

More from Megan L. Anderson, Spring 2016

When revisiting 2 King's story of the widow and Elisha, I sometimes identify more with the empty jars than the characters. After working hard at my job, taking care of projects around the house, running errands, carving time out for relationships, attending committee meetings and church gatherings, there isn't much left of me by the end of the day. When extra challenges arise like loss of a loved one or unexpected expenses, feelings of desperation aren't far behind. Some days, like those hollow jars, I've poured everything out until I too feel empty and useless. And doing anything about it just seems pointless and impossible.

But what attractive opportunities those inner voids must be to God! Think about it. An empty cup can be filled with anything and offered to anyone. Moving in an open space is far easier than in one crowded with junk. Our lack? Our depleted energy and resources? These are not negatives, but rather areas of potential for God to fill in with his infinite, glorious provision.

If we humbly offer not only what we have, but what we don't, to God's service he may multiply it into a wealth of blessings for us and surrounding communities. The Lord often works through people around us in that transformation process. If we're embarrassed by our deficiency in certain areas, accepting provision from others can be difficult. But if we deny others opportunities to do good, we not only deny ourselves their help, but also refuse them the joy and reward from giving it.

Though her late husband left an upright reputation as a good and godly man, I can't imagine how uncomfortable it must have been for the widow to plea door to door among her neighbors. What must they have thought? Perhaps some refused her, unwilling to associate themselves with the shame of her debt. Perhaps some wondered if she'd gone crazy in her grief and distress. It isn't a far flung theory to think maybe even some friends abandoned her in her difficulties. But we know from scripture that at least a few gave what they could. Because of these neighbors' compassion and contributing of what resources they had, the widow's needs were met beyond her wildest imagination. Out of the overflow, the needs of those who bought her oil were met as well. Those who gave the widow jugs and bowls became part of a miracle, and those who may have refused her bore witness to what's possible when we offer our resources and needs to the Lord.

When we extend our emptiness as invitation to God, we open ourselves to the miraculous. Not only can we count on God's provision when we obey his instruction – odd or uncomfortable as it may be – we can bless others by the witness of that provision. Our God is not one to bless sparingly. More often than not he pours his love into our hearts' dried up spaces until they're overflowing. Some days we're like the neighbors with blessings to spare. Let's not hesitate to share that goodness with those in need. Other times we're more like the empty jars, just sitting around waiting for purpose. Without faithful action on our part, we'll stay that way. But hopefully instead we'll invite God and those he chooses into our empty places. Who knows what miracles he has in store for us?