

MENSA OTABIL



GO BORROW VESSELS

Turning Your Liabilities Into Assets

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Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptural references are from the New King James Version of the Holy Bible.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all dreamers, entrepreneurs, and people daring to discover their God-given potential. May you utilize your gifts, transform your life, and impact the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all who inspired and contributed to this book.

Special thanks to:

E rinn Ofori for the editorial work.

E dwin Ato Dadson for the page setting. N ana Kwadwo Duah of Oxygen for
the cover

THE STORY

The lessons of this book are extracted from a close reading of the story of Elisha and the widow, found in 2 Kings 4: 1-7. There are many lessons we can take from this passage; however, the central illustration that the story reveals is about God's ability to provide for us in spite of the challenges and difficulties that we encounter, and the limitations that we may have. God is able to supply our needs, often in miraculous ways, and as we analyze the scripture, we shall discover His process. Our foundational text reads:

¹ A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves. ² So Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil." ³ Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. ⁴ And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones." ⁵ So she went from him and shut the door and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out. ⁶ Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another vessel." So the oil ceased. ⁷ Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest ." 2 Kings 4: 1-7

If you are in a situation like the widow's, where you feel down and out, this book is intended to help you. If you are dealing with a problem that seems so complex, so overwhelming, and all-encompassing that you don't know where to turn, then this book is for you. Be encouraged by the widow's story; that in those moments when you feel powerless to change your situation, there is hope for transformation. It is in those moments when you feel broken, and your ego is bruised and humbled, that you are in a good position to receive the grace, mercy, and miracles that only God can deliver. If you can relate to the widow in this

story, and feel like you have nothing but a small, and seemingly insignificant thing to offer, then you should rejoice, because if you choose to rely on God, and exercise faith and obedience to His word, you may very well be on your way towards seeing the power and favor of God in your life .

A Complex Set Of Problems

Have you ever noticed that in life problems often come in groups? They don't usually appear at your door one at a time; they invite their cousins and friends along with them. While you are trying to get a grip on one situation, another one springs up, followed by yet another, lending credence to the adage that “when it rains, it pours”. Dealing with a cluster of problems is not always easy. Many times the situation gets very complicated and overwhelming. This was the situation the widow was in.

Here was a woman who was confronted simultaneously by various challenges in her life. First of all, she lost her husband. Unfortunately, while she was mourning and expecting people to have sympathy for her, the problem became compounded by other factors. In addition to being widowed, we learn that she was in debt. Her children were about to be taken away from her; she was suffering shame in her community; and she was frustrated with God. She was going through a crisis of huge proportions. So she went to the prophet Elisha, who used to be her now-deceased husband's boss, and presented her dilemma to him, seeking a way out.

I believe that we can all identify with this woman, because we all face complex and complicated problems at various points in our lives. We can break down the widow's problems into five different issues:

1. Personal Pain

The widow's first issue was that she was suffering personal pain. She had just lost her husband. Although we are not told how long it had been since her husband died, it seems as if it hadn't been long because at this stage of the story she was still grieving. She was crying because she had suffered a tragedy. The breadwinner of her home, her lover, and her friend had left her, and she was mourning. So she was going through her own personal pain. That was her first problem.

2. Financial Crisis

Her second problem was a financial crisis. She had inherited all the debt that

her husband owed. He apparently couldn't settle the debts while he was alive, so when he died, the creditors were aggressively trying to collect their payments. If we consider the context of the world in which this woman lived, we can see why this would cause her to despair. In those days, the man was the ultimate breadwinner. He was the only one who brought in the money to sustain the family. Therefore, if their family couldn't pay their debts while the breadwinner was alive and earning an income, how could she possibly settle them on her own, now that he had died? This was her financial crisis, and her second problem.

3. Domestic Nightmare

As if the first two problems were not enough, the widow's third problem was a domestic nightmare. She was about to lose her children. The creditors were coming to take them away to work off her husband's outstanding debts. Can you imagine that? She had already lost her husband, she's financially bankrupt, and her children were going to be taken away from her. She must have felt like she was being reduced to nothing. With this domestic problem, she must have been thinking: *What is going to happen when my two boys are taken away from me? They're all I have.*

4. Social Stigma

The widow's fourth problem was the resulting social stigma. If you know anything about debt, you know that when you owe money, you are not granted much honor or respect. Though you are already ashamed, people sometimes speak things about you that make you feel even worse. It can be a terribly humiliating position to be in. There is a stigma and sense of inferiority attached to being indebted to someone. So along with all the other burdens she was carrying, this social stigma was another among them.

5. Spiritual Disappointment

Fifthly, the widow was disappointed with God, and that was her most difficult problem. She was dismayed by the fact that her husband had diligently served the Lord for so long, yet now his family didn't know where their next meal would come from. She was frustrated with God for not protecting their family from the crisis they were in, if for nothing else she thought, out of recognition for her husband's service. After all, God had used him, and after working diligently for God for so long, the widow felt that God had abandoned her husband and their family. Not only did she feel God had abandoned her, but she believed the church had abandoned her as well. This was the nature of her

spiritual disappointment.

Where To Turn?

As we look at all of these issues, we may ask: How many problems can one woman carry? She's disappointed, there is a social stigma, she has this domestic situation where her children are going to be taken away, she has a financial problem, and she's crying as a widow. But there she is, and she goes to the only place where she thinks she can receive some help. She couldn't get help from her community, and she didn't get help from the church. It seemed as if God would not help her, and her husband hadn't left her the resources to manage any of her troubles. So as a last resort, she goes to her husband's boss, Elisha.

In those days, there was a school of prophets, and Elisha was the Head. Naturally, the widow went to the boss, who was a man of God. She narrated her problems to Elisha believing that he could do something to help. Because Elisha was a prophet, the woman expected him to have spiritual power and to solve her problem. In a case like this, one would expect such a prophet to either pray, lay hands on her, or to give her some financial help. These were the obvious responses most people would have expected from Elisha; however, he didn't pray, and he didn't give her money.

Elisha's Unusual Response

Elisha responded in the most unusual way. He responded to the woman's misery not with solutions, but with questions. Have you ever been in a situation where you have problems, and you want somebody to help you and the person asks you questions? You might think to yourself, *I'm suffering here, and you're asking me questions. If I knew the answer do you think I'd be coming to you for help ?*

Elisha asked two interesting questions that are worth examining:

What shall I do for you?

What do you have in your house?

The first question was centered on what the widow was asking of Elisha. He was probing to find out what she thought he was capable of, or responsible for. The focus was on his capacity to help. However, the second question had nothing to do with Elisha. The question: What do you have in your house? was focused on the woman's capacity to help herself.

Imagine you are in a situation similar to this woman's and you book an appointment with your pastor. Once you are sitting in his office, crying and saying: *Pastor, please listen to me, I have these problems, and I owe money. The creditor is coming, I'm being evicted, and my children are in trouble. I feel God has abandoned me.* You tell the pastor a very moving tale of woes, and the pastor asks you two questions: *What shall I do for you, and what do you have in your house?* Which of these questions would you answer?

I imagine it would be the first one. That's the natural inclination. Perhaps all you even heard was *What shall I do for you?* It's very possible that you stopped listening after that question was rendered, and began preparing to respond with what you want him to do for you. It's possible that after that question your mind immediately started speaking: *Pastor, pray for me; or talk to someone for me; or help me; or give me some capital.* If it isn't the case that you didn't hear the second question, then perhaps you didn't understand it. You may have heard, *What do you have in your house?* and thought to yourself, *What does that have to do with anything?* Either way, I feel safe in assuming that you would answer the first question. I believe even I would answer the first question. It is the logical question to respond to because the expectation is that what you went to the pastor for in the first place was help. So if the pastor asks, *What shall I do for you?*, you'd logically say, *Give me this*, whatever “this” is for you at that time. But notice that the woman didn't answer the first question.

“I have nothing but...”

So Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?” And she said, “Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil.” 2 Kings 4:2

When the widow began to respond to Elisha's questions, she started by saying, “I have nothing but.” Then she had a realization. All of a sudden she realized that yes, her husband was gone; true, he didn't leave any money behind; and yes, the creditors were threatening to take her children from her. However, as she was thinking about all that she didn't have, she started constructing a sentence, and she said, “I have nothing... *but*”, and changed the direction of her response.

Let's pause here to think about the significance of that one word. Anytime you introduce the word “but” into a phrase, you are negating everything you said before it. So when you say, “I have nothing but”, it means what you are going to say next will nullify what you said before “but”.

For example, has anyone ever said to you something like, *You know, I like the way you dress; you are so handsome and all of that, but...*? The moment they interject “but” after everything they like, it means they are going to tell you something they don't like, which, to them, is more important than all the things they like. Isn't it true?

So when you are saying, *I have nothing but*, it means you are going to talk about what you have, not what you don't have. It simply means that although you may be without something you need critically, you have now had a realization of what you do possess. When you are submerged in a difficult situation and you don't see the way out, this is how we should learn to talk. When you are complaining about your problems and you say, *Oh life is hard, and the economy is bad, follow the statement with But...there is always a way, or God has always provided, things always work out in the end.*

When we make statements like, *Well, I'm 45 and I'm not married but...; We have been married for ten years and we have no children but...; I just went for an interview and I was turned down but...; I took my exam and I failed but...*, we are pausing to introduce a new concept. Until you introduce the word “but” the negative statement will be in control. However, when you say “but” you are saying that in spite of this, there is another way; this is not the end. The reason this works is because when you state the affirmative, it cancels the negative. The power of your words can speak life into what you are saying. Declaring *I have nothing but*, focuses the power of your words on what you have, rather than giving power to your deficiency.

The woman in this passage must have been thinking to herself, *I've lost my husband; I have nothing. I have no money; I have nothing. I may even lose my children; I have nothing. My relatives have forgotten me since my husband died; I have nothing, but...* Fortunately for her, she remembered, *I do have something*, and she tells Elisha, *I have a jar of oil*. Looking at her situation it seemed like she had nothing, yet there was something there after all.

Likewise, it may appear from all angles that in your own situation you have nothing, *but* you always have something. God is a God of abundance. He is a giver, not a taker. He is faithful and merciful, and He has left no one empty. In the Parable of the Talents ¹, every single person had something. Even the one with the least number of talents had one. The challenge for anyone in a dire situation is to understand that God has not left you with nothing. Something is there if only you are willing to look for it.

You have to train your eye to identify what it is that you have within you that can be the key to your transformation. This can be difficult for a person whose eyes have been trained to observe what is missing in their lives. If you come from circumstances where you are always without what you need, being overly aware of that void can become more pronounced in your mind's eye than the things you have in abundance .

The widow remembered that she had something. Now, why was it important for her to discover what she had? After all, the oil that she had in a jar was not in any volume that would seem important. It was a jar of oil that she had, not a big drum. Can you imagine how she would sound to people ? *I have all these problems but I have a little bottle of oil.* To the people around her, she may have seemed crazy to make such a small observation in the midst of such huge problems. However, this is what she realized. She said, *I have nothing but I have this bottle of oil. It may be small and domestic, but it could be the beginning of the process of change in my life.* Anybody could have overlooked the jar of oil, because it wasn't a barrel of oil, it was just a jar of oil; it was just for domestic consumption, but even in the midst of staggering deficiency, the widow was still able to see the abundance in her life. She said, *I have this jar of oil, and it's available. It's in my house, and it can be used.*

That's how you must look at your situation. Whatever it is, you have to identify what you have, even if it seems insignificant. You have to be able to say, *I have nothing, but...I can sing, or I can paint; I make excellent pies, or I relate well with people.* Whatever it is, it may not seem valuable on a grand scale, but it is valuable to somebody, somewhere. First, you must discover what you have, and then you must figure out who might want or need it. Recognize that it is your jar of oil. It is what's available to you, and therefore it can be used .

GOD'S 3-PART TURNAROUND PROCESS

The widow realized that although it felt like she had nothing, she did have something of value. It wasn't the most valuable commodity, but it had a certain market value; it was readily available, and it could be used. With that acknowledgement, the miracle of change and transformation began in her life. Do you know it doesn't take much for God to turn around your situation? There are three basic ingredients in God's turnaround process.

1. The Creative Word— The first ingredient in God's turn around process is the release of the creative word. What God brings to the equation is His Word. In the story here, the creative word was spoken through Elisha when he said, *Go*

borrow vessels. That was the solution that God provided via Elisha to the widow. In this case, the creative word did not tell the outcome, but the outcome rested in her obedience to the word she was given.

2. The Jar Of Oil— The second part in God's turnaround process is the jar of oil, and it represents your input. Metaphorically, the jar of oil is what you bring to the table, or what you have that is useful to your situation. First, God brings something to the table, then you also need to bring something to the table.

