

DISCIPLESHIP ESSENTIALS

“Surviving Economic Drought”

11/18/12

Verses from New Living Translation unless noted.



The **last** few years have been a very **difficult** time economically. **Many** people are **suffering** and things **don't seem** to be getting **better**. In fact **world economists** are pretty much **unanimous** in their **prediction** that things are going to get **worse worldwide**.

The news **media** this week is **repeatedly warning** of our nation's impending **fiscal cliff**. It is being widely portrayed as a **looming** financial **crisis** that could send the **nation** and the **world** into **unrecoverable** recession.

In the **past** financial **recessions** have been **seasonal**; they come and they go; in time **adjustments** are made, the economy **rights** itself and we **return** to general **prosperity**.

The **prognosis** this time is much more **bleak** and **grim**. Leading **experts** are telling us that the **world's** economic **systems** cannot continue without dramatic **reform** and **restructuring**.

Economist **Marc Faber**, on **CNBC** Tuesday talked about the **global** financial **markets** and how we must prepare for a **massive** market **meltdown**. He warned that the global **financial** system will **not** be **reset**, after living beyond our **means** for the past **three decades**. It's **payback** time.

Pain, sacrifice and austerity are the **new normal**. In the **US** the **debt ratio** to the (GDP) Gross Domestic Product is **nearing 100%**. **Paying** our debt will **consume everything** we are able to **produce** as a nation.

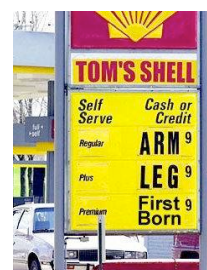
Almost **50%** of the **population** receives their **primary** source of **income** from the **government** and less than **50%** of the population paying federal **income tax**. In addition **Greece** has hit its **debt wall**. **Spain**, **Italy**, and **France** are not far behind.

Former **British** Prime Ministry **Tony Blair** stated that **if Europe** does not **change** its **entitlement** mentality, it would **not survive**. There is **no way** to **tax** our way out, **spend** our way out, **borrow** our way out, **print** our way out or **even grow** our way out.

Our **politicians** who are for the **most part insulated** from the **pain**, don't have the **will** or the **courage** to deal with the problems.

A recent **publication** carried this unnerving gas **station sign**.

Of course economic **drought** is **not** something **new**. Mankind has **suffered** these things for **centuries**. This morning I want to turn to a **similar story** from



the **OT** to help us gain **perspective** and **hope** in spite of the world's **dismal prognosis**.

This story from **1 Kings** has convinced me that we need to approach the next few **years** using the OT prophet **Elijah** as our **model**. This story **demonstrates** how to function in a **drought**.

The **historical** event is recorded in **1 Kings 17**. Let me begin by giving you the **context**. 1 Kings 16:29-31 “**Ahab son of Omri began to rule over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of King Asa’s reign in Judah.**”

Remember after **Solomon** died the nation was **divided** into two parts, a **northern** and **southern** kingdom. **Israel** is north and **Judah** is south. **Ahab** is now king in the north.

“**He (Ahab) reigned in Samaria twenty-two years. But Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the Lord’s sight, even more than any of the kings before him. And as though it were not enough to follow the example of Jeroboam (one of the most wicked kings), he married Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and he began to bow down in worship of Baal.**”

Now here is a **problem**. God told the **Israelites** not to marry **outside** their Jewish **faith**. He **knew** that if they did they would begin to **worship** pagan gods. Here is a **king**, king **Ahab**, and he does what **many** kings did in those times.

He **marries** the **daughter** of the king in a **neighboring** country in order to **insure peace** between the two countries. Everybody knows the name **Jezebel**. She is a most **wicked** woman. And sure enough she **influences** Ahab and begins to worship her **foreign god**.

Now **Elijah** was the **first** of a long line of important **prophets** God sent to **Israel** and **Judah**. Israel, the **northern** kingdom, had **no** faithful kings throughout its **history**. Each king was **wicked**, **leading** the people in **worshiping** pagan gods.

