiding while he checked on his father's mood, and the report wasn't good. This time, Saul had gone all the way over the edge with his bitter hatred toward David. He would not stop his vendetta until either he or David was dead.

It is at this point that David's life unravels.

First, David runs to Gath, the chief city of the Philistines, to seek the protection of the Philistine ruler, Achish, who was from Gath, and had a good grasp of history. Who else from Gath figured significantly in David's life?

The only hint I can give you is that he was extremely tall and loved to behead people. Yes, Goliath. For some strange reason, David went right to Goliath's hometown while carrying the very sword he had stripped from Goliath's body!

The Philistines were surprised for obvious reasons. In fact, King Achish himself came to the gates of the city to see if it was really the David "who had slain ten thousand." It suddenly dawned on David just how much danger he was in, and he became terrified. The only solution he could think of was to act like he'd gone mad! He began to salivate and drool all over himself while scratching on the walls and generally acting like a crazy man. And Achish looked at him and belly laughed, saying, "Look at that king of Israel! Forget about

him—he's a rat in refuse" (See 1 Samuel 21:10-15). The Philistines believed that anyone who kills a demonized person is vulnerable to being possessed by that same demon. Perhaps this explains David's wily actions.

It was at that point that a dejected David slipped quietly into the cave Adullam. When the King James Version says David "escaped" to the cave Adullam, the word "escaped" means he "slipped" into it. He didn't really want to go there, but this was the best alternative he had. No one knows for sure precisely which of the countless caves riddling the massive limestone areas of south Israel is actually the "cave Adullam."

I've asked locals in Israel and consulted the work of many scholars, but there are just too many limestone caves in the wilderness of Egypt near the Dead Sea. You can put thousands upon thousands of sheep, goats, and people inside these caves. They seem to go on forever underground. So, we don't know precisely which one it was. I've searched through the area myself, hoping to discern which one of these caves is the cave Adullam, but it is impossible to figure out.

It was the lowest moment of David's life. He must have thought, surely things can't get any worse! But they did. When his family heard that he was hiding in the cave Adullam, they joined him. How would you like it if your own king (or president) had tried to kill you and you had to act like a madman to escape your country's greatest enemy? When you finally reached your new underground "home," you are hurting and licking your wounds. You're saying, "Dear God, I don't want to see or hear anybody! I'm taking the phone off the hook, Lord. I want to unplug everything. I don't want anything to do with anybody." Then along comes Mom and Dad, plus 400 losers from all over the place! Worst of all, they're just like you—outcasts who are on the run from society for one reason or another:

*And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men. (1 Samuel 22:2)*

Would you have said "Nobody home," or put out a sign that said, "Away for the duration?" Would you get an unlisted phone number and avoid public places?

What did David do? The Bible says that David "became a captain over them." The man "after the heart of God" took them in as a shepherd takes in his sheep.

When we were laying the groundwork for the church we pastor now, we held prayer meetings in our home until we outgrew it. Then we moved to a small building in the area and held prayer meetings week after week for months. I'll never forget the day one of the

ladies in the congregation said, “I believe I have a word from the Lord tonight.” She read the passage in 1 Samuel 22 about “the four hundred” distressed and discontented who came to David. Then she said, “I believe that this is the quality and caliber of people God is going to bring into our church.” I thought, Thanks a lot, lady. What are you talking about? Are you putting a curse on me? Yet today, I thank God for every one of them.

David became a captain over them (see 1 Sam. 22:2b). The Hebrew word for “captain” here is *sar*. It sounds just like the Russian word *czar*, but it doesn’t refer to the supreme ruler of a nation. It refers to “a captain in the field” — somebody who got wet when his men got wet, who got muddy when his men got muddy. It describes a military leader who bivouacked in tents and lived in caves with his troops. David literally shared everything his 400 followers experienced.

When David “slipped” or fell into the cave Adullam, 400 other losers piled in there on top of him, and all of them were in debt or discontented. No one can ever accuse David of starting a church to get the tithes. When the Bible says these men were discontented it is saying these men were sour on life. They were ready to give it all up. All this happened just as David began to experience the most hurtful moment of his life.