3. Borrowed Vessels— The third ingredient is borrowed vessels. That is what others bring to the table to help magnify or multiply your oil .

In sum, for God to turn around your situation there is a God part, there is your part, and there is other people's part. The key is learning to mix all of these things in proper proportion. God's part is not your job. Your part is not other people's job. You have to know that other people cannot be God, not even His messengers. Likewise, God will not do the part that is meant for you.

Know Your Part

God's part is the Word. What Elisha spoke to the widow was the prophetic word. What the woman had—her jar of oil—though not much, was her contribution. And finally, what other people had—the empty vessels—completed the formula. It is when these three things come together, that God starts the process of transformation in our lives, and I believe that what God did for this woman, He can do for us.

What I have seen most often is that in our despair we expect miraculous feats from other human beings and we want them to play the role of God. When that is not the case, then we want God to play our role. We say we are “giving it to God” at inappropriate times. It is not advisable to give a situation up to God, when God has already equipped us with the tools to handle it ourselves. God will only do what you and others cannot. He already has His role; other people have their role, and you have your role.

Remember this anytime you are in a crisis: you can't solve every problem by yourself; you need people. But don't develop a need for others to play your role. You need people to play their role, and for you to play your role, and God will play His role. The three together is what produces the miracle.

That's what Elisha was teaching this woman to do, and we are all made wiser if we can learn this lesson as well. He was teaching her the way to financial

independence. Though he gave her the option with his first question, Elisha didn't want to give the widow money, or a quick fix, just for her to come back to him for more in the following week, or month, or year. Doing so would have developed a dependency in her that anytime she had a need, she would come to Elisha instead of trying to provide for herself.

Help, Don't Handicap

Some individuals feel important and powerful when people come to them for help. However, the best help you can give to anybody is to help them become financially, or emotionally independent from you, so the person doesn't always have to lean on you when they have a problem.

Even if you work as a counselor, you have to be careful of this. As a pastor, I counsel many people, but I don't want them to always come to me with the same problem. What often happens is, I will say, *Let me pray for you: in the name of Jesus I pray, and I cast out every spirit of sorrow from you in Jesus name.* The person will respond, with gratitude and good cheer, but two weeks later, they are back in my office again, weeping. Again, I say, *Bring your head; in the name of Jesus I cast out the spirit of sorrow. Go, in Jesus name. Be whole.* And again, the person says, *Pastor, you've made my day; I'm so happy.* And then two weeks later the same thing. That's not what I want. I want to be able to take that person, and teach them how to deal with the situation, so when they encounter another difficult situation, they will have the tools to solve the problem for themselves. What Elisha was saying to the widow was that it was not about what he could do for her. What she possessed was what they could work with. They started with what she had. In the next chapter, let's take a closer look at how to discover what you have, so you can find your own jar of oil.

CHAPTER 1

FINDING YOUR FLOW

Discovering, Positioning And Utilizing Your Oil

For some people, recognizing what they have is the hardest part, and sadly, there are people who never discover their oil at all. They live their lives doing things outside of their “flow”, which makes life harder and less fulfilling than it needs to be. Some of this has to do with the generation in which they were born, and sometimes it has to do with the value-system they inherit from their family or society. Until recently, the discourse about life was that you must find a “good job”. The focus was not on whether the job you found was a “good fit” for you as an individual. People were targeting careers and engaging in vocations for all the wrong reasons and found that they dreaded or even hated them. Job security, the state of the market, and earning potential were all understandable factors among the things considered. More recently, however, there has been a shift towards focusing on one's calling, passion and fulfillment. People are becoming less inclined to take up careers that add income to their lives, and nothing else .

It is good that this shift is part of the popular discourse on work and career, because it is closer to God's idea about the matter. Whenever we are in line with God's plans, we can expect good things to follow. To get in tune with His specific plan for our lives, we must know what talents, ideas and interests He has blessed us with because that is always a clear indication of our divine purpose. To get a better grasp of this, we must inspect what we have in our house by figuring out what oil God has given us.

EXAMINING WHAT'S IN YOUR HOUSE: 4 WAYS TO DISCOVER YOUR OIL

1. Focus On What You Have

The first step to discovering your oil is to **focus on what you have, not on what you don't have**. There is no easier way to keep the knowledge of your oil elusive to you than to focus on *the I-have-nothing* perspective. Don't begin to list the things you are not good at, and things that are a challenge for you. Your eyes will become programmed to see inadequacy in yourself, which is a deathblow to healthy self-esteem. Such a habit will surely blind you to your gifts. Instead,

focus on what you do have, and what you do well. Everybody is good at something, and everybody has something to offer.

2. Acknowledge Possibility

Acts 3:4-8 illustrates for us the power of acknowledging possibility in the story of Peter and John's encounter with the beggar. It reads:

⁴ And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." ⁵ So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

Notice the parallels in this account to the widow's story. Peter says, *Silver and gold I do not have, but...* Again we see the word "but" following an admission of what someone does not have. Already we know the significance of the word "but" is that it negates what is said prior to it, and the real importance lies in what follows. Peter continues by saying, *But what I do have I give to you.* Here, the word "but" is again a pivotal point. It changed the course of possibility for Peter and the beggar. Before the "but", Peter could only disappoint the man, and leave him in the same state he was in before he encountered Peter. However, marvelous possibility was injected into the situation when Peter's response shifted to what he did have. That was the entry point for God to work through Peter's gift.

In both this story and the story of the widow, miracles weren't received by dwelling on what was lacking. In each case, God worked with what they had in order to perform the miracles that the beggar and the widow needed. Peter didn't say, *I don't have any silver or gold*, then all of a sudden silver and gold sprang out of thin air. He said, *What I do have, I give in the name of Jesus.* What he did possess was an anointed command over affliction, so when he commanded the crippled beggar to get up and walk, God empowered Peter's words and the man stood strong.

The widow didn't just sit lamenting about having nothing, and then miraculously sellable commodities appeared in her home. She gave God room to show His love, power and abundance when she acknowledged that He had blessed her with a jar of oil. As a result, God caused that jar to flow until she ran out of receptacles into which to pour its oil.

What we learn from Peter and the widow is that God works miracles when you acknowledge what you have, not when your sight is fixed on what you don't have. When faced with complex problems, we truly only have two options. We can:

- **Complain about what we lack, or**
- **Focus on what we have**

It's that simple, but it makes all the difference. Ask yourself this question: *Car I see what I have, or am I blinded by what I don't have?* If you don't know what your oil is, now is the time to acknowledge the amazing possibilities God brings into our lives.

3. Look Within

The next step towards discovering your gift is to examine yourself carefully. **Look within to your natural affinities, abilities, and interests.** Your oil is housed within you. It is definitely there. You are the jar that God placed it in, and when Elisha asked, *What do you have in the house?*, the question was a metaphor pointing to what resides within you.

Take a good look at what resides within you:

- What comes easily to you, without formal training?
- What generates enthusiasm within you and towards
- What brings you joy and satisfaction?
- What flows easily for you? What can you do for hours and lose complete track of time in the joy of it?

4. Examine Experience

The fourth step is to examine your life experiences. As hard as it may be to accept, nothing you've been through is accidental. It is your destiny, all of it—the good, the bad, and even the ugly. The sooner you can accept that, the sooner you can get on with the task of discovering your oil. How do we do this?

Identify The Experiences That Have Shaped Your Life

There are things we go through that don't make sense when we are going through them. Behind the potential confusion, hurt or disappointment of the situation, God had a purpose for it. It was in divine order. God does not put us in senseless situations.

For example, this means that who your parents are is not an accident. Where you were born was not an accident. The color of your skin was not an accident. Whatever your particular circumstances are, they all contribute to developing something unique in you that you will use to deliver something to the world. Even your mistakes work together for your good and towards your purpose in life. It may not seem to be so at the time, but remember Joseph. His brothers sold him into slavery. Surely no one in his position would ever think there was any sense in that experience, but in the end Joseph recognized that although his brothers meant it for evil, God used his enslavement for good. What a blessing that we serve a God who is so merciful that He can take our most painful experiences, and use them to elevate us.

Distinguish Your Tools From Your Gifts

There is a difference between our tools and our gifts. We all have formal and informal training. In itself, your training is not your gift, so we must not confuse it with our oil. That internship, your PhD, or the years you spent as an understudy to a respected expert in your field, is not oil. As great an accomplishment as it may be to get an education, it is not your gift; it is a tool. Still, don't discount education and work experience. All that you have learned and been trained in may be necessary to complement your oil, so pay special attention to your abilities or interests that have a common link to your training.

For example, the Apostle Paul was trained as a lawyer and a scholar, yet his oil was to minister to people. His knowledge was respectable, but it wasn't his oil. Even though his training was just a set of acquired skills, they came in handy when he used them in writing much of the New Testament. Like the Apostle Paul, your own education and training may complement your gifts and aid you in making use of your oil .

DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE JAR AND THE OIL

As you begin to look for your oil, you must know what you are looking for. You must know the difference between what your oil is, and what it is not. The widow did not say she had a jar, she said she had a jar of *oil* . She knew that the key was not the jar; rather, it was the substance inside of it. Therefore, in discovering your own oil, you must first know the differences between containers and content—jars and oil.

One of the components you need for a turnaround process is what the widow had—the jar of oil. Let us first take note of how this is described; it's called the jar of oil, and it consists of two parts:

- the jar, and
- the oil

Both play an important role. The Scripture didn't say oil alone. It said a jar of oil, which means that both the jar and the oil are significant. We will examine the jar and its relationship to the oil in greater detail in a later chapter, but for now let's just look at it briefly.

The jar is the vessel that houses the oil. Everyone has his or her own jar and his or her own oil. Metaphorically speaking, the jar is a container. Applied to us as individuals, the jar is us. All that we are, is what holds our oil. Naturally then, we must examine ourselves not only to see what kind of oil is contained within us, but also what kind of jar we are holding it in.

The oil represents our inborn talents, natural skills and ideas. Every one of us has inborn gifts, talents and ideas. They are there, even if we don't know it. God wired something unique into our DNA when we were being formed in our mother's womb. For some people, it is more apparent what that something is, but everyone in this world has gifts that are unique to them. It is our oil, and it is what we must use to flow in life.

Other Characteristics Of The Oil:

- **It is God's investment in you.** God imparts talents to you as an investment. He has a purpose for your life, and He expects a return on what He has put into you.
- **It is a clue to your calling.** Your oil is the gift God has given you, and is linked to the purpose He has placed on your life.
- **It is your strength and advantage in life.** Your oil is what sets you apart from others and gives you a leading edge. Your strengths and talents are what make you unique.

The Boldness To Believe

Your jar of oil may not be much to start with. Remember, the widow had huge responsibilities, which it seemed she had inadequate resources to fulfill. But then she remembered she had a jar of oil, and she was audacious enough to believe that her little jar of oil could solve her complex problems.

We should also have that kind of audacity; to know that our complex problems can be solved by a little, tiny thing, like an idea, or ability we have. It can solve our problems because it's our jar of oil. God poured it into us, and

although it may be small, and it may be all we have, it will be enough to solve our problems. You must have faith like the widow; to know that although you may not have parents; you may not have a husband; you may not have a wife; you may not have children; you may not have an education; and you may not have wealth, but you will always have your jar of oil. It is inborn. God gave it to you, and it can be used to meet your needs.

That's what the widow remembered. She said, *I have lost everything—my husband, my money, my dignity; I'm losing my children but God left me something to work with.* The task for us is to find our jar of oil so that we can see, and then use what we possess to improve our own complex situations.

The 3 Things We Must Do With Our Jar of Oil

1. Discover It.

As we have already explained, you must discover your oil. You must know what it is that you have to work with. Had the widow not recognized that she had oil, she would have stopped at her initial statement, *I have nothing.* There isn't much you can do to develop nothing. We all have something, and our first task is to find it. The sooner you find your oil, the closer you will be to having the life God intends for you .

2. Position It.

Secondly, you must position your oil. You must learn how to package it and where to present it. The widow was instructed to borrow vessels so that she could present her oil in a more marketable way than in the small, single jar she had it in. Too many of us keep our oil tucked away in little jars where no one can see its worth. Sometimes the jars we've placed our oil in even lower our own estimation of its worth. The presentation of our oil is very important.

3. Use It.

Discovery and positioning are useless without doing something with the oil. Elisha didn't tell the widow to borrow vessels and fill them so she could decorate her house. He told her to sell them. In the marketplace of her time, there were people who had a need for oil, and the widow certainly had a need for money, so Elisha's instruction made perfect sense. We have to make our oil beneficial to ourselves and to others. That is why God has blessed us with the gifts He's given us.