Thus God called **prophets** to try to **rescue** Israel from its **moral** and **spiritual** decline. For the next **300** years these prophets would play a **vital** role in **both** nations, **encouraging** the people and leaders to **turn back** to God.

Those who **worshiped Baal** believed he was the god who brought the **rains** and **bountiful** harvests.

Let’s **pick up** the story in chapter **17:1**. “**Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, ‘As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives—the God I serve—there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!’**”

Now **no rain**, that’s **bad**, but no **dew**; that’s a real **drought**. Elijah **confronts** King Ahab and **prophecies** a devastating **drought** that, though he **didn’t say** it at the time, would span **three years**.

Ahab had built a strong **military defense**, but it would be **no help** against drought. And his **priests** of Baal, this **god** of rain would be no help **either**.

Ahab probably thought of Elijah as some kind of **religious nut** and ignored him. But, **sure enough**, the drought comes and along with it, **dreadful famine** that effects **all Israel** as well as surrounding areas.

Now God **provides** for Elijah sending him to **camp out** on the banks of a **brook**. “**Drink from the brook and eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food.**” V.4

This was the **first** recorded **fast-food delivery** service. **And** for a **while** Elijah **endured** the drought. But then, “... **the brook dried up, because there was no rainfall anywhere in the land**” (v. 7).

Now even **God’s prophet** was feeling the **effects** of the drought. And God sent him to **Zarephath** to find shelter **outside Israel** in the home of a Gentile widow.

1 Kings 17:8-11 “**Then the LORD said to Elijah, ‘Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. There is a widow there who will feed you. I have given her my instructions.’ So he went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, ‘Would you please bring me a cup of water?’ As she was going to get it, he called to her, ‘Bring me a bite of bread, too.’**”

When Elijah **showed up** in the little village of Zarephath he discovered his **room reservation** was with a **widow** collecting some **sticks** to cook a **final** meal.

Trying to keep her **son** and herself alive **without** a husband, she’s seen her **supplies** diminish to where she didn’t have a **fridge** full or a **shelf** full. She had a **handful**—her **last** handful—and she had already **accepted** the fact that **when** she ate this meal, that would be the **end**. She responds,

“I swear by the Lord your God that I don’t have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die.”

There was no **recourse**, no **forms** to fill out, and no **government** assistance that would come. She was going to **watch** her son **die**, and then she would die.

Elijah **discovered** the situation when he asked the woman for a **drink** and a **snack**. But he **responded** to her difficult situation with this hard sentence: “**Don’t be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you’ve said, but make a little bread for me first.**” (v. 13a).

He’s like, “**Last meal? Ok, I hear you. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me, and “Then use what’s left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son.”** (v. 13b).

“Go ahead and **split** your **last** meal, ma’am, because here is what’s going to **happen**. “**this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops grow again!**” (v.14)

He was **saying**, “You **take** this step of **faith**, you **do** this thing I’m **asking**, and **God** will make sure this **drought** is not the **death** of you and your son.”

“So she did as **Elijah** said, and she and **Elijah** and her family continued to eat for many **days**. There was always enough **flour and olive oil left in the containers**, just as the **Lord had promised through Elijah.**” (vs. 15-16).

Keep in **mind** this is **no random** story, for the **NT** asserts that “**These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.**” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

This **Bible** that we are **using** this morning is the **record** of God’s **interaction** with mankind from the very **beginning**. After God **created** man in the **garden** he made certain to have **recorded** for **our benefit** exactly what he was **doing** so we could learn to **trust** him.

The economic **drought** we are facing is as **real** to people in our country as the **drought** killing the **widow** of Zarephath was to her and her **son**.

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A DROUGHT

1. Diminished Resource.

The **vast majority** of people in this **country** are using about **half** the **peanut butter** to cover the **same piece** of bread. They are trying to **meet** growing **need** with **less** financial **capacity**; they are **stretched** in faith and **strained** in all the ways **diminished** resource impacts a family.

