STORIES AND RITUALS

LESSON 9

Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

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Elijah Cares for a Widow

Texts: **1 Kings 17:8-24**

Big Idea: **The poor and lowly are cared for by God.**

Lesson Objectives

Participants will:

1. Recognize how others have helped them in times of trouble by playing a game.
2. Understand God's caring nature for those in trouble by engaging with a re-telling of the story of the Elijah and a widow.
3. Perform an act of prayer by finding and sharing images and words with the group.

ACTIVITY (TIME)	MATERIALS NEEDED
Dive In (10 minutes) **Group Check-In**	• Nothing
Community Builder (15 minutes) **Save the Beans!**	• Cups • Dry beans • Straws • Boundary markers (optional)
The Story (15 minutes) **Elijah Cares for a Widow**	• Copy of Lesson Sheet 9.1
The Ritual (15 minutes) **Praying for the Poor and Lowly**	• Soft, instrumental music (optional) • Method for playing music (optional) • Scissors • Glue Stick • Poster board or large banner of paper • Newspapers and news magazine
Dig Deeper (10 minutes) **Bountiful Blessings**	• A loaf of bread
Wrap it Up (5 minutes) **Closing Prayer**	• Nothing

LESSON OVERVIEW

What's the Story?

Today's story is found in 1 Kings 17:8-24. In this story, the prophet Elijah travels to Zarephath (pronounced zAE – ruh - fAEth). At this point in the Biblical narrative, there is a massive famine across the land, and many people do not have much food to eat, let alone share with other people.

Two miracles happen in the story. First, Elijah asks a widow for some food, to which she responds that she has none to give. However, Elijah instructs her to make bread anyway, the small portions of flour and oil that she has never run out. The widow, her family, and Elijah continue to eat during the great famine. Then, the widow's son becomes ill and dies. Elijah then brings life back into the boy, once again bringing hope to a family that needs it.

These two miracles change the lives of the widow and her son. The widow realizes God's power and truly believes that Elijah brings the word of God to people. She believes that the words said by Elijah are truth.

What's the "Big Idea?"

Today's lesson focuses on the big idea that *the poor and lowly are cared for by God*. Money, wealth, and power are valued in today's society. We strive to live full lives that include success and prosperity. Not all people live lives that include bountiful blessings and even an abundance of basic needs. However, God still cares for the poor and lowly even in their difficult times. God's love is still abundant, no matter who you are or what you may or may not have.

What's the Symbol?

Bread is an important symbol in today's story. It is through sharing a small loaf of bread that the widow and her son truly see God's abundance. Breaking bread is a practice with which Christians also experience God's love, grace, and provision. Place a large loaf of bread that can be shared (you may even wish to bake your own) on a plate or paten.

What's the Ritual?

Today's ritual will invite participants to look through newspapers, news magazines, and articles. As they look through these materials, they will find words or images of the poor and lowly in the world today. Then, they will engage in a prayer time for the world and these people by sharing these images with the group on a poster, and praying for these people both individually and collectively.

Setting Up Your Space

Set up your "altar" area. Set up a table and cover it with fabric or linen. On the table, place a few candles and a large cross. On a large plate or paten, place a loaf of bread large enough for your group to share. Place the poster board or paper for the ritual on the floor in a central place nearby. Place all other materials for the ritual in a place that is easily accessible. If you are using the Community Builder activity, set up the relay race.

DIVE IN
(10 MINUTES)

Group Check-In

Materials:

- Nothing

During the session:

- Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own:
  Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
- **Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week. What were the high points and low points of your week?**
  Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

COMMUNITY BUILDER
(15 MINUTES)

Save the Beans!

Materials:

- Cups (2 per team)
- Beans
- Straws (2 per team)
- Boundary markers (optional)

Before the session:

- Set up the playing space. Find a large space where you can play this relay race.
- If desired, use boundary markers to mark the start and finish lines of the race.
- Space two cups apart at the start and two cups at finish line of the race (there should be about ten feet between the starting and finishing lines). In each of the cups at the starting line, place an equal number of beans (approximately two per player).