We mentioned that both the jar and the oil are important. The reason why the

oil is so important is because it is your true key to success. The reason why the jar is so important is because it shapes your oil, and thus determines the reach of your potential. If your key has been cast to open the door of disappointing outcomes, you will be disappointed in life. If your key has been cast to open the door to possibilities, then your oil has a better chance of earning you the kind of life you want. In most cases, the problem is not your oil; its the container that your oil is shaped by. Let's now turn to this concept in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROBLEM IS NOT YOUR OIL

Most of the time, God has no problem with the ideas we have, or the gifts He has given to us. Often, the problem is how we have packaged what He has given us. Elisha saw the widow's problem not as an oil problem; she had oil. The problem, he said, was her vessel. People have gifts, originality, talents and skills, but aren't able to elevate them to work at a higher capacity because the containers they have molded themselves to fit are inadequate for reaching their potential.

The widow's first response to Elisha's question, *What do you have?*, was that she had nothing. Already, this tells us how she viewed her jar of oil. Saying first that she had nothing, before mentioning the jar of oil reflects her own negative evaluation and also “packages” her oil to Elisha in a way that devalues it. So Elisha says to the woman, *Go borrow vessels*. In other words, he saw how small and limited she viewed and treated her oil. His command instructed her to repackage her gift in a way that displays its value. What you have is a gift, and you must present it as such. It is vital that we present what we are endowed with in a way that will make it desirable to others .

What Are Borrowed Vessels?

Borrowed vessels are the systems, methods and platforms of other people. They are tools others have acquired which we can use to advance the vision and ideas that God has given to us. Each one of us has been given some specific gift, talent, or ability that nobody can take away from us, but sometimes we don't know how to use them well. In order to use them, we have to get something from other people, and that is where the vessels come in. They are not ours, but we need them to stretch our oil.

Once we have our part, we need other people to bring their part—their knowledge, systems, platforms, institutions, lessons, and experiences. We can use all of these. Elisha said the problem is not the oil. You have the oil, but for it to reflect its worth, you must go and borrow vessels. He didn't say go and borrow oil, because the oil that you already have is your key to success. Instead of borrowing what you already have, go and borrow vessels, which is where

your problem lies.

In truth, it is not possible to borrow someone else's oil. You cannot borrow my gift. My gift is my gift. But although you can't borrow my gift, you can borrow my methods. You can learn from my technique and the way I do things, but you can't learn to be who I am. My gift is my gift; your gift is your gift. It's the oil that God gave for you to work with.

DEFINE YOURSELF ACCORDING TO YOUR ADVANTAGE, NOT YOUR DISADVANTAGE

There is a story I like to tell about a documentary that made such a profound impact on me. It was about a young boy, born as a twin, who was deformed physically, handicapped mentally, and blind visually. He has these multiple challenges because when they were in the mother's womb, he did not get adequate oxygen and nutrition, because it went to the other twin. As a result, this boy was born weighing less than 2 lbs., *but he survived*. Strangely enough, however, the other twin who had all the oxygen and nutrients, died.

It was only once the surviving boy grew a little, that they discovered he was deformed, blind and mentally handicapped. He was the kind of person that if you saw him somewhere you would ask, *Why would God let a person be born like this?* To most it might look like he was a waste of space, time, and energy.

Sometimes we see such people and view God as cruel because due to the boy's condition he couldn't do much. He didn't go to school, because he couldn't learn. He just roamed about the house. He had other siblings—one older than him, and one younger—and the parents obviously loved their child so much that they didn't put him in an institution. They kept him at home with the rest of the family. Everyone advised them to leave him somewhere, to live out his life.

The parents hired a music teacher who used to come to the house to teach the so-called normal children, the younger one and the older one, but they didn't bother to teach the boy with all the challenges. He would just be there doing nothing while his siblings had their lessons. One day the music teacher came and was trying hard to teach the younger brother a piece of music that he wasn't learning well. The teacher tried different approaches, but the younger brother wasn't getting it despite the teacher's efforts. After a while, they took a break and the music teacher, the student and the parents all moved away from the piano to another part of the house. Then the so-called “disabled” boy, who was sitting somewhere near the piano began to feel his way towards the piano and finally sat himself on the stool and started banging on the keys.

The parents heard it but they didn't bother him. They said let him have fun; he's not bothering anybody, so he kept banging, and banging random notes. He did this for a few minutes, but after a while, he started playing a melody. When the adults shifted their attention to the sound coming from the piano, they realized that what he was playing was what the teacher had been trying to teach the so-called normal brother. They sat listening in amazement as he played that melody. Then he started playing to perfection all the songs the teacher had been teaching over the weeks.

The family moved from the other room to see the spectacle of this so-called useless child playing music. Everyone was so moved by what they were seeing and hearing. The family and the teacher were in tears, and they came to sit by the boy. The teacher began to play another melody and waited to see what the boy would do. Whatever he played, the boy would play. Within a short time, the music lesson had shifted from the younger brother to him, and he was learning music.

The parents had lots of records of classical Beethoven, Strauss, Mozart, Handel, and many other great masters, so they began to play them. Whatever he heard, the boy would play back to them. Pretty soon he had played all the music in the house and they had to give him more. At the time the documentary was filmed, he was not only playing music, but he was also composing classical music of his own.

If you saw this boy you would say he had nothing, *but he had his jar of oil*. This goes to show that within each one of us—no matter who we are, no matter what our disadvantage is, no matter how down we are, there is something in us which we will never lose. You may lose your husband, you may lose your friends, you may lose your nationality, you may lose your job, but you will never lose your jar of oil.

The problem for this young boy was not the gift; it was the container. He wasn't able to get his gift out of his container because he had been cast into a limited category. When people saw his container—his disabilities—they underestimated what he could offer. His container was his body. They saw that he was blind, and they saw that he was deformed; so they said he had nothing. Meanwhile, his oil wanted an opportunity to display itself in a more beautiful vessel, so it could showcase its true worth.

Personalities, Self-Perception, And Labels

If the problem is not our oil, then it is our jars. We said before that our jars represent what we use to house, contain and mold our gifts. This includes our attitudes, self-esteem, personalities and character, and the ways we label and define ourselves. These elements are important for us to be conscious of because they shape and define our gifts, and therefore determine whether our oil is appealing or not .

If you are not able to deal with your containers—your labels, perceptions or descriptions of what you have—you may limit your oil, because where you put your oil is crucial to what you will or will not do with it. Ask yourself these questions:

- *Where am I keeping my gifts and ideas?*
- *How am I labeling my talents?*
- *Is the jar I am using limiting my oil?*
- *Is the system I am using limiting my ability?*
- *Have I stuffed my big gift into a small vessel?*

Like the widow, if your container is limited, your oil will not flow the way it should.

You Cannot Recreate Facebook

The young Mark Zuckerberg co-created the social networking platform called Facebook. It was a brilliant idea brought to fruition, and it may ultimately be his greatest achievement in life. That idea was his oil. Whether he is a Christian or not, God gave him that idea as well as the ability to manifest it into something real. I don't know the young man, but I imagine that Facebook has turned out to be bigger than what he initially imagined. Perhaps he visualized it in a smaller vessel. But the internet is a rather massive jar, so his oil continued to flow to fill it. That's how God's gifts work.

Creating Facebook was excellent oil to be blessed with. Many of us wish it were our oil, but it isn't, and we can't borrow it. The idea has already been developed, so what sense is there to do it again? However, Facebook has grown to be more than just a young man's oil. Now it is a vessel and a platform in its own right. It's true that you can't borrow Zuckerberg's oil, but you can borrow the vessel of Facebook in both productive, and of course, unproductive ways. On the positive side, you can use it to market your business, or to scout new clients. There are all sorts of useful and beneficial purposes you can find for other people's vessels that are available to you.

What Do Borrowed Vessels Do?

Borrowed vessels grow and expand your oil. They grow and expand your capacity. Your oil may be little now, but it can grow; it can expand. As your capacity expands, you must house it in more, and larger vessels.

Borrowed vessels modify and shape your oil. Have you noticed that oil is fluid, and whatever vessel you put it into, it takes the form of that vessel? So the borrowed vessel will shape and modify your oil. If it is large, your oil will become large. If it is far-reaching, placed in it, your oil will be far-reaching.

Borrowed vessels increase the value of your oil. The vessels did not belong to the widow. They belonged to other people. She was told to go around borrowing what others had, in order to better display and increase the value of her oil.

What should you do with borrowed vessels? You have to:

- Seek them, and
- learn how to use them.

Not all vessels will expand your oil. You must learn to find useful vessels and how to get the most growth out of them.

Jesus Borrowed Vessels

Did you know that in the Bible, Jesus Christ himself borrowed vessels? You say, **ah but Jesus had everything**. No, he didn't have everything. He borrowed vessels.

Remember when Jesus wanted to preach to people by the beach? If you are on the beach, normally as you get to the water, the land slopes downward towards the sea. Is that not so? When Jesus was talking on the beach, He was near the water, and at a lower height in relation to the people who were further inland. Jesus wanted an elevated position to speak to them so they could see and hear him well. He saw Peter, a fisherman, who was fishing in the ocean and He said to him, *Peter, give me your ship*. It was a borrowed vessel. Jesus had His oil; He had His anointing, and His message, but He took Peter's ship and added His oil to it. Placed on Peter's ship, Jesus was elevated; He could talk to the people, and in borrowing that vessel, increased the effectiveness and reach of His message.

Another example of Jesus borrowing vessels was when He was going to

Jerusalem. He had His mission; that was His oil. He knew from Heaven what He was supposed to do; He was supposed to die. But how to get there was not so certain, so He borrowed donkeys. They were not His donkeys; they were other people's donkeys, but He used what He had, and added it to what other people had, and it carried Him to His mission .

A third example was when Christ wanted to celebrate the Last Supper with His disciples. We call it communion. He wanted to have a meal with them but He had no space. He knew His mission, and He told the disciples to go and ask a certain man to lend his upper room to provide the space they needed. Jesus had his divine mission, plus someone else's upper room.

In the next chapter, we will turn to more modern day examples of how people have borrowed vessels in order to expand the reach of their oil.

CHAPTER 3

TWO EXAMPLES OF THOSE WHO BORROWED BIG

Billy Graham is a great modern example of someone who has properly borrowed vessels. Today his name is recognized throughout the Christian World and beyond, however he started out very small. When Graham was a young man in his early twenties, God used the Evangelist Bob Jones, Sr. to speak a creative word to him. Jones said to the young man, *You have a voice that pulls. God can use that voice of yours. He can use it mightily*². That was the seed that sparked the growth of Graham's ministry. He knew he was anointed and called of God but his ministry started at a small level until he saw possibility in larger vessels.

Graham's ministry service began while attending college in Minnesota, USA. He preached to various small campus audiences while there, and developed his skills. All the while, Graham held on to the creative word that had been spoken to him. With faith that God would use him in a greater capacity, he accepted a post as an evangelist for Youth for Christ International (YFCI). This was his first expansion, allowing him to spread his oil from the small campus audiences to ministering to young people throughout the US and Europe³. He borrowed the established platform of YFCI, and put the gift of his voice into its vessel in order to reach a wider audience.

Although he had secured a wider audience, Graham kept searching for bigger vessels to fill because he held on to the creative word that God had spoken to him. Reaching youth in Europe and the United States was good, but Graham believed God had more in store for his oil.

In 1944 God placed an opportunity before Graham to take over a struggling radio program⁴. Again, it was a bigger vessel than the Minnesota campus church, and had the potential to be bigger than his international ministry work as well. *His Hour of Decision* radio program did very well. In fact, it ran weekly for over 50 years, and reached listeners all around the world⁵, proving that his oil had not run out.

This was the pattern Graham followed throughout the rest of his career. He held on to the creative word that God had spoken to him. He didn't

underestimate how far God could stretch his talent, and he didn't confine his oil by labeling its limits. He just continued to borrow bigger vessels. Among the many vessels Graham has used to bring his ministry to the world, many of us are familiar with his Crusades. To make them so successful, Graham again had to borrow vessels. He borrowed tents, stadiums, parks and even whole streets in order to reach people with the gospel, and each time he filled them ⁶ .

Ultimately, as a result of the vessels he has borrowed, Billy Graham has preached to over 215 million people in 185 countries—more than anyone in history. He has had a lifetime audience totaling 2.2 billion as of 2008 ⁷ , and it is reported that he has won roughly 3.2 million souls for Christ.

Though Graham's growth is a ministry-related example, the concept of borrowing vessels has application wider than just the church. What the Bible teaches us, works everywhere. Since God's Word is universal truth, then it must have application outside the realm of ministry. It is true that we must understand the Bible for our spiritual lives, but then we must give it wider application.