2. Damaged Confidence.

People **used** to **gut it out** in economic recession, expecting a **turn** around by next **fall**— or surely by the following **summer**—but now we’re being told by economists this is “the **new normal**.”

This drought seems to have **no end** in sight and people are **searching** for ways to **cope** that include **major adjustments** in lifestyle with **no** expectation for improvement.

3. Doubtful Future.

Some people are saying “You know, **Ralph**, I used to **look** to the **future** and I kinda **knew** what was going to **happen**. I thought I **could see** myself **making** it, **saving** it, and **growing** it.

We were **going to retire** at this age. We had a **plan**. Now I can’t **see** a particular future and just **hope** to make it through the **month**.”

4. Deficit Living.

A lot of people are living on **savings**, still spending **more** than they are **making**. That **can't** go on much longer. **If** people living in a past, **deficit living**, because they **expect** the drought to **end**, things will only get **worse** for them as that **capacity** is depleted.

5. A Desert Mentality.

A desert mentality **hoards** resources, **hides** any excess, and **resents** requests for **generosity**, slipping quickly toward "I've got to protect what's mine."

In the **desert**, you think only of **survival** and how to get **water**. **God** may lead us **through** a desert in our lives, but he **doesn't** want us to make **plans** to **settle** down and be at home with a **scarcity**, stingy, **survive-at-all-cost** way of thinking.

SO WHAT DO WE DO IN A TIME OF DROUGHT?

The **answer** is to do what **Elijah** and the **widow** did. Let's **isolate** some **principles** of God's **provision** that are still **operative** today.

#1 - GOD ALWAYS HAS A GOOD REASON AND A SUFFICIENT SUPPLY FOR EVERY NEED HE ALLOWS.

There's been **no rain** and Elijah, like **everyone** else **needed** food and water. Even **believers** and true followers of God are **affected** by circumstances around us - **drought, famine, recession**.

And, there is also a **widow** in the village of **Zarephath** for whom God is concerned.

But, **when** God **allows** a **need** in the lives of those who **trust** in Him, there will always be **two** other **things present**. (1) a **good reason** (2) a **sufficient supply**

(1) a good reason - Romans 8:28 **"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."**

What are some of the **Possible Reasons** for Elijah's experience?

- * To **get the attention** of His people, Israel and Ahab.
- * To show Elijah an example of **miraculous provision**.
- * To demonstrate the importance of **obedience** to the widow.
- * To **grow** Elijah's faith.
- * To **grow** the faith of the widow and her son.
- * To grow our faith

(2) a sufficient **supply** - Philippians 4:19 “And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches...” There’s no drought or famine in heaven – no recession, either.

#2 - GOD **KNOWS** OUR NEED BEFORE WE ASK. v.9

Verse 9 “Go to **Zarephath**” - Elijah **hadn't** even asked yet. “I’ve **instructed** a widow” - God had **already made** provision. He knows our need before we ask. Listen to what **Jesus** said in Matthew 6:8 “Your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!”

This **widow** is **not** from among **God's** people. Zarephath is a **Sidonian** town – these people are **Baal** worshippers. God has the **power** to **supply** through the **unbelieving** world. Many of you receive your **income** from **unbelievers**. Even those who **oppose** God's kingdom **support** it. God **uses** unbelievers to **accomplish** His will.

#3 - GOD USES **CRISIS** TO GET OUR ATTENTION. vs.11-12

We **in this country** have had **our share** of crisis lately.

Did you hear the **Oakland Raiders** football practice was **delayed** on Wednesday for nearly **two hours**. One of the players, while on his way to the locker room happened to look down and notice **suspicious looking**, unknown **white powdery substance** on the practice field.

The head **coach** immediately **suspended** practice while the **FBI** was called to **investigate**. After a complete **field analysis**, the FBI determined the white substance **unknown to the players** was actually the **goal line**.