During the session:

- Split the group into two (or more) teams. Say: **Today we're going to start our time together with a relay race! Each team should line up behind one of the cups at the starting line.**
- Instruct teams to line up. **If you look inside your cup, you'll see that there are a bunch of beans. Your job is to safely "rescue" your beans by using only two straws to carry them from this cup to the empty cup on the other side of the space.**
- Hand the first person in each team two straws. **Each person must take turns carrying a bean to the empty cup on the other side of our space. Once you successfully place your bean in the empty cup, run back to your team and hand your straws off to the next person. The first team to get all of their beans to the other cup wins!**
- Give teams a signal to start and play the game. If you have time, play several rounds.

COMMUNITY BUILDER - CONTINUED

- **Was it easy or hard to move the beans from one cup to another? What made it easy? What made it hard?** *[Answers will vary.]*
- **Sometimes we care for people by "saving" them from an ailment or problem. Has there ever been a time in your life when someone has saved you from something? What happened?** *[Answers will vary. This topic may be difficult for some groups to discuss; you might want to open the discussion by telling your own story first.]*

THE STORY (15 MINUTES)

Elijah Cares for a Widow

Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 9.1

Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 9.1
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 9.1.
- **After the story, ask: What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God provides for us; God takes care of us; God takes care of those who do not have a lot or enough.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: Sometimes we don't have enough of our basic needs; sometimes we are unsure that we will be cared for in times of distress; we question God's provision when it isn't near us; we trust that God will take care of us and provide for us.]*
- **What is this story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: It is full of people who are poor and lowly; it is full of resources worth sharing with those who need it.]*
- **The widow and her son in this story did not have enough food. However, she still shared what she had with Elijah, and God provided for her. By the end of the story, her family had more than enough flour and oil and her son was healed of his sickness! Elijah knew that God would take care of this lowly family and the woman still gave all she had in order to show love and hospitality to a new stranger.**

THE RITUAL (15 MINUTES)

Praying for the Poor and Lowly

Materials:

- Soft, instrumental music (optional)
- Method for playing music (optional)
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Poster board or large banner of paper
- Newspapers and news magazines

Before the session:

- Secure either one large banner of paper or a large poster board (you may wish to use two boards, depending on the size of your group). Place the paper or boards in a central place where everyone can see it.
- Collect newspapers or news magazines (Time, Newsweek, etc.). You may also wish to print news articles from Internet news sites about the poor or lowly around the world.

During the session:

- If you are playing music, begin playing it softly.
- **God cared for the poor and lowly family and Elijah helped bring them hope when they needed it. As Christians, we are asked to follow the example of Elijah and help bring hope to the poor and lowly. We keep these people in our prayers daily.**
- Spread out the magazines, newspapers, and news articles. **Take a few minutes to look through some of these newspapers and magazines. Think about some of the current events that are happening in the world. What is happening to the poor and lowly today? Let's find out.**
- Invite participants to look at the newspapers and magazines for a few minutes. Invite them to find stories or images that remind them of those around the world who are in need.
- Hand out scissors and glue sticks to the group. **Today we are going to take a moment to pray for those who need God's love and care. Look at the articles or images in these newspapers and magazines. Which ones remind you of the widow in the story? Cut them out.**
- Give participants the opportunity to select their articles or images. Then, motion to the poster board or paper.
- **In a moment, I will invite each of you to come to the poster board or paper. As you do, take a moment to glue your images, articles, words, and phrases to the poster. When you glue your images or words, stop for a moment and pray for the people whom you have discovered during this activity today.**
- Invite members of the group one at a time to the poster or paper to glue their findings. After everyone has glued their images or words, ask: **For what have we prayed today? What stories or images did you discover during your search?** *[Answers will vary. Some participants may wish to share their thoughts, and others won't. You may wish to begin this discussion by sharing your own thoughts.]* **How can we help others remember that they are cared for by God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: tell them the Good News, pray with them, and help them in their time of need.]*
- **Let's close our time together with a group prayer of our own. I will open our prayer, and then you will have the opportunity to add your own thoughts and petitions. Then, I will close us.**
- **Give the group a moment to focus. Then, pray: Gracious God, you provide for each of your children during our time of need. We pray for those who need your hope and love today. We especially pray for…** (give the group some time for their own prayers.) **Bring each person for whom we pray today hope and peace, and care for them in their time of trouble. We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.**