Apple Seeds And Abundant Fruit

The growth of Apple Inc. is a good example from the business world of how borrowing vessels can enable a business turnaround. After a rough start from its beginning in 1976, Apple borrowed the concept of the Personal Computer (PC), an innovation first made by IBM. IBM's initial concept was for its machines to compute large amounts of numerical data, which was useful to big corporations, governments and universities, but was not appealing or affordable to the general public ⁹ .

Apple saw IBM's concept as a vessel, which they borrowed and poured their own innovative vision into. As a result, Apple came up with ways to both increase the functionality of PCs and to expand the base of potential buyers who would want to use them. Apple used its oil to also improve the overall purpose of the PC. Their innovations made PCs even more useful to both the corporate world, and the general user alike. Through the introduction of the floppy disc, they allowed computed data to be easily stored and transported, vastly increasing applications for computer technology which were not previously possible ¹⁰ .

Perhaps the biggest breakthrough for Apple was the way in which they borrowed GUI (graphic user interface) technology from Xerox, and combined it with the PC concept. Until this time, only specialized computer scientists knew the code commands required to make the computers work. Xerox had created a

system that used images and menus to make usage more accessible, though their innovation failed to get off the ground on its own. Apple saw an opportunity to expand their oil, and expanded on Xerox's graphic user interface concept to produce a commercially viable product. They introduced the computer mouse for easier function control, and continued to pour their oil into computer industry vessels. Later, Apple added color monitors, sound, and graphics for greater consumer appeal ¹¹ .

These developments revolutionized the entire computer technology industry, and Apple continued to borrow vessels to which it added its own oil of innovation. One in particular was the development of the Internet, which Apple utilized with iTunes and the online Apple store to increase and fuel the use of their products ¹² . Today Apple is one of the world's most successful businesses and the use of their products has become woven into the day-to-day lifestyles of people all around the world.

In these two examples, we see that Elisha's idea of borrowing vessels is a specific type of borrowing. It is borrowing with good vision, borrowing to allow your own oil of innovation to shine through. It is not like the borrowing that neighborhood families did when we were young. Some may remember when your mother was cooking and realized she was out of onion. She would tell you to go and ask the next-door neighbor if she could borrow some. Then, when she realizes that she was also out of pepper, she would tell you to ask the lady across the street for a few. There are people in this world who will borrow, and borrow, and make a whole meal with other people's ingredients. That's not the kind of borrowing we are talking about.

You have to know *how* to borrow and *what* to borrow, so you don't develop a habit of borrowing wrongly. It is good to borrow with vision, like Billy Graham and Apple, Inc; however, not every vessel is advisable to borrow. In the next chapter we will look at the difference, and uncover the art of borrowing.

CHAPTER 4

THE ART OF BORROWING VESSELS

Then he [Elisha] said, “Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few.” 2 Kings 4:3

Elisha gave the widow specific guidelines for what, and from where to borrow. The fact that he took time to elaborate so specifically signals a lesson to us that there must be wisdom and discretion guiding what, how and from whom we borrow.

Borrow From Everywhere

After telling the woman to borrow vessels, the first instruction Elisha gave was to borrow from everywhere. When we are borrowing, we must go beyond our home and our comfort zone to borrow from every field and discipline. No matter what we are doing, there are things we can learn from science, law, art, music, sports, and business. We can borrow from everywhere, because whatever God gives us will need containers of various forms. Sometimes the idea will be there, but you may not have every aspect of what you are trying to do covered, so you will need to borrow the vessels that can fill the void .

For example, I was listening to someone on TV saying, *I have a great product; my only problem is marketing*. Sometimes you have your oil, and it's a great product, but you don't market properly. In a case like that, you would be wise to borrow marketing tools. Marketing may not be your area of strength; however, it could make your area of strength even stronger. The key is not to remain in a narrow box. Identify your vessel problem, then look widely to identify what methods others with sound vessels have used, and apply them to your purpose.

Elisha said go borrow from everywhere; from every field, from every discipline. *I believe one of the important keys for everyone who wants to achieve success in life is that they must be multidisciplinary*. Yes, you may have grown in one particular area of endeavor, but you cannot be one-dimensional if you want to have success. I am a pastor, I must focus on spiritual growth and theological development, but I must also borrow vessels from science, business, law, and

music, so I can properly package what I have in order to be able to serve God's people better. I must borrow from everywhere.

Borrow From All Your Neighbors

Secondly, Elisha said to borrow from all your neighbors. I don't know the kind of neighbors this woman had. I'm sure some of them were male, some were female; some were young, some were old; some were rich, some were poor; some were educated, some were illiterate; some were noble people, some were servants, but combined they comprised her total network. He said borrow from all of them. You cannot tell who can give you the structure that will help you to develop the vision you have, so examine your entire network of friends, family, colleagues and acquaintances, and see who has vessels that can be of use to you.

Remember when Solomon, who was a wise man, went to God with a problem, and God told him to look to the ant? ¹³ That's a model from the Bible that teaches so much about so many areas of our lives. We can learn from everything around us; we can even learn from the behavior of ants.

Jesus Christ himself borrowed from all kinds of people; borrowed from everywhere. Do you know Jesus Christ, a carpenter by trade, used agriculture to teach about a spiritual truth? In Mark 4, He used the metaphor of a sower going out to sow, and though not all of the places where his seeds fell bore fruit, he persisted in planting until they landed on fertile ground. Jesus was teaching a spiritual truth about persistence, and finding the right vessels. He taught this lesson by borrowing from agricultural ideas.

Jesus also talked about talents as a metaphor to teach a lesson about commerce, business, and management ¹⁴ . He used new ideas from His environment to carry His teachings. If Jesus did it, then there is all the more reason for us to also borrow from everywhere. Borrow from all your neighbors because God can use rich people to help you, and He can also use poor people to help you. He can use old people to help you, but He can also use young people to help you. God can use men and women; professors and illiterates. If you are open to borrowing from all your neighbors, you can see value in everyone, and learn lessons from even the most unlikely sources .

Leaders Are Readers

Beyond our neighbors, we must look at other worthwhile vessel-borrowing avenues, especially books. Everyone who wants to rise high in life, must also read about those who have risen to remarkable heights. This is why I believe

every leader must also be a reader. Read biographies and autobiographies of great achievers. Read how-to's and self-help books written by those who have accomplished goals similar to yours. For some of us, all the knowledge we have is what is already in our heads. However, if you want to grow and really achieve great things for God, you must borrow other people's ideas. Read books. Read good books—not just something people have written that doesn't have substance. Read intelligent books. Reading is an excellent mental challenge because sometimes you will have to struggle to understand what you are reading. That will stretch you to grow your knowledge, comprehension and even your vocabulary. As you are reading, get a dictionary, and refer to words you don't understand. Develop your vocabulary. Develop your scope of understanding. Think creatively and seek innovative vessels to put your oil into.

What Elisha teaches us is that although God has blessed you with the perfect oil for your life, He has not necessarily blessed you with the perfect vessels. The perfect vessels are with someone else, and you have to borrow from them. Anytime you read a book, you've borrowed someone else's vessel. If you want to be a leader, read about the great leaders of the world in all disciplines—military leaders, political leaders, economic leaders, business leaders, fashion leaders, sports leaders, religious leaders. As a personal principle, I read a lot about leaders. I read about all types of leaders because I am the leader of our church, aspiring to improve all the time.

The people who come to church are not only looking for spiritual leadership. They are looking for leadership in all areas of life. You probably can't imagine the kinds of questions people ask. They don't only ask questions about the Bible; in fact, most people don't ask us directly about the Bible at all. For example, people often come to us to ask about how to solve marital problems. Though the counsel I give is based on Biblical principles, the questions people raise are not directly theological. My expertise is in Biblical principles, but what people come for is family therapy. Therefore, I must know something about family therapy. I must understand the dynamics of male-female relationships to enhance my explanation of the Biblical principle at the core of the issue; I must understand how societies are constructed. I must understand the construct of marriage and how it works. That is not theological. That is family therapy, psychology, and even sociology; however I must know it in order to execute my role well.

Wives come to me and say, *These days, when my husband comes home, he doesn't talk.* The theological approach would say, pray about it. I will certainly advise the wife to pray, but that advice alone might not satisfy her desire for a

solution. I must also understand the dynamics of human behavior to understand that when a man doesn't talk, it doesn't necessarily mean we should only pray about it, but there may be other causes which I can bring to light. Where did I get that technique and approach? I borrowed a vessel. How did I borrow it? By reading about family therapy and marital counseling.

People also come to me with business ideas. They want to invest in this or that venture, or they want to start a business, and they come to me, their pastor, asking what they should do. I'm not a businessman; I'm a reverend minister. I'm called *Pastor* Mensa Otabil, not *Businessman* Otabil, but people come to me hoping I will give them business ideas and sound advice, so I must have some guidelines. I may not be able to inform them or guide them specifically and technically, or as competently as a banker or veteran investor would. But I should be able to give them some guidance to help them to move closer to their aspirations, or recommend where they can go for more specialized counsel. If I had absolutely no knowledge of business and investing, all I could say is, *Bow your head, let's pray*.

Students come to me asking what they should study in the university, and what career they should pursue. I am not a career counselor, but those problems come to me. As a pastor who cares for his congregation I deal with all these things, and I want to be helpful to those who value my guidance and input. As a result, I can't afford to just stay in one discipline. I have to be multidisciplinary. We must all do this in order to serve the purpose God has placed on our lives. We must take the advice of Elisha, and go borrow vessels from all our neighbors .

Borrow Empty Vessels

Thirdly, Elisha said, borrow empty vessels. Make sure the vessels you borrow don't have other people's content in them. Don't borrow other people's achievements. That is poor borrowing, and the results won't last long. Instead, borrow the methods and processes they used to achieve their success. It is good to be inspired by what people have achieved, but beyond being inspired, what is more important is to learn how they achieved success. If you are inspired by someone, don't idolize them. Rather, you should study their methods and glean the principles behind their success so that you can incorporate them into your own practices and get to where you want to be.

The widow could not borrow other people's oil. If she had, it would have only delayed her process of facing and resolving her problems. She could only

borrow vessels—empty vessels. The prophet Elisha was very particular. In borrowing vessels, you must be careful not to borrow vessels full of other peoples' oil. Don't borrow another person's reputation, or their fame. Don't borrow other people's ideas or inventions. Instead, if they are more established than you, and are willing to loan you their platform, their facilities, or their referral, utilize only that. Utilize it to display your own creativity, talents, and skills so that their exposure will help you establish your own improved vessels.

Rather than hoping to borrow someone else's oil, focus on the quality and quantity of the vessels in which you keep your own oil. Remember, the challenge is not with your oil, it's with your vessels. Elisha was essentially telling the woman that she already had the solution, but that the solution was wrongly packaged. It was in a jar, and a jar is a very tiny container. The gifts God has given us need larger platforms in order to live up to the potential He has bestowed upon them. This is what Elisha was telling the widow when he told her to go to other people and get their containers. The widow's problem was similar to the problem many of us face; the vessels we've been using simply aren't large enough, and that is why our oil flow is minimal. She, like us, needed to take her oil and pour it into other people's vessels, so her oil could spread further. Elisha's lesson was that once she poured her oil into multiple and larger empty vessels, her oil would increase, and she would be able to solve her own problems.

The importance of borrowing empty vessels is that when you borrow empty vessels you become creative. When you borrow vessels with other people's oil in it, you become a copycat. The way in which you borrow is so critical because it will determine whether you will become a second-class copycat or a creative original. *Every creative idea is a mixture of original concepts and borrowed systems.* Every single creative idea is a mixture. When you check through the world's history of development, that is how it has always been: original concepts, and borrowed ideas—a mixture of two different things.

Borrow Many Vessels

Elisha's fourth instruction to the widow was, do not gather just a few, but borrow many vessels. He was instructing us to make sure we don't limit our borrowing. Don't limit your learning. Don't limit your ability to acquire the knowledge, methods and systems that other people have used to achieve success. Look to learn and grow everywhere you turn. Learn to recognize the multitude of vessels that surround you, and borrow all of them that are useful. Don't borrow a few.

Don't Borrow Oil

Elisha told the widow to go and borrow these things. I'm sure when the woman went to her neighbors and asked to borrow their empty vessels, they were all probably wondering what she was going to use them for. It is not common for people to come to you looking to borrow only vessels; most people ask to borrow oil. We have generally developed the habit of borrowing fruit. In other words, we like to borrow other people's results, not the details about their labor. How many of us have had people come to us saying, *Teach me how you made your money*? Not many, I'm sure. Instead, most people will ask if they can borrow some of your money, but rarely will they ask for tips on how you've earned it.