Adullam comes from the Hebrew root *dalah*. I love this word because it reminds me of Israel. Everywhere you go in Israel, you hear, “One dollah, please. One dollah.” *Dalah* means “to dangle” as a bucket at the end of a rope. Have you ever been “at the end of your rope?” You may feel like you have been to Adullam several times already! Don’t tell me you feel like you live there because Adullam is not for living; it is for learning.

Adullam was David’s place of testing, growing, and learning. It was the hardest place in his life, and the only place that the Bible says he “fell” into. I think we all fall into tough testing times, but Adullam is just as necessary for reigning as Bethlehem.

If you tell me, “Dr. Cottle, I have my calling from God, and I have my anointing. Now I’ve made my beginning.” That’s wonderful. Do you know where you will get to go next? “Well, I’m going for the gold of my destiny! I’ve defeated my Goliath, you see. And I’ve found a friend that I can pour my life into and who will help me with my journey. I’m on my way to success.”

Guess where you’re going now—that’s right: If you intend to reach Zion, then you’re on your way to Adullam! You can always get sidetracked and entangled by money-making schemes, the accumulation of lands and houses, and the allure of success. But all of that will only rust or rot in your hands if you fail to fulfill your destiny and achieve the divine design dwelling within you. Frankly, anything that deters you from your divine destiny,

you will live to curse. That quest is worth whatever it costs you. Like a mother who finally experiences the pleasure of holding her newborn baby in her arms, once you achieve your destiny you will forget all about the pain it took to get you to Zion.

*“And [David] brought [his parents] before the king of Moab: and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold” (1 Sam. 22:4).* What happens in Adullam? The Bible says David was placed “in the hold” there. I like that. David was put “on hold” by the Holy Spirit. Yes, he had a “calling,” and he had been “anointed” by the prophet Samuel. He had even killed his Goliath. It looked as if David was on his way to the top. If you’re saying the same thing don’t be surprised if God says, “That’s right. Now slide over here on a back burner for a while. I have put all the ingredients for greatness in you—the meat is in there, the celery is in there, the potatoes are there. Everything that will make this pot roast is in there. Now, slide over to the back burner so you can just simmer for awhile.”

Without Adullam, you will never be worth anything. You will become an inedible bland stew folks won’t eat. Show me a person whose life mellowed, and who has found a centerpoint, and I’ll show you a person who knows suffering firsthand.

Generally, those who know suffering firsthand aren’t worth hearing. It is a principle of life. Yet most of us spend our time groaning, complaining, and begging to get out of Adullam when it is the only place where we can learn certain lessons. Adullam was the worst and the best place of David’s life. I’ve been to Adullam twice as far as I can tell, and I never want to go back! Yet I also thank God for taking me there. It was my fault. I deserved it. I needed it; but I don’t ever want to need it again. I have to tell you that qualities are developed in Adullam that cannot be developed anywhere else in life! Don’t beg God to get you out of Adullam ask Him to enable you to learn the lessons of Adullam so that when He brings you out in His good time, you will never need to go back.

David took Adullam seriously. That is why he took his mother and father to the king of Moab. That in itself is incredible! A Moabite was a Philistine, one of the most vicious enemies of Israel! Why did David think he could go to Mizpeh, the king of Moab and leave his mother and father there while he was in the hold?

The Gospel of Matthew lists a genealogy or lineage of Jesus Christ that includes this passage: *“And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse” (Matt. 1:5).* Booz or Boaz was the father of Obed. David put his mother and his father in the home of his grandpa, Obed, who was a Moabite. He asked this king of Moab, *“Let my*

*father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me” (1 Sam. 22:3b).*

Adullam was and is a place of confusion. David was called and anointed, and he had handled Goliath. He was on the road to his destiny, but at that crucial moment in his life, he didn't have a clue about what God was doing in his life. David knew that he and God were going to get into a wrestling match of thunderous proportions in Adullam. He sensed that his life was going to be changed, shaped, and built for the rest of his future while he was there.

A lot of people in the Kingdom of God deny that there is an “Adullam” stage in the Christian life. The “faith message” came out a few years ago, and it is a good message right out of the Bible. However, some aberrations of the teaching claim that if something is “bad,” that it isn't from God: “If it hurts, it's not from God.” I have to tell you that God sometimes leads us through Adullam because He has one objective for us: Zion. And the road to Zion runs through Adullam. That is just the way it is.