DIG DEEPER
(10 MINUTES)

Bountiful Blessings

Materials:

- A large loaf of bread

During the session:

- Invite the group to sit in a large circle.
- **God cared for the widow and her son by providing them with all the food they needed, plus more! God provides for us and cares for us, too. Take a moment to think about how God has provided for and cared for you during times of trouble.**
- Give the group some time to think. Then, take the loaf of bread. **For the woman and her son, a loaf of bread was a symbol of God's love and provision. Having bread in their house meant that they were being cared for when they needed it. Let's break bread together and thank God for always caring for us.**
- **We are going to pass the loaf of bread around the circle. When it comes to you, tear off a piece and share one way in which God has cared for you.**
- Pass the bread around the circle, inviting everyone to share their stories as they tear off a piece.
- **Every time you see bread this week, thank God for always caring for you, no matter what.**

WRAP IT UP
(5 MINUTES)

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week. Close your time together in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

Merciful God, you are always with us, especially those who are poor and neglected. Help us remember those whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless, the hungry, and those who have no one to care for them. Help us bring hope and joy to those who need it, and help us care for them just as you do. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Lesson Sheet 9.1

Elijah Cares for a Widow

(A story about the prophet Elijah)

The word of the Lord came to the prophet Elijah. The Lord said to Elijah, "Go to Zarephath and stay there for some time. There is a widow there who will take care of you." So, Elijah went to Zarephath.

As he approached the town, Elijah saw a widow outside the town gates, collecting sticks. Elijah called to the widow and asked, "Can you bring me some water in a jar so that I may have something to drink?" As the woman was leaving, Elijah shouted, "Also, please get me a piece of bread."

The widow stopped and turned to Elijah. She said, "I don't have any food. I only have a little bit of flour and a little bit of oil. I am out here collecting sticks so that I can start a fire and make the last of our food for myself and my son. After we eat this food, we won't have anything else. We will die of hunger."

Elijah responded to the woman and said, "Don't be afraid. Go and do what you have planned. Start by making a little loaf of bread and bring it to me. Then, make a little for yourself and your son. The Lord will take care of you! Your flour will not run out and your oil won't dry up until the Lord sends rain to nurture the dry land."

The widow did as Elijah commanded. And, much to their surprise, their food was always plenty! The widow, her son, and Elijah ate and ate and ate. The flour didn't run out and the oil was always plenty.

Soon, the widow's son became sick. His sickness became worse and worse, and eventually he stopped breathing. The woman asked Elijah, "What has happened? What have you done to me and my family, man of God? Why must you remind me of my sins and kill my son?"

Elijah told the woman to bring her son to the prophet. Elijah took her son and carried him to the upper room, the place where Elijah was living. He laid the boy on his own bed and said, "Lord, my God, why have you brought this upon this family with whom I have staying? Why have you brought such evil to this kind woman who has graciously welcomed me into her home?" Then, Elijah stretched his arms over the boy three times. Each time Elijah said, "Lord, my God, let this boy's life come back into him!"

Then, something amazing happened. God listened, and the boy started to breathe once again! He was living! Elijah brought the son to his mother, telling the widow, "Look! Your son is alive!"

The woman saw God's amazing power and the miracle that happened. She said to Elijah, "I now know that you really are a man of God. I now know that the word of God really does come from your mouth."