It's true even in ministry. Most pastors who come to me seeking help, don't ask me for organizational advice or how to improve their message delivery techniques. You know what they most often ask? They ask me to pray that their ministry will grow. Most will not come to me and ask that I teach them the keys to the successful growth of my ministry. In general, people want the oil, they don't want the vessel. They want what you have achieved, not how you achieved it. This is why Elisha said, *Don't just go and borrow oil, borrow the vessel*. It is a pivotal lesson that we can learn to apply when we want to transform our lives .

Don't sit in front of somebody begging him for money. Beg him for his system, his knowledge, his understanding, or his competence instead. If you have the vessel, you can pour your own oil into it, and have a sustainable way to transform your life.

WHAT NOT TO BORROW: THINGS TO INSPECT BEFORE YOU BORROW

Many of us have developed a bad habit, a behavior of always going to borrow the oil, not the vessel. When borrowing a vessel, it helps to ask questions and seek clarification from the vessel owner to ensure that it is of good use to you. Don't misinterpret Elisha's instruction to borrow from everywhere and to borrow bountifully to mean that you should go borrowing everything, without careful examination. Inspect the vessels you borrow, and ask yourself these three questions:

Question 1: Does The Vessel Leak?

The act of borrowing a vessel does not automatically mean that the vessel is good. It is possible that it has holes in it, and will therefore leak the oil you pour

into it. I'm sure the widow knew that a leaky vessel would only waste her precious oil, so she would have asked and inspected it for cracks. If they had cracks or holes, she would have refused to borrow those vessels, because they would not be able to keep what she was planning to put into them .

Question 2: Is The Vessel Clean For My Use?

This is a very important question to ask. Not every method or system is clean. Some people make lots of money, but they make it with unclean methods, which you should not borrow. If you go to someone who's been successful and ask how they did it, and they tell you by distributing, selling or smuggling cocaine, abandon their vessels at once! Don't hesitate and try to justify to yourself that the Bible says we should borrow vessels. That's not what we are talking about. The vessels we borrow must be clean. They must bring honor to God, so ask yourself if they meet those requirements before you borrow. Ask yourself if the method you are considering is ethical, because if it is not, you will be wise not to use it. There are many people who have achieved great success the right way, but there are also many who have achieved remarkable success the wrong way as well. Don't borrow leaky vessels, or vessels that are unclean.

Question 3: Is The Vessel Strong Enough To Hold My Oil?

You should consider if it has the strength to keep what you plan to put into it? Sometimes you can get a vessel, but it's weak. It may not leak and it may be perfectly clean, yet still it is insufficient because it is fragile. Let me give you an example. You are going to the market to buy oil. In one hand, you have a big cellophane rubber bag that is big enough to take about 30 liters of fluid. It's quite sizable. Then in the other hand, you could also have a container made of either metal or thick, strong plastic that can also take 30 liters. If you pour 30 liters of oil into that cellophane bag, it will surely break before you get home because it's weak. Sure, it is a vessel, but it doesn't have the strength to carry the weight of that particular item. It could carry the same volume of something lighter in weight, but not a heavy, 30-liter bottle of oil.

Inspect the vessels you borrow to ensure they have the strength to hold the glory that God is bringing your way. Does it have the strength to sustain and live long, even after you have acquired it? Because sometimes you may borrow something, use it, and achieve success, then it breaks apart because it can't be sustained.

It happens in all fields: in churches, politics, everywhere. People achieve success and they lose it because they used weak systems. The system may be

clean. It may not have holes in it, but it lacks the strength and durability necessary for the oil it's holding. If you build that way, your success will collapse.

Let me give you another example. If you look at how nations have developed and consider a great nation like the former Soviet Union, you observe that they built a system of governance, and they built a great nation. The Soviet Union became a super power. At their height, there were only two super powers in the world: the USA and the USSR. But you and I know that not long ago, in the 1990s, the Soviet Union began to collapse. All the nations that had come together to form the former Soviet Union dispersed. Why? Because they used a system, that although it appeared strong and had impressive success, it was weak because it did not take into account human will, and the human desire for freedom. The USSR taught us that you may successfully use a system for a time, but if it isn't durable, it may collapse .

Shortcut Systems

Let's apply this to marriage. For example, sometimes you may encounter people who say they don't quarrel in their marriage. That's a pretty impressive statement, and it may be tempting to find out and follow their method. However, when people tell me they never quarrel in their marriage, I have a serious conflict within myself. I think, either I am not normal, or they are not normal. For sure, one of us is not normal. They say they have been married for 20 years and they don't argue.

When I dig deeper, I find out that sometimes the reason the couple doesn't argue is because one of them is afraid to speak his or her mind. Because one spouse is afraid, the two never quarrel. On the surface, a non-quarreling couple seems like the picture of success in marriage, but what may not be visible is looming failure underneath the surface. Unfortunately, most of the time in cases like this, the fearful one is the wife. When she sees disagreement or conflict coming, she shuts up so the argument will stop. This strategy may have kept them married for 20 years without quarreling, but one of these days, somebody is going to speak his or her mind, and when they do, it may be quite a difficult challenge for that marriage to be sustained.

Don't build on a shortcut system that seems to work, but is weak, because when it really begins to expand, it will break apart. It has to be built on a solid system that is sustainable. Sometimes instead of the wife telling the husband something, she's afraid, so she goes to somebody and asks them to tell him for

her. That's a shortcut to effective, sustainable communication in marriage. Meanwhile, the couple boasts that they never quarrel, but the wife can't talk to her own spouse. That kind of harmony in marriage is superficial. That is not the vessel to borrow. It's a shortcut vessel that may work for a time, but in the long run it cannot sustain the oil of a healthy, lasting marriage.

If you are a young couple and you want to learn from others about marriage, don't learn from people who have never quarreled. You can't learn anything useful about conflict resolution from them. Go to those who know how to quarrel. Go to those who know how to make up, understand one another, compromise, and get along after they quarrel. Learn from those who don't keep bitterness and anger and frustration, but who quarrel and then move on.

The same principle applies in business. You may find someone whose business has done well, but you realize this guy is a brutal dictator in his office, and he's bullying people into productivity. Everyone is afraid to complain because the boss has informants at all levels of the organization. On the surface, the company is doing well, but the vessel is weak. One day a brave person will emerge, and when he speaks up, others will get the courage to follow, and the business will be in jeopardy.

You have to be careful and ask yourself if the vessel is resilient? Can it keep? Can it sustain long-term occupation? If it cannot, you shouldn't borrow it. Inspect the vessel you are borrowing. Does it leak? Is it clean? Can it sustain as you aspire to expand? Borrow the right kind of vessels, and then pour your oil into them.

CHAPTER 5

POUR YOURSELF INTO IT

How To Transfer Your Oil Into The Vessels You Have Borrowed

⁴ And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones.” ⁵ So she went from him and shut the door and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out. ⁶ Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” And he said to her, “There is not another vessel.” So the oil ceased. 2 Kings 4: 4-6

After borrowing the vessels, Elisha tells the widow to shut the door. That's a very important instruction. In other words, go into your house, into your office, into your studio or into your workshop, and shut the door. Go into your marriage, or your family life or into your campus and shut the door. Go into your Bible, and shut the door. *If you don't know how to shut the door you're going to allow all sorts of people into your life who don't belong there.* People who don't need to come close to you at this time will appear and distract you if you don't close them out. Shutting the door means giving your all to what you are doing—all of your effort and attention. Shut the door and cut off unnecessary distractions.

Can you imagine, after the widow borrowed all of the vessels and put them in her house, how many neighbors would be following her? Among themselves, they'd be saying, *Have you heard? Did she come to your house asking for vessels from you too? What is she up to? Let's go and see.* Neighbors would be watching and wanting to find out what she was doing with all these vessels, her sons, and a small bottle of oil. All day long she'd be getting visitors pestering her asking, *What are you going to do with that oil and the vessels you've borrowed?* If she tells them the prophet said she should start pouring the oil into the vessels, they will think she has gone crazy, because in the natural realm, 30 liters of oil cannot fill 3,000 liters worth of vessels. She would not be able to do what she was aiming to do, because sometimes the thing you are pursuing may not be what people consider conventional, but you can't be distracted by their questions, doubts and opinions.

Salvation

This is especially true when you first become a Christian. If you lived a very wayward life prior to dedicating your life to Christ, you may need to shut the door for quite some time as you strengthen your faith and understanding of the Bible. As you grow in your walk with God, you may need to shut the door so you can hear His voice. Otherwise, old friends will question your decision and your new lifestyle and may even be able to sway you away from it. You may not be strong enough in your walk to stand up to their ridicule or ignore their disparaging or questioning comments.

Marriage

Shutting the door is also important in the beginning of a marriage. When you are newly married, and even before you are married, there will be people from your single life who you need to shut the door to. Some of those people will need to be shut out permanently. You will need to limit your time with single friends, and socialize more with other couples. You will need to delete certain phone numbers from your phone contacts. Old acquaintances of the opposite sex may be unproductive acquaintances to keep once you are married. The Bible even says that a man and woman should leave their mother and father so that they can cleave to each other. New wives don't need to be so influenced by the opinion of their fathers once they get married, because their husbands must become the primary man in their lives. Likewise, men need to break from the influence of their mothers when they marry. They need to eat their wife's food, and treat her as the first lady in their life.

Recovery

People recovering from substance or alcohol abuse will also need to shield themselves from exposure to environments, people and occasions where consumption of these things may be happening, and may tempt them. If you are trusting God to perform a miracle in your life and free you from the grips of addiction, you must shut the door, and let Him work in you .

If you allow certain people into your space, you will not be able to achieve what you want to achieve. So shut the door in order to keep all distractions out. Every kind of distraction should be out of your way, so you can focus on the goal you've set. Nothing should distract your attention because if you are going to expand your little oil into a transformational achievement, you have to keep distractions out. You have to shut the door.

When I started pastoring this church, and we were small in numbers, I preached consistently almost every service. For two years straight, I never took

an appointment anywhere, and never preached anywhere else other than my church. I focused my efforts entirely on preaching to my congregation because if you want to achieve something of substance, you have to remove all distractions. If you want to build your business, you can't do it by involving yourself in everything. Sometimes you have to shut every door, and for one or two years—sometimes even longer—you will have to commit yourself to the goal before you and get it done. You have to shut the door.

Whether you are a student working towards a Bachelor's Degree, a medical degree or a law degree; or whether you are a writer trying to complete a book, play or film script, your success will be predicated on shutting the door to distraction. Not every appointment, every visit, every friend, everyone who knocks on your door, or rings your phone deserves your one-hour of conversation. You have to learn to shut the door. Keep the distractions out and focus on the task before you. Don't let people come to you to waste your time and energy, because you have something in front of you to do. You have a project to complete.

“Sorry, I Am Busy Building”

I like the story of Nehemiah, when he was rebuilding the walls of the temple of Jerusalem. He was approached by Sanballat, Tobias and all these people who wanted to distract him. They said, *Come and let us discuss these things*. But Nehemiah replied, *I have no time for that. You can hold your discussion but I am busy building a wall* ¹⁵. Sometimes we have to tell people, *Sorry. I am busy building*.

Do you remember the person in the Bible who was told to go and follow Jesus? The person said *First, let me go and bury the dead* ¹⁶. What was Jesus' response? He said, *Let the dead bury their dead*. In other words, Jesus was saying *You don't have time for that*. There is a task at hand, more important than this distraction, and you must commit your focus to it.

Sometimes we need to shut the door. It's not permanent that we will not attend to those people, but for a moment in our life we have to focus on something. The reason some people never achieve anything is because they never focus. They are always doing too many things at once, occupying their time with too many unnecessary activities and unproductive associations, but focus is required to reach any goal.

Surround Yourself With Like-Minded People

After you have committed to focusing on your task, you should surround yourself with like-minded people. If you are newly saved, spend time with other Christians. If you are a student, have study groups with your classmates more often than you hang-out with friends who are not in school. If you are a newly-wed couple, socialize with other married couples.

That's why Elisha said, *Shut the door behind you and your sons*. Her sons were the people also focused on doing what the widow needed to do. They were walking the same walk, and were committed to attempting what she was attempting. Sometimes we must shut the door on some friends, and open the door on other friends. It depends on who the appropriate associates are for that season in your life. Some people will draw you away from your goal, and others will help facilitate your achievement. You have to determine who you should shut the door to and who you should open the door to.

The widow did not shut the door to everybody; she opened the door to her sons because they were in agreement on the objective at hand. They all heard the prophet and they were determined to convert their little domestic oil into a commercial product that would serve their family's long-term interest. Like the widow, we must shut the door, but keep likeminded people around.