Practice was **resumed** when FBI Special **Agents** **decided** that the Oakland **Raider players** would not likely **encounter** the **substance again**.

What Elijah asks is an **extraordinary** request. **If** she **responds** she **must be** the widow that God had **previously** instructed.

Listen to what she says, “I swear by the Lord **your God**, I don’t have any bread.” “The Lord **your** God,” **not my God**. Not Baal. She swears by **Elijah’s** God.

Now we begin to **understand** why God is **concerned** about this widow and why he got her **involved**. Even though she doesn’t really **know** him yet, she’s **heard** of him, and she really **wants to believe** in him. She is really **close**.

She's **lived near** enough to Israel, she's heard enough to believe **intellectually**, but **no personal** experience. **59%** of Americans believe the **Bible** is the **inerrant** Word of God. **Do all 59%** have a personal **relationship** with God? No.

They are **unconverted**, **self-reliant** believers. Believe from a **distance** - no **personal** experience. **Many** who come to **church** are unchanged or **unconverted** believers, **not atheists**, don't **deny** god, but **no personal** experience.

James 2:19 “Do you still think it’s enough just to believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror!”

The primary reason God allows struggle is to help people turn to God; to teach them the futility of self-reliance. *“I don’t have any bread”* - this woman is destitute.

If she’d had a credit card, she could have delayed the inevitable. Our society has developed an extravagant system of credit that allows us to delay this confrontation with helplessness.

This woman has arrived at a very important point of crisis - her pride is gone. She readily admits she has no hope. What little is left is about to be consumed and there is no more. We as people don’t generally turn to God until all other alternatives have been exhausted.

You’ve possibly heard the story of the tourist who stopped at a turn-out on a mountain road to snap a picture of the breathtaking view of the valley below. As he approached the edge of the cliff, suddenly the ground gave way beneath his feet.

He frantically turned just in time to grab a root that was sticking out of the side of the mountain. There, dangling between sky and certain death he began to yell for help; but no one was around to hear. In desperation he cries out, *“Oh God, help me.”*

A deep voice from the clouds above answers, *“Just let go, John, and trust me.”* Hesitating only a moment to contemplate his situation, the man responds, *“Is there anybody else up there who can help me?”*

As long as there is anyone or anything else to put our trust in, we will. This woman had nothing left. She had to let go and trust.

#4 - MIRACLES OFTEN REQUIRE A STEP OF FAITH. v.13

V.13 Elijah says to her, “Don’t be afraid! Go ahead and cook that ‘last meal,’ but bake me a little loaf of bread first. Afterward there will still be enough food for you and your son.”

Whoa! Do you hear what he asked? Fix me something to eat first. She only has a little left, and Elijah asks her to feed him first! She could have easily argued, *“women & children first,”* or *“charity begins at home.”*

But remember, God has already spoken to the widow and told her she is to feed Elijah. This is her test of faith - *“let go and trust me.”*

Someone has said, *“Giving to God is not only a debt we owe, but a seed we sow.”* A farmer must be willing to plant seed if he ever expects a harvest. If he eats his seed in winter there’ll be no planting in spring or crop in summer.

29 x’s in the Bible God speaks to us about *“first fruits”*

2 Chronicles 31:5 (NIV) "...the Israelites generously gave the firstfruits of their grain, new wine, oil and honey and all that the fields produced. They brought a great amount, a tithe of everything."

What are **firstfruits**? That's what's gathered at the **beginning** of harvest, **not** at the end. **First fruits** means giving to **God first** – like he asked the **widow**.

Jesus said, "**But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**"

I get paid twice each month. I used to **write** my **tithe** for the month out of my **first** check. Now that's **no big deal**, but **to me** it represented **firstfruits**. Now I pay **online** and it comes out automatically.

Why is that important? Because it **not** very **honoring** to God to give him what's **left over**, but **rather**, we should give to Him **first**.