David got ready for Adullam by getting his priorities in order so he could focus on God and the lessons of Adullam. Do you realize that he had to stay there for seven years? However, when he came out, he was a transformed person who commanded a crack army of 340,000 seasoned and well-disciplined soldiers! That's right, his original 400 men had grown to an army of 340,000 men! David was a King when he emerged from Adullam.

Earlier in this chapter I said that David had been placed “on hold” by the Holy Spirit. This comes from the verse that refers to his stay in Adullam as “...all the while that David was in the hold” (1 Sam. 22:4). What does it mean to be placed on the “back burner” by the Holy Spirit? This is one of the greatest lessons I believe the Lord has ever taught me. The Hebrew word for “hold” is m-s-d, sometimes appearing as *masad*, *matsad* or *masodah*. (Hebrew is a consonantal language. There are no vowels in the original Hebrew text. Vowels were added only about a thousand years ago, long after the biblical period so we would know how to pronounce words.) Whenever you come into Adullam and are put on the “back burner” of God's stove, you need to understand that he is “growing” you. The Lord gave me a *rhema* of His Word in this passage. He said, “Adullam is the place for growing underground.”

When we started the church I now pastor, I walked one of the elderly ladies to her car after a prayer meeting and remarked that we had been praying for six or eight weeks. Then I said, “I think we've hit a plateau; we're not growing anymore.” She looked at me and said, “Oh, Pastor, that's not true. We are growing now—more than ever.” I thought to myself, you can't count lady, and I said, “The numbers are the same as they were four weeks ago.

We need to keep growing.” She just smiled and said, “We’re growing underground, Pastor. We’re shooting out roots into each others’ lives. We’re building the foundation in our relationships with each other so that when the fruit comes, we can bear it, and we can hold it.” Adullam is a place for “growing underground.”

We develop values in Adullam’s darkness that can be pursued in the sunshine of a brighter day. When David was put “on hold” in Adullam, the outcome of the experienced depended upon David. One of the greatest truths the Lord ever showed me was this: When God put David on the “back burner,” David could either have made it a *masada* or a *masuda*.

*Masada* means “fortress” or “stronghold.” Specifically, it refers to the briefing room where generals come together to strategize for war. It is the heart and core of the warfare in a conflict. It is the counsel chamber.

When you enter a time of testing, trouble, and trauma in your life, God is pushing you over to a “back burner” so he can build you a fortress and a stronghold of His Word and build a relationship with Him. That fortress and stronghold will become the very foundation of your life and ministry from that point forward! This is what happened to David.

However, David’s stay in the “hold” could just as easily have become a *masuda* in his life. *Masuda* has the same letters as *masada*, but it is a different word. It means “a snare, a trap.” If this passage was describing a failure in David’s life, it would use the same written word we translate as *masada*, but the context and experience of David’s life would establish its meaning as “a snare”

instead of “a stronghold and fortress.” What makes the difference? The meaning changes with the view or perspective that you take of the experience!

If you take the “Yah” view, if you look at your cave Adullam through God’s eyes, you will see it as a powerful training ground and foundation for future ministry. If you take the “you” (or “me”) view and pray, “God, I want to get out of here. Why did You put me here? Did You put me here to hurt me? I’m down and out, and nobody cares,” then you will find yourself trapped in a *masuda*, a snare of failure. David was human. He actually said all those negative things at first, but he worked through it! It is not a sin to be human; it is a sin to refuse to go on up higher with God.

*I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before Him; I shewed before Him my trouble. (Psalm 142:1-2)*

David was transparent about his experiences in Adullam. When he said he “cried out” to the Lord, he used the Hebrew word, *za’aq*, which literally means “to shriek from anguish or fear.” Have you ever done that? The Hebrew word for “showed” is *nasad*, which means “to make abundantly clear.” David didn’t want God to have any doubt about what he was talking about.