Act On The Authority Of The Creative Word

Next, act on the authority of the creative word. If God has said it, we should act on it. If you believe what you are doing is the will of God, then that's what you need to determine yourself to do. Act on the authority of the word.

I can almost imagine the widow taking that jar of oil and the vessels she had collected. She has a house full of empty vessels, and her sons are looking into her face, waiting to follow her lead, and she's looking at the oil. They all know that nobody has done this before. Nobody has transformed a simple jar of oil to fill all of these vessels. But that doesn't matter. She's holding on to the word she heard from the prophet. In the natural sense, everything before her makes no sense at all, but when the Lord says something new is about to happen, it doesn't matter what appears to be true in the natural. When we face a situation like the widow's, we must focus on the creative word, and let our actions be fueled by no other circumstance.

Pour Your Oil Into The Vessels

After you shut the door, pour your oil into the borrowed vessels. Pour with confidence, not with hesitation. Something began to happen when the widow

started pouring her oil. She was encouraged and empowered by the creative word. She realized that as long as there was capacity to receive what she had, her oil was never exhausted. In the act of pouring, the widow had an epiphany that what was limiting her was capacity, not oil. She recognized that it wasn't her content, it was her containers that were insufficient. She now saw that she had an abundance of oil, so she poured it into the vessels with an expectation that it would fill them .

CREATE THE SPACE, AND PEOPLE WILL FILL IT

I learned this principle when we started our church. We used to meet in a classroom in Kanda Estates—a residential area of our capital city, Accra. It was not a very big space; just one classroom. It wasn't a big classroom either; I think it was meant for Class 4, having a capacity for about 30-40 children.

We took the tables out and jammed about fifty chairs into it, and then we would have service. There was another church, which met about two or three classrooms down the corridor from us, but they had a double-sized classroom. Once in a while this church would go for one of their regional or district conventions and the class would be empty. Every time they left, we would occupy their space for that week. For some reason, which I couldn't explain at the time, whenever we occupied their space, we filled the double classroom. When we were in the single-sized classroom we filled it. When we were in the double-sized one, we would fill it too.

Something began to say to me, *The problem is not people; the problem is capacity*. I realized the problem was about space, because whenever we had the space, God would send the people to fill it. In fact, whatever space we had, God would fill it with people. My number one task from then onward was to get a bigger space. At the time we moved from that classroom, we were about eighty people. We moved to another, larger space called Regal Cinema Hall. The first meeting we had there drew two hundred people. We went from an attendance of 80 people one week, to an attendance of 200 the next. All correlated to available space.

That experience taught me an important principle. It taught me that often times, the problem is not our oil, the problem is that we haven't created a large enough capacity for our oil to expand. That is what Elisha said to the woman. He said her problem was not the oil, her problem was the jar that her oil was in. If you pour your oil, it will fill as many vessels as possible.

I remember when we moved from our last meeting place to our current home

at Christ Temple. We said, Wow because this place is about three times bigger. Initially, I said that we would have only one service on Sundays. We soon learned that my initial perspective was like filling only one vessel. We couldn't stop at that because we had more capacity. The first Sunday service we had overflowed. There were more people than there were seats. That continued for about a month until we realized we needed to resume offering double services. The abundance of our oil still hasn't ceased because there is still more capacity to fill. Today, not only do we fill up the seats in two services, but we are also now filling up the tower, and making plans for an entirely new, larger structure because our oil continues to flow beyond the capacity of our current vessel.

With that lesson, I learned that the problem has never been about people. If we build four times this auditorium, I believe it will be filled. If we build ten times this auditorium, it will be filled. That is what the widow's story shows us. God will continue to supply the oil, if we continue to be faithful and find more and more vessels to fill.

Create the space and people will fill it. That is the principle. If you have a business, that's been in a kiosk for too long, and you are having diminishing returns, the problem is probably not your product. The problem is the kiosk. It's your jar, and it is small. Move from the jar of a kiosk and start pouring into something bigger. Then watch how God will stretch your oil to fill a bigger business.

I don't know why Ghanaian businessmen like small shops. I can't understand it. I was talking to a businessman doing very well, and I asked him why is it that all of you have these small shops? He said you have to be careful, and if you're not careful, you might fail. That isn't what I've observed. If you go to the Accra Mall, it's full, and it's not full of small shops. If you create more space, it will be full. The problem is not the oil; it's the vessel.

Allow The Vessel To Shape Your Oil

Another important step in effectively borrowing vessels is to allow the vessels to shape what you have. Follow how it takes you in different directions, and gives you new ideas and layers to add to your talent. That's one of the good things about vessels; they give new form, new shape, and new direction to your oil. I'm sure some of the vessels the widow used were cylindrical, so the oil became cylindrical. Some were squareish, so her oil became square-ish; some were hexagonal, and the oil became hexagonal. Whatever shape it had, the oil filled it. You have no idea the different shapes that your business, your

enterprise, your church, or your family can take until you have enough shapes and vessels and start pouring into them. You will then see the diversity you can create and achieve. Allow the vessels to shape what you have.

Work One Vessel At A Time

Working on one vessel at a time is also important. Although the widow had many vessels, she didn't pour just a little into each one. That's not what Elisha told her to do. He said focus on one vessel until it is full, then move on to the next. Do you know why some people never achieve what they would like to? They are doing too many things at a time. They have one good vessel, one good thing they are working on, and before it is finished, they jump to another one. They start one thing one year, and move on to another the next year, and they never finish anything or experience the feeling of seeing one vessel filled to its capacity. But Elisha advises us to be thorough. He says we should focus on one vessel at a time until it cannot hold any more of our oil.

Patience, Faith, Endurance And Perseverance

I can just imagine when this woman starts to pour the oil into the first vessel. Can you imagine the sound it made? She stretched it, saying, *Oh Lord, don't let this finish*. She was pouring and it wasn't flowing in a large volume. I imagine it was coming in a steady, measured stream. So she had to have patience; she had to have faith; she had to have endurance; she had to persevere. It was trickling out, filling the bottom of the vessel, and as she continues to pour, it begins to rise. She was thinking, *Wow, this is a lot*. She waits and she waits. Patiently she endures, and before long, one vessel was completely full yet there was still more in her jar of oil. She moved on to the next one, and again it trickles into the vessel. But she was patient; and she waited, and waited until that vessel was full and it was time to go onto the next one.

Patience, endurance, faith and perseverance are essential when you begin to pour your oil into borrowed vessels. If you start and right away you throw your hands up complaining that it's developing too slowly, and decide to go to the next vessel, you will be like a hamster on a wheel, going nowhere. You have to wait until one vessel is full.

Be determined that for at least once in your lifetime, you will achieve one solid objective. Do something and finish it before you move on. The widow had to work on the vessels one at a time, and she had to wait until every vessel was completely filled before she began to work on the next one. Completely fill the vessels you pick.

We could have started our church one year, and then said we were going to start a university in the next. Effectively borrowing vessels doesn't work that way. Sometimes you see people who have started; they haven't finished one vessel and they are moving on to the next vessel. But that is not the formula for success. You must start one, fill it, and then move on to the next and start working again. Just because somebody else is doing it doesn't mean you should go and do it. When you start one thing, determine to finish it, and then move on to the next one.

Now that we have put work into filling our church vessel, we are now filling our university vessel. Once we get that running well, then we can move on to our bank vessel and other vessels to come. Like the widow, the same anointing that raised our church, is raising our university, and will raise our bank, and all the other good things God has destined us to do as a church, so we continue to move from one vessel to the next with confidence.

When God begins to allow you to pour into new vessels, don't run away when it's slow. Stay and wait until that vessel is also filled. Set aside the full vessels and move on to new ones, because when the vessel is full and you keep pouring into it, what will happen is there will either be a spillage or there will be a stoppage. From what we have learned from the story, the moment the vessel is full there is a stoppage.

What this teaches us is that if you don't create new space, you will get stuck at one level of achievement. But you can achieve more. You can have various vessels that become a success. Business people should especially take note of this principle and incorporate it into your methods. *Don't waste all your life, time and energy filling only one vessel. You must have the courage to borrow more vessels.* So after you have filled one, you can move on to the next, and then to the next. Strive to form a conglomerate of businesses, but recognize that you can't do that operating from a kiosk. I don't know of any conglomerate of kiosks. Move from that vessel .

The Oil Will Cease When There Are No More Vessels

Verse 6 of our foundational text states that when there were no more vessels, the widow's oil stopped flowing. When your oil stops flowing and you've reached the limit of your current business, that is when it is time to branch out into a new venture. Some of us have one talent that will carry us to achieving the potential God intended for us. However, most of us have more than one type of oil. We have been blessed with more than one gift and God expects us to be

fruitful with all of them. When you have more than one gift, and the current one reaches its potential, you must develop another one and begin the process of borrowing appropriate vessels to see it to maturity.

As you build new avenues of success, you must also mature and learn how to wisely use the fruit of your current success, in order to sustain continued success. In the following chapter, we will explore what the Bible teaches us about what to do with our full vessels.

CHAPTER 6

WISDOM IN WEALTH

What To Do With the Oil

⁷ Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest."
2 Kings 4: 7

When God gives you increase and success, you must seek His guidance on how to use what He has given to you. After accumulating all of her jars of oil, the widow did not decide on her own, what to do with them. She went back to the prophet and asked him, *What do you want me to do with what I have achieved?* Many times, God gives us success and we decide what we are going to use God's success for. We don't go back and ask Him why He gave it to us, and what He wants us to do with it. There are three instructions Elisha gave to the woman that are instructive for us.

Sell What You Have

The first instruction he gave was, sell what you have. He didn't say sell yourself. Do you remember at the beginning of the story, the widow's children were going to be sold? Elisha says you don't need to sell the children. You can sell the oil because God has provided a substitute commodity for them. Sell the oil, not the children. I thank God that He is able to provide for us, so we don't sell the future of our children, but God gives us something instead that we can sell to pay for the sustenance of our children.

In order to sell the oil, the woman had to be strong on the market. She had to learn how to negotiate, and how to properly market her product. That is where we sometimes miss the big pay-off. God has given you increase, but if you don't market it well, you'll get cheap value for it. When Elisha tells the widow to go and sell, she has to find the best way of selling, because if she is cheated in the selling process, and she doesn't negotiate well for what she had produced, her miracle would be a waste.

God gives you the increase, but you have to learn how to capitalize on it. People will want to take what you have for cheap, so you have to learn to negotiate and sell at the right price for yourself. If everybody in the village already had oil, this woman's oil would be of low value. She would have to look

for new markets of people who had not had oil for a long time and sell to them in order to get a good price. Just because she had abundance did not guarantee she could get a good price for it. Elisha simply said, *Go sell what you have*. How she did it was up to her. Look for the optimal market to sell what you have.

Pay Your Debts

The second thing Elisha said to the widow was pay your debts. Pay the people you owe. Now you may think that the only person the widow owed was the creditor, but she actually owed three kinds of debts.

- **The first debt she owed was to God.** The widow knew that she had to honor God. She had to pay her tithe as a debt of gratitude and of thanks and appreciation to God. When God blesses you, you don't just go and take that money and pay your debts, or go and live on the rest. You must give back to God, because He is the One who multiplied what you had.
- **The second debt she owed was to her creditors.** The widow had to pay the people that her husband owed before he died. Paying them was the only way to free herself from the threat of her children being taken from her. Pay your creditors to ease your mind and avoid having them confiscate other valuables from you.
- **The third debt she owed was to her future.** The widow needed to invest so that she wouldn't find herself in a similar situation in the future. When God gives us money, before we live on any of it, we must first pay God, pay the people we owe, and pay into our future. *Honoring God, being debt-free, and investing should be part of our monthly practice.* Every month, we should do these things. Whatever reasonable financial instrument we can use should be utilized to invest into the future. Pay God, pay people you owe, and invest in the future.

Live On The Rest

The third thing Elisha said was, live on the rest. Look at the sequence. The sequence is not by chance. You must sell first, then pay your debts, before you even begin to live on the rest. You don't live on the rest before you pay your debts. And you don't live on all of it, when you haven't invested into the future.

Please let me offer a little counsel here. When you have money, buy assets whose value will increase with time, not those that decreases with time. If you

have money, you should put it in financial instruments in the bank, or buy land. If there's anything I know about land—particularly in Ghana—the price *always* goes up. It always goes up. Sometimes in a year the value increases by 100%. In my opinion, it's the best form of investment. If you can get the documents right, it is the best way of investing because you can get a minimum 50% return on your investment. That is higher than any other form of investment, at least in my country. I am sure it is similarly so in other countries. Anywhere you go, land and real estate are good investments. I must caution you, however, to be very careful and meticulous about documentation, because there are a lot of demons lurking in the process of documenting land ownership. If you can get the documents and everything right, land ownership is a very sound investment into your future.

