

Womanhood
HIDDEN JEWELS
CHARACTER STUDIES OF SOME LESSER KNOWN WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE
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WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

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WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH



FOCUS: Because single moms and widows face unique and difficult challenges, we as sisters in Christ seek to offer them our support and share rays of hope..

FOOTPRINT: 1 Kings 17

FACET: “For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is a storm against the wall” (ISAIAH 25:4).

FORTUNE: “Solitary trees, if they grow at all, grow strong” —Winston Churchill.

I know some widows and some fatherless children, as I’m sure you do. They long for normal lives, but most of the time, their lives are anything but normal. They struggle with loneliness, heartache, helplessness and insecurities. It’s even worse for these women when children are young because they have to arrange child care, transportation for events, doctors, futures—without the help of a husband. When something around the house clogs up, falls apart or shuts down, these women must fix it themselves, call for friends, or pay the price for workmen or technicians. Oh, and I didn’t even mention the discipline of their children—children who may be scared, lonely, confused, traumatized, and emotional. How do these women manage?

I’m thinking of one who does it with God’s help. She works full-time, attends church faithfully, takes part in the Bible studies at our church, sings in the choir, is starting to teach a Sunday School Class this quarter, and still keeps a cheerful attitude. She is a young widow with young children and a *teenager*. This compounds her duties. I get tired just thinking about this scenario. I don’t see her sitting around or hear her complaining, “Oh, woe is me.” If there is a problem, she looks for a solution and continues to keep her strong faith in God. She may not even realize how many admire her. I believe we are to help her when possible and give her as much encouragement as we can. God expects that of us.

In this study, we find this woman, a widow, with a small son. They are destitute and literally starving to death. But God is at work. He sends His man into enemy territory (Satan’s territory) with the Good News. She accepts it, obeys his commands, and lives to tell others of the strange and wonderful things God has done in her life. Would that we become as faithful in our lives as she. How can we glean so much from one Bible passage? This story is there for a purpose. It shows us what one person can do when she gives all she has for the purpose of sustaining the living Word of God. Jesus cited her in His teaching in Luke 4 as an example of someone with a great faith. Let’s find out a little more about the Widow or Zarephath by opening the pages of our Bibles.

ALONE

- ❖ Write the Facet on a 3x5 card for review and study this month. “For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is a storm against the wall” (Isaiah 25:4).
- ❖ Go over all the questions and answers for Week One, pp. 21-22.
- ❖ How old do you think the widow was? (Probably not too old, since she had a young son still at home.)
- ❖ Where was Zarephath? (It was north of Israel on the Mediterranean coast of Phoenicia between Tyre and Sidon. It later became known as Serepta. It’s name means “melting houses” which indicate it as a place of furnaces—a chief center for the glass works of Phoenicia.)
- ❖ Why was Elijah in Zarephath? (God told him to go there—1 Kings 17:8-9)



- ✧ Where had Elijah been hanging out? (*By the Brook Cherith—1 Kings 17:5*)
- ✧ How did Elijah receive his meals at the brook? (*By ravens—1 Kings 17:6*)
- ✧ Can you just imagine this wild looking man (he resembled John the Baptist) asking you for food? Even in that day, it would have been kind of scary.
- ✧ How do you react when you are approached by homeless people asking for handouts?
- ✧ Are we willing to give to others in need?
- ✧ What does Elijah tell the woman? (*“Fear not”—1 Kings 17:13*)
- ✧ Do you think this fear was concerning Elijah or fear of doing what he asked? (*Remember, she thought that she and her son were going to die after they finished their meager meal.*)
- ✧ How many times do we fear what God asks of us?
- ✧ What did the widow do? (*She obeyed and was blessed—1 Kings 17:15-16. This woman suddenly exercised the “Gift of Hospitality” and allowed Elijah to become a houseguest for a time.*)
- ✧ Did the widow’s poverty status change because of this situation? (*No, but at least she and her son could survive because now she was trusting God for her provisions.*)
- ✧ Make an entry in your journal of a time when you felt poor, either financially or spiritually.
- ✧ Close in prayer and thank God for His blessings on you and your family.

ALIGNED

- ✧ Read the FACET Scripture together (Isaiah 25:4).
- ✧ Go over all the questions and answers for Week Two, pp. 22-23.
- ✧ Take the three words that start with “S” from the FACET verse and write each one in your journal. Then write down or share how these words remind you of the Lord. (*Examples: Strength—God is my power; Storm—God is with me through the storms of life; Shadow—God can be with me all the time.*)
- ✧ What does “aligned” mean? (*To adhere to a prescribed course of action; to ally [oneself, for example] with one side of an argument or cause.*)
- ✧ Do you want God on your side?
- ✧ How does God feel about widows and their children? (*James 1:27-says we should not neglect them; In Deuteronomy 14:29, God says those who care for them will be blessed*)
- ✧ What does Christ command of us? (*Care for others—Luke 3:11; Matthew 5:42-45*)
- ✧ Jesus said there were many widows in Israel during the days of Elias (another spelling of Elijah) but which widow did he specifically mention? (*Widow of Sarepta, the city formerly known as Zarephath—Luke 4:26-27*)
- ✧ Even in the Old Testament, we find directions about being charitable. Read Ecclesiastes 11:1-2 and discuss what it means.

