



GROUPS MATTER.

Sermon Outline: Biblical Foundation for New Groups

For churches to continue to reach more people, new groups must be created.

FROM: *GroupsMatter.com/Launch*

2 Kings 4:1-7

2 Kings 4-7 provides a break in the chronological records of the kings and prophets. These chapters examine specific miracles, providing lessons that strengthen faith and dependence upon God.

The specific miracle in 2 Kings 4:1–7 involves a widow and her sons. Her late husband was a man who feared the Lord and was considered a “son of the prophets”. Upon his death, the widow and her two children were apparently alone, with no one to care for them and very little resources. A creditor was soon to place them as slaves.

Elijah asked the woman what she had left. A jar of oil was all. Elijah instructed her to borrow empty containers from her neighbors, not just a few, but as many as she could gather. She was then to pour the oil from her containers into the borrowed ones—to fill them. Her sons kept bringing the containers and she kept pouring the oil. Here God stepped in. Her one container of oil continued to fill container after container. Then, the oil stopped when all the containers were full and there were no more empty ones.

There are some principles and realities from this passage that churches and church leaders must understand. Let’s begin with an understanding that God has a mission for every church. That mission is to fulfill the Great Commission to make disciples. God wants every church to be reaching people with the gospel and to see those people mature in Christ.

The Bible tells us that evangelism and discipleship occurs best in the context of relationships. Within the ministry of the church, relationships develop best within smaller groups. The larger the group, the less likely deeper relationships will develop. Smaller groups simply provide greater opportunity for people to know one another, openly converse and confide with each other, work together on projects and missions, share life together, and care for one another. All of these actions develop relationships that grow and deepen.

For churches to continue to reach more people, new groups (empty containers) have to be created.

continued >

So let's learn from this account of a miracle and its implication for the church today.

1. Gather an exponential number of empty containers (v3)

The prophet did not ask the widow to find one or two more containers, but to borrow empty containers from everyone. She was to go to all her neighbors, friends, relatives to ask for empty containers. In fact, she was specifically told “do not get just a few.”

If empty containers (new groups) are needed in order to include more people in our churches, we cannot focus on gathering just one or two. We should not set our goals and sights on “just a few”, but on many. In other words, we should strive to launch many new groups every year, expecting those groups to reach new people hearing and learning the Word of God.

2. God fills the containers (vv5-6)

The prophet did not bring in oil to fill all the containers. God miraculously filled the empty containers. The widow and her sons worked to gather the containers. She obeyed the prophet by pouring her oil into the empty containers, but it was God that filled the containers. He took the little oil she already had and multiplied it out many times over.

FROM: *GroupsMatter.com/Launch*

Launching new groups involves work. Leaders are enlisted and trained. A gathering place is determined. The content of study (curriculum) is chosen. We are to obey the Lord in fulfilling the Great Commission by inviting people. But, it is up to God to “fill the containers.” Sure, we are to invite others. God works through our work, but He is the one who brings people into the groups and forms relationships that He determines are best.

1 Corinthians 12:18 tells us that God places people into the body as He sees fit. “But now God has placed each one of the parts in one body just as He wanted.”

3. Involve others (v3)

The prophet did not do all the work. Many people were involved. The widow, her sons, the neighbors—all had a part in this miracle.

Launching new groups requires the involvement of many. A pastor, minister of education, or Sunday School leader alone can only do so much. But when many are involved, the possibilities are so much greater. For example, if the woman had involved more neighbors—borrowed more empty containers—there ultimately would have been more oil.

“The secret to success is involvement.”

4. Containers can only hold so much (v4)

The widow was instructed to fill the containers and then set them aside when they are full. While the original container contained a seemingly endless supply of oil, the containers would only hold so much. When they were full, they were full.

There are all sizes of groups. Some groups are large. Some are really small. In fact, a group can be composed of only two people. There is no perfect size group, however, every group has a “full” limit. While the numbers of people may vary, every group maximizes effectiveness at some point.

Many factors are involved in determining when a group is full. Some are obvious, such as the size of the meeting location. There's no way to get 20 people in a space that can only hold 10! But some are subjective: the maximum number that allows all to verbally interact; no more than the group can adequately minister to one another in need and crisis times; the ability to know everyone's names and information about their lives, etc.

Empty chairs **do not** equate room for more people.

Here's the reality: when a group reaches that mystical maximum number, when the container is full., if more people are added, others have to be poured out and displaced. It is impossible to add more when a container is full.

5. A catalyst is needed (v3)

The widow poured the oil. The Lord miraculously filled the containers. But, the Lord used the prophet to initiate it all.

FROM: *GroupsMatter.com/Launch*

Very few, **very** few groups just spring up on their own volition. New groups are not like tree sprigs that just pop up out of roots. New groups are initiated. And a person, a catalyst, is needed for that initiation.

Because God places people into the body of the church as He sees fit, He has a place where He wants them. This is a place where they will be loved, cared for, challenged to grow and serve. Therefore, God will place upon the hearts of church leaders the need for new groups. He will burden for certain types of groups, the target of groups and the content for study of groups. Church leaders should be prayerful, expectant and open to the Lord's voice in the exponential creation and launch of new groups.

6. When there are no more empty containers, the oil will stop flowing (v6)

The sons kept on bringing empty containers to their mother, and she kept pouring from her original oil container. But when the last container was filled, the oil stopped flowing. In other words, God stopped providing more oil for the widow and sons.

Why would church leaders think that God will send more people when there is no place for them in a group? If a group is full, why would the Lord add more to that group?

If we desire to really fulfill the Great Commission in obedience to the Lord, we will always have new containers that can hold more. Not just one or two, but many, all expecting the Lord to fill those containers with people who need Him and His Word. ■