No wonder whenever God gives people a promise in the Bible, He adds land to it. He promised land to Abraham, Ismael and to Caleb. You should invest in land. Don't invest in perishables. Cars are nice, but they don't increase in value. As a matter of fact, when you buy a car and you drive it out of the showroom, it instantly loses about 20% of its value. So it's not really a good investment. It is a nice purchase, and a useful tool, but that is about it. Before you buy a car, buy land. Buy land. Buy a house. Invest your money wisely, not in something that has diminishing returns. And if you can use a car for a long time, use it until all the juices are gone, before you get another one. Don't let yourself be bothered, or feel judged by the car you drive. After all, why should you feel ashamed of living wisely? Your investments must be solid, futuristic, and long-term, so buy assets that have great dividends .

It's nice to have good furniture, quality sound systems and all of these things. I can guarantee you; it is good. It makes your life a bit more enjoyable. However, those luxuries should not come at the expense of your real investments. If you don't have land or other solid investments, yet you have two TVs, two cars, jewelry and an expensive wardrobe, you must ask yourself whether your priorities are right. What are you getting from it all? If you don't have investments, yet you are traveling abroad all the time, you must ask if this is financially wise. What if a crisis of a similar proportion to the widow's problem hits you and your family? What will you have to stand on? How well will those cars and jewelry support you in a time of financial trouble? You can have all of those things, but secure them in the right order. Make sure your priorities are correct by referring to the sequence Elisha laid out for the widow: sell your oil, pay your debts to God, your creditors and your future, and then you can live as lavishly as you can afford on the rest.

One of the ugliest and most unfortunate sights to see is somebody who owes people, yet they are trying to live lavishly. That's a very annoying and foolish sight to see because it is spiritually and financially immature to owe people, then when you get money, instead of paying your debts, you lavish yourself. Unfortunately, that kind of immaturity is not exclusive to young people. You see adults of significant age, who have made this kind of improper prioritizing a habit in their lives.

Elisha didn't say, *Sell the oil and enjoy the good life*. He said pay your debts before you live on the rest. You must strive to be debt-free. It is a special kind of freedom when you can say I owe nothing but love to anyone. If you take a loan from the bank, pay it back. Banks are not like your neighbors whom you can play games with. The banks have coercive power. They will repossess things from you and make your life miserable.

Pay your debts. Don't pay girlfriends. Pay your debts. I don't know why a man should suffer to make money and pay a girlfriend whom he has no intention of marrying in the first place. It's the highest form of insanity. How can somebody in his or her right mind, sweat and work hard, just to give all of his money to a girlfriend? There must be something wrong with his thought process. Meanwhile, the girl is taking full advantage of his mental lapse, crying, *You don't love me. If you do, then buy me this car, and this house*. The man will suffer to supply, yet she has no desire to marry him either. To any man who is doing that, please, for your own sake, be wise. Just be wise. And to any woman who is receiving the fruit of a man's foolishness, go and get your own vessels.

Discover what oil God has given you, and start working hard for yourself. We must all learn this important lesson from this story, that you can take what little you may have, and grow it into large-scale commercial quantities, but it all boils down to how you respond to the questions Elisha asked the widow: *What shall I do for you, and what do you have in your house?* Let us revisit the significance of those two questions in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ELISHA'S TWO QUESTIONS

After the widow detailed her situation to Elisha, he asked her two questions: *What do you want me to do for you, and what do you have?* She answered the second one. There are three significant things demonstrated by the widow's choice. First, notice that she was listening. This may not seem to be a big deal because after all, she went to him to hear his advice. However, often when people go to someone for advice, they already have in their mind what they want or expect to hear. The widow didn't stop listening after Elisha asked the first question. She didn't jump in and begin to prepare her response. She continued listening long enough to hear the second question.

What we can learn from this is that we have to listen to the questions life asks us. We have to pay attention to what options we have, and choose wisely, because we may very well miss the question that will lead us in the right direction.

Secondly, by not answering the first question, the widow demonstrated an important awareness that *in life, the questions you choose to respond to will determine the answers you will receive*. Not every option that is available is always advisable. You're going to have a lot of potential answers and avenues to choose from, but the questions you choose to respond to will determine the answers you receive. This relates to the previous point in that listening to our options enables us to choose wisely which ones to pursue. Many times, when we are in a crisis, we choose to answer the easy questions. The easy ones are those that requires somebody else to do something for us. *What shall I do for you?* is an easy question to answer. It doesn't require any work of us. Often times we don't even think about the details when we answer the easy questions. We leave it up to the person we are asking to figure out how to do what we are requesting. We say, *Please give me money*, but when the person asks, *What do you have?* we don't respond as quickly to that one. It requires our own thought, effort and consideration much more than simply asking the other person to meet our need.

Thirdly, by answering the second question, the widow displayed a faith in herself equal to her faith in the man of God, Elisha. By not answering the obvious question that would put the onus of a solution on him, she chose the

question that required something of herself instead. Often times when people go to a pastor, or bishop, or prophet, or any other official in the church, they go with the false belief that ministers have more access to God than themselves. Men and women in the ministry do not have a monopoly on God's deliverance. They do not have a secret access code that makes their prayers reach God's ear faster or louder. The widow's choice demonstrated that she understood this. She understood that she had as much access to God as the prophet did, and that is another lesson we can learn. Don't relinquish your soul, your situation, or your miracle to someone simply because they are ordained to minister the gospel. Ministers are there for guidance; however, the real outcome depends only on your faith, and God's power. Without those two elements being involved, a church official cannot do much for you.

The Role Of Faith In Borrowing Vessels

Just as there is a healthy and unhealthy way of relying on others, we must also assess our reliance on God. Even more than needing others, we need God in our lives. At the center of it all, God is the provider of all of our needs, and He provides in various ways.

- God provides by giving us abilities.
- God provides by bringing others into our lives.
- God provides directly the things that neither we, nor others can.

Let's look individually at each of the ways God provides.

First, God gives us the ability to provide for ourselves. There are things that we can do in our lives, without relying on others. The source of that ability is God, but we don't necessarily need to pray to Him to execute them. For example, God has given us a brain, two hands, and two feet. Unless God has not given you these things, you are accountable for using them. Laziness is not an option. Hoping and wishing simply will not work. You must act and put your abilities to use.

Second, God plants people in our lives, who are gifted by Him with talents, skills or resources that we do not possess. We are accountable for relying on these people in situations where they can be of help.

When we can't do something on our own, and there is no one who can help us, that is when we must rely directly on God. We must always have an underlying reliance on God, but one mistake that some of us make is that we jump to an inappropriate level of reliance on Him from the very start. For

example, let's say you are unemployed; and rather than searching for a job, you say, *I am trusting God*. Well, my friend, a job is not going to come and find you sitting in your living room while you are watching television. This is where your brain, two hands and two feet come in. God has already given you those things, so what exactly are you relying on? God has given you the tools, but He won't use them for you.

Now in that same situation, the proper way to rely on God is to do your part and go out searching for an ideal job. Submit resumes, go on interviews, and put your best foot forward. That is all within your capacity. The area where you rely on God is to give you favor with the people interviewing you, to give you guidance on where He wants to use you. That's a healthy reliance on God, not sitting at home, praying for a company representative to come knocking on your door and beg you to come and work for them. God doesn't often deliver those types of miracles.

A Statement Of Faith

The widow chose not to respond to Elisha's first question. Instead, she responded only to the second one. She said, *I have nothing but*, then she made a statement of faith. Her response was first about what she didn't have, and her statement of faith was about what she had. In that statement of faith she declared what she possessed. This is so critical for all of us. In tough times, when it seems like we have nothing, we must be able to make our own statement of faith. We all have the option to say, *I have nothing but ...* I don't know what your particular statement of faith will be. Some of you may say *I have no money but, I have talent. I have no one to help me but, I have God. I feel weak and tired, but I have faith. I feel discouraged but, I have hope. I have no job, but I have the assurance of God's Word. I have no husband but, I have the strength and Spirit of God.* I don't know what you don't have *but*, you must discover what it is that you do have, because it is in discovering what you have that you will find God's provision. You may have lost everything, but you have new opportunities all around you. Saying *I have nothing but ...* is a bold statement of faith, and essential for God to perform a turnaround miracle in our lives.

Oil Of Faith

In a previous section, we discussed what the oil represents.

We said that it represents our gifts, talents and ideas. In addition to those things the oil is also a metaphor for faith. Faith is an additional asset that we all have, and can utilize to transform our situation from having nothing to having

something. We all believe in something. Whether it is in our best interest or against our best interest, faith functions in all of our lives. Like we have explained about our oil, the key is in how well we direct and use it.

Faith works much like the jar of oil in the story of the widow and Elisha. It has the power to transform our lives and bring us closer to achieving the life God intended for us. But as we have already examined, the jar we keep our oil in will determine the success of our faith. If our faith is surrounded by a jar made of doubt, it will cancel the potential of our faith—oil. Just look back to the widow's story. It doesn't mention her doubting or second-guessing the prophet's instructions. She didn't turn to him after he told her to pour her oil into all the vessels and remind him about the small volume of oil in her jar. She didn't retort that her little bottle couldn't fill even one larger vessel, let alone many. The widow simply acted in faith, totally absent of doubt.

That is what we must do. In as much as we attempt to apply our faith, we must also focus on eliminating doubt. We must cancel all doubts from our minds, and block out thoughts, opinions, even research, which suggests that what we are attempting is not possible. Our goals may not seem possible in the natural realm, but our faith releases God's supernatural power, which makes the impossible, possible. Faith causes evidence of the unseen and unlikely hope to manifest. It doesn't function according to natural laws of logic, physics, or the like. Faith operates according to God's supernatural laws. It operates according to the creative word. So when we apply our faith, we must do so in that spirit, knowing that even if it does not seem possible in the natural sense, all things are possible through our faith in Christ. This is what the Bible teaches us, and as Christians, this is what we know to be true.

Faith In Action

Just as the Bible teaches us that all things are possible through faith, in the book of James it also teaches us that faith without works is dead ¹⁷. It is simply pointless to have faith and do nothing. The widow did not receive the creative word from Elisha, believe it would solve her problems, and then sit back on her hands. She went to work. She took steps to act in the direction of her faith, and on the authority of the creative word. She obeyed the word that was given to her. She didn't doubt it, and she didn't ignore it either. Faith is very important in all that we do, but faith alone, without some follow through on our parts, will not achieve results.

If we think back to earlier in the book where we discussed the ingredients for

God's turnaround process, we will remember that we play a critical role in our own life—transformation. The process includes God's part, other people's part, and our part. Our part features our faith, but it also includes our action, which is very important.

Just imagine a person who is believing God to help them lose a significant amount of weight. The person stands on God's promise of health for His people. Now if that person is trying to lose 60 kilograms, then surely their faith alone isn't going to shed the weight. He or she will have to work it off with a focused exercise and nutrition routine. They are already standing on the creative word, which is God's part, and they will likely need the help of effective fitness and nutrition techniques, which is other people's part. However, neither their faith in God, nor the expertise of a fitness trainer will garner results without their own committed, routine, and disciplined effort. We must have faith to be successful, but we must also work for our success .

TURNING DOWN HANDOUTS

One caution in borrowing vessels is not to confuse it with looking for handouts. The widow's choice to respond to the question, *What do you have in your house?* was a choice to earn her solution, rather than receive it. It was that choice, which opened the path for God to perform a miracle in her life. By only answering the question of what she had, she was in essence saying to Elisha, *I don't want a handout from you that will only solve my problems temporarily. I want you to teach me something that I can apply to my current situation and carry forward, so that I may sustain myself through future situations as well.* She wasn't asking Elisha for a solution that he would perform, but for one that she could sustain in her own life. In a sense, she was borrowing a vessel, and in this case the vessel was his spiritual counsel. Responding to his *What shall I do for you?* question would have been an act of borrowing oil—a handout. It was a wise choice on the widow's part to answer only the second question, because if she could be taught a way to help herself, it would likely go much further in her life than anything Elisha could have done.

Choices And Outcomes

When Elisha asked the widow those two important questions, it represented a crossroads in her life. Had she answered the first question— *What can I do for you?* —she would have likely received a short-term solution, and would soon be in need of help again. In answering the second question— *What do you have in your house?* —she made a bold step towards providing herself with a long term

solution, and gaining experience for facing challenges that lay ahead .