LEADER’S NOTE: In researching, I found that the idea here is one of openhanded generosity. Give freely, wisely, but generously to the needs of those about you. This phrase, “Cast your bread upon the waters”, was a proverb in Israel for what looked like wasteful expenditures. No one would take good bread and throw it into the river; he would be regarded as someone who was very wasteful. Yet, here, we are being encouraged to do just that, to be willing to take a chance where a real need is evident and try to meet that need. The thought of going to the park and throwing bread to the ducks came to mind. Can you imagine how the people of old would have looked at that?

- ✧ We find many other examples in the Bible of giving freely. Read Luke 21:2-3. This story has motivated people all over the earth to give from their hearts.
- ✧ What type attitude should we have in giving? (*Cheerful—2 Corinthians 9:7b*)
- ✧ Close in prayer and ask God to give you courage to meet the needs of others and to do it with the right attitude.

ASSURED

- ✧ Read the FACET verse together.
- ✧ Go over all the questions and answers for Week Three, p. 23.
- ✧ Do you have assurance of your salvation? (*Hebrews 10:22, 2 Timothy 1:12, Proverbs 3:24*)
- ✧ If not, can you trust God to give you assurance? (*Romans 10:9*)
- ✧ What made the Widow of Zarephath give this man her last little bit of food? (*God had prepared her heart as a widow to be: W-wise; I-Interested; D-Devoted; O-Observant; W-Worthy. Write the word WIDOW on a card or in your journal. Fill in the acrostic.*)
- ✧ Tell how she was each of the above words. (*Wise-she recognized the man of God and wanted to care for him; Interested in Elijah's God and trusted Him; Devoted to her son and his needs; Observant of how the man of God cared for them; and Worthy of God's love and provision.*)
- ✧ Besides the ravens and the widow, can you think of another miraculous way Elijah was fed? (*1 Kings 19:1-8*)
- ✧ Name another time when a woman had to trust a prophet regarding her son. (*2 Kings 4:8, 14, 17-21, 32-36*)
- ✧ How is this similar to the situation in Zarephath? (*Man of God prayed, stretched himself on the dead child, and the child came back to life.*)
- ✧ Did the Shunamite woman have the faith of the widow? (*Yes. She recognized the man of God immediately and offered him hospitality—2 Kings 4:9-10*)
- ✧ Are you willing to give your all for the cause of Christ? (*God has always demanded our all. He's not satisfied with less than our total commitment.*)
- ✧ Make an entry in your journal. List things you do for Christ. These might be singing, praying, serving, Bible study, working with children...whatever. If you know of areas where you haven't given your best, tell the Lord how you plan to make that right.
- ✧ Close in prayer. Ask God to shower His blessings on you and strengthen your faith.



AFFIRMED

- ✧ Read the FACET again and tell how this verse can apply to your life.
- ✧ Go over the questions and answers for Week Four, p. 24.
- ✧ What would have been the outcome of this story if Elijah had moved on instead of staying at the widow's house for a while? (*Her son would probably have died and been buried. She, herself, might have starved to death.*)
- ✧ Name the two miracles Elijah performed in Zarephath. (*The barrel and cruse of oil stayed full and the fatherless dead son of the woman was presented back to her alive.*)
- ✧ What did this woman have that so many people lack today? (*FAITH*)
- ✧ Reread 1 Kings 17:9. Notice what God told Elijah. "I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." God was working on the widow's heart before Elijah arrived on her doorstep.
- ✧ Has God ever "commanded" you to do anything?
- ✧ Have you ever felt or thought that whatever crisis is happening in your life at the time is because of your sin? This was what the widow thought when her son died. (*1 Kings 17:18*)
- ✧ Why did God choose to give life back to the son? (*Because of His compassion.*)
- ✧ Are you thankful for that compassion on your life? (*Psalms 78:38*)
- ✧ Would this woman's life ever be the same again? (*I think not; her faith would stand strong against all odds after Elijah departed.*)



- ✧ Make an entry in your journal to affirm your faith in God by thanking Him for things He has accomplished in your life.
- ✧ Close in prayer and give everything to Him, your finances, your family, your life-past and future.

In Closing

We never know how our lives may change from one day to the next. Life's many twists and turns may make us feel like we are on a theme park ride. I know that feeling, and I'm sure the young widow I mentioned in the introduction does, also. How are we to face unexpected tragedies, shattered dreams, interrupted futures and emotional outbursts? It's only by the grace and mercy of God that we can continue on and live productive lives. If we could sit down and have a little corn cake with the widow of Zarephath, I'm sure she would tell us to trust in God with everything that is in us. We are to "lean not to our own understanding" because God is in control. Can you let Him be the ultimate authority in all your situations? The widow of Zarephath had something that I long to have more of. That something was the faith that God would take care of her and her family. How's your faith?