David was human, just like you and me today. He wrote Psalm 142 in the early days of his stay in the cave Adullam. Then, little by little, David began to get the “Yah” view of his life. He turned his experience into the greatest strength of his life and ministry! And from this experience, he learned to perceive God’s view on every situation and circumstance. After this, he went to God for direction every time he fought a battle against the Philistines. (By the way, the Philistines of today are the “principalities...powers...[and] rulers of the darkness of this world” spoken of in Ephesians 6:12. They are the Goliaths of our day—demon spirits, our carnal nature, and man-made tradition.) David learned to search for God’s understanding in every matter.

When God puts you “in the hold,” it is to test you and make you better. A test (*masada*) will make you better, but a temptation (*masuda*) will make you bitter. It’s the same experience, but the way you take it will make the difference. If you can learn how to deal with Adullam by getting God’s view of what comes into your life, then you can turn it into your greatest victory. From this point on David took *masada* with him everywhere he went. Every time the Philistines came against David, the Bible said, “*David went into the hold.*” He went into his *masada*. And every battle David ever fought from that time on was fought from *masada*. He fought with the knowledge of God he learned at Adullam, the most important turning point of his life.

Like Joseph centuries before him, David could say to Saul and his pursuers, “*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good [Gen. 50:20a]. The devil intended it to bring me harm, but God meant it for my good.*” In everything, particularly in Adullam, God is at work for the ultimate good of those who love Him and are “*the called according to His purpose*” (Rom. 8:28).

Your Adullam is designed to strengthen you (or weaken you if you keep your gaze on yourself). Your “cave” experience is designed for destiny or destruction, depending on your heart attitude. The same experience can have two radically different outcomes depending on the viewpoint you take.

Everything that comes into your life has either a divine or a demonic handle on it. If you can find the right “handle” for your crisis, then God can use anything for your good. I have

a little statement that might do you some good in your life: “You must be put on hold in order to get a hold of the divine destiny within you.”

David’s Psalm 23, written while he was in the cave Adullam, holds a key to success in the midst of crisis. “*The Lord is my shepherd... I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...*” (Ps. 23:1, 4). Many people will tell you, “Well, the Lord is obviously not your shepherd, because He would never lead you through the valley of the shadow of death. No, He will only lead you to bliss and prosperity and plenty.”

David said, “*The Lord is my shepherd.*” The Hebrew word for “shepherd” is *rohe*. One of the names of God is *Jehovah-rohe*. This word means “one who takes me by the hand and leads me.” The Good Shepherd walks with me. The Lord has me by the hand, and He is leading me as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. A lot of people say, “Oh no, brother, not my God!” Yes, your God loves you enough to take you through Adullam. I love Margaret E. Powers’ story entitled “Footsteps.” It tells of a man who reached heaven and began to look back over his life. He saw two sets of footprints until he came to a place where he had gone through a deep, dark valley—a gulch of horror and heartache. Puzzled, he said, “Lord, look at that. There’s only one set of footprints there. Lord, you were with me everywhere else, but You forsook me in that particular place.” And the Lord said, “Look again, son. There’s only one set of footprints because that’s where I picked you up and carried you. Those are My footprints.

The Lord is your Shepherd, even when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death. God never said life would be a bed of roses, did He? If He did, He would warn you about the thorns. Isaiah, the great prophet, declared to Israel:

*Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon His God. (50:10)*

The word for “fear” in Hebrew is *yare*, which means “to reverence.” You are reverent toward God, and you are a worshiper and an obedient servant of God, yet you sometimes walk in darkness and have no light. Darkness is confusion, or *sheol* in Hebrew. *Sheol* doesn’t always mean “hell;” it actually refers to the essence of what hell is confusion, purposeless, and meaninglessness. If you walk in these things; you have no light. You are missing the important ingredients of purpose, focus, design, and desire. What do you do? God’s Word says, “*Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God*” (Isa. 50:10b).

The Hebrew word for “name” in this verse is *shem*. The cognate *shemen* is the word for the anointing oil that Samuel used to anoint David king of Israel. The anointing of God grows out of the character of God. Thus the word name (or *shem*) means “God’s character.” It describes who God is, not what God does. Put your faith and your trust in the divine character of God when you’re in that hard, troubled place called Adullam. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He’ll be with you always.