Metaphorically speaking, Elisha's two questions represent two different kinds of people: those who want somebody to solve their problems for them, and those who want to use what they already have to solve their own problems. As we said before, life will always present you with different options. Many times, those options fall into two general categories, similar to the questions Elisha asked: *What do you want someone else to do for you? and what can you do for yourself?* The question you choose to answer will determine your outcome. People who generally respond to the first type of question, exhibit dependency, and people who tend to answer the second type of question exhibit self-reliance, and self-determination.

Dependency Or Self-Reliance?

The saying that “no man is an island” is certainly true, as none of us live totally independent lives. There will be times throughout our lives that we will need others. The point of this book is to illustrate just that. However, there is a healthy degree of depending on others, and an unhealthy degree of it. The question we must all ask ourselves is, *Am I generally dependent on others for my sufficiency, or do I secure my own wellbeing?* Needing others becomes unhealthy when without their help, we could not survive. When our basic needs are determined by the charity of someone outside of ourselves, we have fallen into the category of dependent which in essence, is childish. Unless we are children dependent on our parents, it is unhealthy and immature to have this kind of need for others.

The opposite of dependency is independence, or self-reliance. This is when we exhibit a level of maturity that is manifested in our ability to be self-sufficient in the fundamental areas of our lives. This means we have the wherewithal to feed, clothe and shelter ourselves. We don't have to ask someone else to do this for us, because we can provide these necessities on our own. This is not to say that we don't need others in other areas of our lives. We may need someone to teach us a skill so we can increase our earning potential. We may need someone to advise us on breaking into an industry or company they are familiar with. We may need someone to give us spiritual advice on how to repair our marriage, or suggestions on where to buy a home. There are so many reasons why we will need people in our lives, but, these examples are very different from the need for someone to give money so that we may eat.

We have to be cautious, because dependency can become a habit and a cycle.

It can root itself in the personality of individuals, and can even grow to affect entire groups of people. In the following chapter, we will address how the cycle of dependency has impacted the peoples and progress of Africa.

CHAPTER 8

A MESSAGE FOR AFRICA

Breaking The Cycle Of Dependency, And Preserving Human Dignity

Although the Spirit of God is signifying that this is [Africa's] time, there is little that our generation can achieve if we do not break the spirit of dependency.¹⁸

In Africa, one of our biggest problems is a pervasive spirit of dependency, which has its origin partly in the era of colonialism and the process of slavery, and partly in nostalgia for a type of communalism that is both antiquated and distorted. During the period of slavery and colonialism, images of African backwardness, childishness, and inferiority were aggressively portrayed to us and to the world. These inaccurate depictions of African identity had a powerful effect on the African psyche. We began to believe, perceive and even project those images about ourselves. Today, we live in an era where this is widely recognized and known; however, the perception and the performance of African inferiority continues. This is simply unacceptable because we now know better.

Despite the man-made stereotypes about Africans, before those misperceptions became so deeply ingrained in our minds, the God-ordained truth was—and remains—that we were created in His likeness. This means there can be no inferiority, inadequacy, or inability to take care of ourselves, because those are not characteristics of God, whose attributes we were made to reflect. What has happened in Africa is that we have focused more on the man-made image rather than on the God-ordained image of ourselves. As the saying goes, you are what you think, so accordingly we have manifested evidence of the mental image we hold of ourselves.

Shifting our focus back to our true, God-like nature is both possible and in order. When we do this, what will manifest in our lives will be a self-perception of excellence, uprightness, and self-determination. A new self-perception for Africans will permeate our families and we will see new manifestations of accomplishment and achievement. It will permeate our communities and we will see new manifestations of order, efficiency, and camaraderie. A new African self-perception rooted in God's definition of us will permeate our governments and we will see our nations rise above corruption, ethnic conflict, and

dependency on foreign powers. We will see the African continent transformed into what God intended it to be, and we will develop more and more to offer to the world, and to humanity.

AFRICA MUST ANSWER THE QUESTION: ‘WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR HOUSE?’

Thus far in this book, we have focused our discussion on the gifts God has blessed us with and their ability to meet our own needs. The widow had an overwhelming need and her own oil was the key to her provision. However, there is another important role that our oil is intended to play; it is meant to be a blessing to others, even more than to ourselves. One universal trait to every human's purpose is to be a blessing to others, and to make our own unique contribution to the world. This is why discovering, developing, and deploying our gifts is so essential—not only to our personal success, but in fulfilling our overall purpose in life.

What Africa must come to grips with is that it is impossible to fulfill our purpose when we are perpetually dependent on the oil of others. Africa must stop answering the question, *What shall I do for you?* when other nations and aid organizations ask. Africa must begin to ask itself, *What do we have in our house?* We must begin to discover the oil God has given to African people in order to solve our own problems, and be a blessing to the world. How do we do this? Well, first we must begin to look within to identify where we are keeping our oil. This is important because having something to sell is critical.

Have Something To Sell

The widow's story started with her being forced to sell her children into slavery. Her story ends with her still selling something, but not her children. It is important to have something to sell, because if you've produced nothing to sell, you're going to either end up selling yourself, your family, or something far more precious to you than your work.

We witness this in Africa and throughout the Developing World. For example, child slavery happens because people in dire situations have nothing else to sell, so they sell their children into bondage. If they had something else that they had recognized, valued and packaged, they could sell it rather than their children.

Prostitution is another example. Women, and sometimes even men, sell their bodies because they haven't discovered the gifts God has implanted in them.

They haven't developed those gifts and seen how they can be useful to others. No spiritually healthy woman wants to sell her body and her dignity. She does it because she has nothing else to sell.

This is true for people participating in other illegal, demeaning or exploitative activities as well. A person who values himself and sees that he is gifted, would never consider being a drug mule, or running internet scams. If he had other means of earning a living, he would probably choose those instead, even if the earning was less. Why? Because criminal activity is dangerous. The consequences are quite high.

Even Africans and people of African descent in the Diaspora who may not be participating in these particular things, generally share a common problem with dependency. We want someone else to solve our problems for us, whether it's government or relatives. We claim that the government doesn't provide us with opportunities, or we expect to be perpetually supported by family members who are doing well. Too many of us never get to discover our own worth, value and skills because of this attitude that our provisions should come from someone else. And when we have that kind of attitude, we never recognize and seize the opportunity to deploy the gifts God has given us towards solving our own problems, and making a contribution to the world we live in.

Such attitudes don't just stop at the individual level. African governments and their attitudes towards dependency on foreign powers has kept our collective progress moving at a snail's pace. Until African governments stop responding to *What shall I do for you?* and start looking at *What do we have in our house?*, Africa will continue to be dependent on charity and bound by the interests of other nations and organizations willing to offer us handouts.

The story of the widow should be a great inspiration to Africa. In the past, we may have been told that we have nothing. We may have believed it ourselves, but we are children of God. We have been made in His likeness, and He has not left us with nothing. We have plenty to offer, and we have been ordained to contribute to our own empowerment, progress and growth. Our oil will flow as long as we pour it into beneficial vessels. It is plentiful enough to bless us, and to have excess to share with the world.

CHAPTER 9

IT ALL BEGINS WITH GOD'S CREATIVE WORD

The creative word is divine wisdom and direction. It is a word of direction; a word of wisdom that comes from God. When I stand before a congregation to preach, I preach the creative word. God's word. The word by itself cannot do everything for you, but it is an essential component for what you want to achieve, so I preach God's word. When I stand at the beginning of the year, and declare, *This is a year of discovery*, that is the creative word that will guide and define our year. That word cannot by itself solve all your problems. It is one common component that has been put on the table. We must also bring our own oil and put it there, and we must bring other people's components and mix them together. Only then can we get results.

Too often, the moment people hear a word from God that speaks to their situation, they think the problem is solved, just by hearing the word. That's not how it works. God will give you the word, but you must also do something with it. God's component is a word of direction. It may be a prophecy, it may be a vision, it may be a word from preaching, it may be a scriptural verse, it may be a declaration, or a confession. All of that is only component number one: the creative word. It is the most important component in His three-step process, but it is not the only one.

The creative word doesn't come from man, it comes from God. Even if God uses man to deliver the word, it comes from Him. Because the creative word originates from God, it carries the power of God. Every word from God carries His power. This is why it is so important, because without God's power, your efforts—your jar of oil—may not be enough. The help of others—borrowed vessels—may not be enough. It is the power in God's word, fueling your efforts and driving the part others will play that creates miracles.

A very important and interesting fact about God's word is that, it imparts faith into you. Have you noticed how you feel when you hear a creative word from God? When you are sitting in church, or receive a divine vision, or when God speaks to your spirit, you become inspired, motivated and develop a “can do” attitude. That is God's word boosting your faith.

For example, when you go to a convention like our annual Greater Works

conference, and you hear a prophetic declaration that this is your year of breakthrough, all of a sudden you begin to feel like, *Wow, things are going to happen!* When a season of open heavens is prophesied, or a 24-hour miracle is declared, you get a spiritual surge; you feel the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. That encounter is step number one and it's crucial because you need faith in order to allow God to perform a miracle in your life. If you don't have faith, the creative word will fall dormant on your ears, and you won't even recognize your jar of oil. In fact, you may even despise it .

You need the creative word to impart faith in you, and open your eyes to your jar of oil. That is what happened to the widow as she was saying that she had nothing. In her mind's eye, there was a clarity that opened her vision to recognize that she did have something after all.

After the creative word stimulates your faith, the creative word constructs your destiny. It designs how your future is going to develop, and builds a new future for you as God's divine input sets the miracle process on course. It always starts with the creative word. If you take the creative word out, nothing can be done, for the Bible says in John 1: 1-4 that all things were made by the word and without God's word, nothing was made. In His word is life. If you want to change something, you have to deal with the word. When God wanted to change the condition of the earth, He didn't do anything physically; He released the word. He said, *Let there be light*, and in speaking those words, light appeared. He did not construct a light bulb, or engineer electricity. He spoke the existence of light with His word, and this is also how God constructs our destiny.

How Should You Respond To The Creative Word?

You must hear it, you must accept it, and most importantly, you must act on it. When the creative word comes, don't fight it, as some people do. They doubt that the word's significance applies to their situation. Accept it. Receive it with gratitude. After all, it is the answer to a question you may have been asking for a long time. Why should you pray for an answer, then reject it when it comes? Accept it. Receive it, and then act on it. Start doing something about what you've heard and your efforts will be propelled by the power of the creative word.

Elisha said to the widow, *Go borrow vessels*, and that was a creative word. She could have asked, *What should I do with them?* Many of us do this; when we hear a creative word. It's as if we want to be reassured that it really came from God, and we want to hear it repeated to us in greater detail, so we can feel sure. Had the widow questioned the instruction God gave Elisha to relay to her, it would

have shown skepticism, if not utter doubt.

We can learn from this. The widow didn't ask anything, she simply obeyed, and acted on the creative word. When you ask God for a solution to a problem and He gives you an answer, you should first ask in faith, but also receive in faith. When you ask God in faith, then use logic to interpret and understand the answer He has given you, you will weaken the power of the solution. Your asking for clarification and further elaboration is fine in the realm of logic. If you are a student, and you ask your instructor to clarify the homework assignment, that is good. However, in the realm of faith, presenting follow-up questions is an act of doubt. Doubt kills miracles, whereas obedient faith ensures them.

The widow's turnaround process began with God's creative word. Seek His word for its wisdom and direction. Let it impart faith into you and design your destiny. Once you've heard the Lord's word for your situation, act on it with the faith and assurance that all things are possible through Christ. He can turn your nothing into something. He can expand your oil.

CONCLUSION

The prophet Elisha shows us that we do not have to be destroyed by a complex set of problems. We can have financial, domestic, personal, social, and spiritual problems, all happening at once, and still overcome. If the widow in this story could be victorious over her situation, I believe you can also deal with the crisis of your life by using the same method that delivered her: the creative word, your jar of oil, and borrowed vessels.

From this day forward, may God cause you to take the little oil you have and create abundance with it. May God help you to do extraordinary things with the ordinary tools you have. May God open your eyes to the things you have, so that even when there seems to be nothing, you will know that you are blessed. May He increase you. May He multiply you. May He strengthen you, and grow your effort in every way. May your little oil become a business. May you move from a small space, small business, or small ideas, into a big international success.

May God increase you and prosper you in all that you do. As the Lord blessed this widow, may that blessing be upon you as well, in Jesus' name. Amen!

NOTES

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13. Proverbs 6:6
14. Matthew 25:15-31
15. Nehemiah 6:2-3
16. Luke 9:59-60
17. James 2:14-24
18. Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia: A Biblical Revelation on God's Purpose for the Black Race. p. 66
19. See Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia: A Biblical Revelation on God's Purpose for the Black Race to learn more about the true identity of Africans, based on Biblical accounts.

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