#5 - INHERENT IN GOD'S COMMANDS IS AN ENABLEMENT TO OBEY.

The **flour** was **not used up** and the jug of **oil** did not run dry. Paul said, Philippians 4:13 "**I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.**" God will **never ask** of you, that which he does not **first provide**, both **strength** and **resources**. Do you believe that?

#6 - GOD REWARDS FAITH AND OBEDIENCE.

Luke 6:38 "**If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use in giving—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you.**"

In v.15 we get the **test results**. **Will** she do it? Will she **trust** God? Will she take that **little** that she had and use it as **seed**? The **widow did** what God had told her to do and God **provided miraculously** for her, her family and Elijah until the **famine** was **over**. The widow **personally** placed her **faith in** God and found Him **trustworthy**.

FOUR BRIDGES TO GOD'S PROVISION

1ST BRIDGE: BELIEVE IN THE BENEVOLENT CHARACTER OF GOD.

Until Elijah came and the widow had **not heard** the word of the Lord, she had **no chance** of rescue.

Romans 10:14 "**How can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?**"

Marc Nuttle, an economic **advisor** who just happens to be a **Christian** believes that the **church** and **Christians** should **prepare** for a great **harvest** of souls during the **imminent** financial disaster.

We should be **fiscally prudent**, so we can be **financially generous**, demonstrating Christ like **compassion** and love when people around us are **struggling** and are in desperate **need** of help.

This will provide an **unprecedented** chance to **demonstrate** our **faith** in God's **provision**, but we will **need** to be **faithful** people to experience the **divine provision**.

2ND BRIDGE: UNDERSTAND THE TOTAL SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

Deuteronomy 8:18 (NIV) "**Remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.**"

We **dare not** forget that it is **God alone** who blesses and gives **prosperity**. **Once** we begin to think that it **comes** from **us** or **anywhere** else we are in **danger** of losing it all.

3RD BRIDGE: OBEY THE COMMANDS OF GOD TO GIVE.

If Elijah had **disobeyed** and not gone to Zarephath **or** if the **widow** had been **unwilling** to obey the command she had received from God, there would have been **no miracle**. We put ourselves into a **position** to receive God's miracles **when** we **obey** him.

Exodus 20:6(TLB) "**I lavish my love upon thousands of those who love me and obey my commandments.**"

Isaiah 1:19 "**If you will only obey me and let me help you, then you will have plenty to eat.**"

On **Tuesday** of this week we had **11 turkeys** in our freezer for our Thanksgiving **distribution** of food. **105 families** came to the **pantry** on Friday and **each one** received a **turkey** or **game hen** depending on the **family size**.

4TH BRIDGE: HAVE FAITH THAT GOD WILL COME THROUGH.

V.13 The widow **was afraid** she and her son were about to **die**. **God** had instructed her to **give away** her last meal. Elijah reassures her, "**Don't be afraid, God will provide.**" But, you'll **never** be able to see God's miraculous provision unless you put your **faith** in him.

Psalms 34:8,10 (TLB) "**...Put God to the test and see how kind He is! See for yourself the way His mercies shower down on all who trust in Him. Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry, but those of us who reverence the Lord will never lack any good thing.**"

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

Some of you are crying out to God, “I **need more** money!” and **God** is saying a “**No** you don’t. **If** you needed more, **I’d give** your more. What you **really need** is to learn **contentment**. What you need is to learn to be **grateful**. To be **faithful** in **giving** from what you have. I **can’t give** you any more until you first **learn** these important lessons.”

In times of **drought**, one of the **first things** some people **stop** is **giving** to **God**, and that’s a **big mistake**, as our **story** this morning **illustrates**.

But as **we** are **faithful**, we are going to be a **blessed** people. Our **church** will be blessed. Our **families** will be blessed. And, our **community**, many, like the **widow** of Zeraphath, who didn’t yet know God personally, will be blessed. As **surely** as our God **lives**, he will be **faithful!**