Isaiah goes on to say, “*And [let him] stay upon his God.*” The word “stay” in Hebrew is *shaan*. It means “to lean on, to nail your life to, to fix and support yourself on God’s character.” So where do you go when everything is confused, dark, and hurtful? Where do you turn when no one will acknowledge you or even admit that you are his friend? What do you do? You nail your life to the character of God.

W. Ian Thomas wrote a book entitled *The Mystery of Godliness*. In it he said, “When you’re in (Adullam), a difficult place of your life, do not put your trust in God’s will.” He went on to explain, “Now, God’s will is wonderful, but if you’re in a time of confusion and you don’t know what in the world is going on in your life, how can you be sure that you have a grasp of what God’s will really is? So, you can’t put your trust in God’s will” (9-22). “Don’t even put your trust in God’s work.” We often say, “I know I’m a preacher, a prophet, and a teacher. I’ve got to get on with God’s work. I’ll just work my way through this thing.” No, you need to understand what God is doing and saying to you. Get your mother, your father, and your children to a place of safety, and take care of the Adullam of your life. It’s up to you to create room for God to work in your life!

A lot of people put on a “plaster of Paris smile.” They grin and bear it, and go straight to hell! Adullam becomes a *masuda* for them. Make room for God to work in your life if He has brought you to that place. Make room for Him and His purposes. “What will that mean?” You may discover you have to change jobs, or quit your present job. You might have to stop teaching the boy’s class at church or heading up the youth group ministry. Let God do what He wants to do in your life. Do it.

If you are in the midst of Adullam, it is time for you to *put your faith and confidence in His character, His person, in Him alone. He is the same “yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8).* James 1:17 says that in Him there is “*no variableness [nor] shadow of turning.*” You can trust Him. In the Book of Malachi 3:6a, God declares: “*...I am the Lord, I change not.*” Nail yourself into the divine character of God and stay there in His face.

We were praying for a woman’s daughter one time, and this mother told me, “Dr. Cottle, I’ve done everything I know to do. I’ve done this, I’ve done that, and I’ve even done...! I’ve

fulfilled everything that I know how to fulfill. What can I do now?” I told her, “Just stay at the heart of Jesus and let God do what He’s going to do.” (That takes a lot of faith.) Now that will turn a masuda into a masada. It will turn the worst place of your life into the best. It will transform your Adullam into a fortress for the rest of your life, a platform of victory from which you can fight the enemy and win.

What are the lessons to be learned in Adullam? It is ironic that David found the answer to his own needs by supplying the needs of others during one of the most stressful times of his life. This is an important principle in the Kingdom of God. If you try to hold on to your talents by “burying” them in the ground of your own personality and needs, they will rot. On the other hand, if you take what you have especially in times of pain, and sow into the lives of others who perhaps are not hurting as much as you, you will experience the miracle of God meeting your needs. He is glorified when you give away what you have to someone else. This law of “sowing and reaping” is a spiritual principle.

A friend of mine told audiences all around the world: “What do you need most in your life? Do you need compassion? Then take what little compassion you have — it may be just a thimble full—and give it to somebody else. In the process of pouring it out, like the widow’s oil, it will grow and grow until you have more than you could ever use. Do you need mercy? Then take what little bit you have and sow it like a seed into some other needy person’s life. Your mercy will grow in the sowing until you will have more than you could ever need for yourself and for others.” This is a spiritual principle that David demonstrated right here in the cave Adullam.

David learned the lesson of compassion in Adullam. Without compassion, you will never be a leader in God’s Kingdom. You will be too self-centered, and you will always be tempted to take everything in for yourself, whether the valued commodity is fame, respect, money, or leadership authority.

There are three kinds of people: takers, keepers, and givers. Which group winds up with more than they need in the end? Those who give away what they have. David learned to be a giver at the time of his greatest need. When four hundred losers, debtors, and discontented lawbreakers piled in on him, he forgot his own needs. David saw the others’ needs, and so he rolled up his sleeves to go to work. In the end, he made these men into what Israel called “God’s mighty men.” They became the greatest fighting force that Israel ever had, and it was because David had learned compassion.

Second, David worked with those whom God had brought him. He became a captain in the field over Israel’s lowest outcasts. David could have said to them, “But I am a king — I’m

anointed. I'm not getting in that muck and dirt. I refuse to dig those trenches." A whole lot of anointed people will only work in the area of their anointing, believing anything else is beneath them.

I had great hopes for a bright young man in our church who was full of promise and potential. He was like one of my own sons, and he eagerly did whatever I needed him to do. One time he slipped off somewhere and got into a meeting where some people told him he was a prophet. They said he should start focusing on his work as a prophet.

Shortly after he returned from that meeting, a guest speaker was scheduled to come to our church. Normally, I like to pick up guest speakers at their hotel myself. Somehow, I got tied up with some details, so I tossed my car keys across the desk and said to this young man, "Go and get the speaker. I'm too busy to break away." He said, "Oh, I can't do that." I looked up and said, "Say what?" Again he said, "I can't do that. I'm a prophet." I realized what was going on, so I said, "Okay, prophet, give me my car keys." Then I walked over to another young fellow who still works in the ministry today. I asked him, "Are you a prophet?" When he replied, "Not that I know of," I said, "Go get the speaker." The other young man kept his title but lost his servant's heart. What a tragedy!

Leadership does not reside in position; leadership resides in purpose and passion.

David realized that leadership resides in purpose and passion. He knew that purpose comes from revelation, and passion comes from relationship. I just gave you an entire university course in a few words. Did you get it? Leadership does not come from position! I know a lot of people in leadership positions who are no more qualified as leaders than Mickey Mouse. (In fact, when I think about it, they are a whole lot less qualified.) True leadership comes from purpose and passion.

Watchman Nee said, "The purpose of leadership comes through revelation." If God gives you the *rhema*, then you're the leader. Passion comes out of relationship with God in the Spirit. These are the ingredients of leadership.

David didn't need anyone to tell him he was king. He knew who he was, so he could roll up his sleeves and get right down into the muck and the grime to make things happen. His purpose was Zion. Now he was stuck in a cave in Adullam, and Zion seemed to be far away. He needed to learn the lessons of Adullam so God could bring him out. A lot of people live their lives stuck in a cave because they are unwilling to dirty their hands with anything except "My anointing."

David accepted followers because they needed him, not because he needed them! These folks were in distress, in debt, and discontented, and he took them in. He wasn't looking for an easy road to victory. He didn't need a slave work force to achieve "his vision," and he wasn't searching for some shortcut to his destiny, or for some sugar daddy to pay his way. Now, I have nothing against people giving generously to support God's work, so if you have a spare \$600K or so, I know exactly where it can be put to good use. The principle is that we work with the people, materials, and resources that God brings.

Many ministers find it difficult to build their ministry on the basis of the gifts God provides—but that is God's way. Where there is no gift, there should be no ministry (because it isn't birthed of God). Don't look down the street at what Brother and Sister Powerhouse are doing, and say, "My, but they sure have a good, successful bus ministry. I think I will get into the bus ministry business too so I can build up my church." If God wants you to get into the bus ministry, He'll plant a gift in the form of an anointed bus ministry pastor in your church and ministry. Whether or not you say anything, that fellow will begin to agitate for buses. Before long, you'll find yourself saying, "All right. All right. You may have one." Before you can turn around, he'll be back in your office saying, "I need another one, Pastor. We're growing too fast, and we have too many people for that one bus to handle." That's the way God-birthed ministry grows. If the gift isn't in the house, the ministry can't flow from the house. Any ministry in your church that has to be propped up and given mouth-to-mouth resuscitation every few months has problems. If it keeps pulling money out of other things, then give that flesh-driven work a decent burial. Put it out of its ministry misery.

One of my favorite messages comes from 2 Kings 4:1-7 and the story of Elisha and the widow's cruse of oil. One of Elisha's disciples in the school of the prophets had died, leaving his wife and two sons deeply in debt. Creditors were coming to take her two sons and put them into slavery to pay the debt. The widow called on the man of God for help, and Elisha, the prophet, responded. He looked around and asked her, "*What do you have in the house?*" She said, "*I don't have anything in the house except a cruse of oil.*"

A cruse of oil. The Bible says we have this treasure in what? Earthen vessels (see 2 Cor. 4:7). Do you know what a cruse is? It's an earthen vessel. It is what you are too— an earthen vessel with the potential to be full of the oil of the Holy Spirit of God. This is what you have in your house. Every believer has this oil in his house. What do you have in the house? Elisha, the man of God said, "Give it to me."

Now your first impulse might be to say, “This prophet deserves the left foot of fellowship right out the front door. Who does he think he is to take for himself the last thing this woman owns?” A closer look reveals that there is a spiritual principle involved here. The fact is that you already have everything you need to meet every lack you will ever have! By the gift of God’s grace, your Provision, the Risen Christ, is already inside you. He lives there in all of His abundance. By His Spirit, you are full of the oil of anointing. You are a cruse of oil.

“What can I do to meet my need?” Pour your oil into the needs of others. Pour it into every empty vessel you can fill! Find every empty life in your community, your neighborhood, and the world. Pour out all of the oil you have! “Wait a minute, Brother Cottle. I’ll run out!” No, you won’t run out. In the very process of giving out of your need to meet the needs of others, your supply will grow until it is bottomless! The Bible says the widow had more than enough to pay her debts, with a supply left over for her and her sons to live abundantly from that day forward. It is an eternal principle of God.

David learned the principle and the miracle of compassion in the cave Adullam. He took in four hundred lost and outcast men and poured himself into them. When he emerged from the wild and lonely caves of En-Gedi, he had transformed his rag tag band of losers into the greatest army Israel ever had! According to 1 Chronicles 12, David spent seven and one-half years with those men, and he converted his original band of four hundred into a highly trained army of 340,800 men by the time he left Adullam and went to Heron to become king of Judah. (Talk about church growth!) This number doesn’t even include all the women and children!

Now, if David did that in the wilderness, what can you do in the palatial church to which you belong? David didn’t have access to modern media tools, a college or seminary education, or publicity. All he had was a cruse of oil that he poured liberally into people’s lives. The more he poured, the more they came. The more they came, the greater they grew. When David finally emerged from Adullam, he could have taken any kingdom in Israel that he wanted. His army was greater and even better trained than the standing army of Israel!

Let’s improve our perspective before we move on past the lesson of compassion into the lesson of courage. David was called by God and anointed by the prophet Samuel when he was seventeen years old. He was about twenty years old when he fought Goliath, according to the best evidence. He slipped into Adullam when he was twenty-one years old, and he left the cave of Adullam at the age of twenty-eight after spending about seven and a-half years in the wilderness. He became king of Judah at the age of thirty, and he was

proclaimed king of Israel on his thirty-seventh year. David died and went to Heaven (the Bible says “slept with his fathers” [1 Kings 2:10]) at the age of seventy. Every major episode and event in David’s life happened at seven-year intervals.

The depth and quality of the relationships David shared with the men under his leadership are revealed in a remarkable passage in 2 Samuel 23:13-17. One day David was hot, tired, and thirsty while near the cave Adullam. He happened to remark casually to no one in particular, (We all believe that the “best water” in the world is the water from home because we grew up drinking it.) Unknown to David, three of his mighty men heard him make that offhand statement. The men got together and risked their lives to sneak right through the encampment of the Philistine army to bring David one canteen of Bethlehem water. The well was in the center of the enemy’s camp! The men loved their leader so much, and their lives were so intertwined with his destiny that they thought nothing of risking their lives to please their leader and meet his need! This is the true Bible definition of a sharath — a “minister.”

When these men offered David the water from his father’s well in Bethlehem, he knew they had come within a hair’s breadth of losing their lives for his sake. He was a soldier. He knew that if any one of the men had made one sound, they would have all died a cruel death at the hands of their enemies. Most humbling of all, David knew his men had risked their lives not to supply something he needed; no. They had knowingly risked their lives to supply something he had merely wanted!

David was so moved by the men’s sacrificial gift that he took the water from them as they stood in a circle (after he probably called everyone else to his side) and he poured it out as an offering to Jehovah God for their fellowship and relationship with each other. He symbolically offered back to God the loyalty and relationship God had given him through his men. It was all rooted in David’s compassion for others. Compassion is fundamental to leadership.