Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study “God is...” these sermon outlines will use different Scripture passages from the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit. This is a series of lessons about the nature of God and the benefits He brings into the lives of His children. This sermon has to do with God’s provision. He uses some strange means and some unlikely sources to provide for us. If we are willing to trust Him and obey, we will never go without.

Introduction: Help can come from some unlikely sources. “As a Georgia correctional officer lay unconscious on the ground, six inmates surrounded him. Then one reached toward the officer's belt and grabbed, not his gun, but his cell phone. As the inmate called 911, the others removed the officer's bulletproof vest so they could perform CPR. ‘It wasn't about who is in jail and who wasn't. It was about a man going down and we had to help him.’” The sheriff’s office gave the inmates free pizza, and the officer’s family brought the dessert.1

We all have needs. One day, that will not be true. We won’t need food or sleep or rest. We’re not there yet. Until then, God promises to provide every need at just the right time. Are you willing to trust Him for that? Are you willing to accept the strange, illogical and even distasteful ways He chooses to use? Elijah was in a situation where he had no choice but to trust God and His way. The result was that God met needs Elijah did not know he had through means he never expected.

1. God causes His servants to have needs. (1 Kings 17:1)

The first time Elijah’s name shows up in the Bible is when he gives God’s message of judgment to Ahab. Ahab and the people who followed him would soon be in need. A faithfulness famine had lead to a food famine.

Elijah had two possessions that equipped him for his confrontation. He had a message from God, and he had courage. This courage came from his faith that God was always going to provide for him exactly what he needed. There was one problem. Though the Word of God fed his soul, it couldn’t feed his belly. He lived in Israel. A famine for Israel meant a famine for him. Though he had been obedient to God, his obedience had not saved him from hunger.

Does God put us in places of need even when we’re living in absolute obedience to Him? God took Job’s family and possessions from him after He called Job “upright” (Job 1-2). The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where Satan tempted Him (Matt. 4). God gave Paul a “thorn in the flesh” despite the fact Paul was living in faithfulness to Him (2 Cor. 12). God didn’t promise faithfulness would save us from difficulty. Jesus said just the opposite. But He also promised He would meet those needs (Matt. 6:30).

2. God calls others to meet those needs. (1 Kings 17:2-24)

A. He used dirty birds. (v. 2-7)

It wasn’t hard for Elijah to obey God’s command to leave and go into seclusion by the brook. Those instructions would have made sense to
anyone. Drinking from the brook as his source of water also made sense. But using birds particularly ravens, as his source of food was weird and (pardon the pun) hard to swallow. Every morning and evening, the birds brought meat and bread to Elijah. Bringing food was nothing new for birds. Their instinct was to bring food (worms) to their young. This was different. Now they would be bringing food to a human. They would have to overcome their natural fear and their natural hunger.

Elijah had some overcoming to do too. These were ravens. Ravens were dirty (Lev. 11:13-15). They were scavengers, eating food other animals would bypass. When the birds brought the food, did Elijah question where they got it from? Did they steal it from Ahab’s kitchen, cooked and tasty, or did they pluck it from a dead animal baking in the sun? Either way, it would have had bird saliva on it. Doesn’t that sound tasty? The first few days, he probably had difficulty stomaching the food. He didn’t complain. He received it, and he was nourished.

Are you willing to accept God’s means of providing for your needs no matter how illogical or distasteful those means are? “I’ll starve before I get a job there!” “I’ve got my pride. I’m not going to tell anyone about our need or accept anyone’s charity.” God promised to meet your needs. He never said the means He would use would be to your liking.

There was one more problem with God’s solution for Elijah’s need. It was temporary. The brook dried up. God knew that was coming and had a second step to the plan.

B. He used a desperate widow. (v. 8-24)

1) God met their physical needs. (v. 8-16)

Elijah must have responded with shock when God told him the plan. God had already instructed a widow to provide for him. This wasn’t a rich widow. This was a desperate widow. All she had left was a son and a last meal. Because she was willing to exercise faith and obey God, God met Elijah’s needs, the widow’s needs, and the boy’s needs.

She wasn’t the only one who had a difficult, distasteful task. Elijah had to get up the guts to require of this mother that she give food to him before she gave food to her son. Confronting Ahab was painless compared to confronting this widow! If he hadn’t done so, she would have carried out her plan – eat and watch her son waste away.

The two of them illustrate two truths. First, as you obey God to meet needs in other’s lives, God will meet the needs in your life. Don’t wait for God to meet your needs before you obey Him and meet needs in other’s lives. Second, obedience to God is the pathway to everyone’s needs being met. God uses to meet one another’s needs.

2) God met their emotional needs.

Not all our needs are physical. Some of our deepest needs are emotional. This woman and her son experienced loneliness. So did Elijah. Since he called for the drought and because he judged idolatry, he did not have many supporters in Israel. His only friends were birds, and they weren’t very talkative. It may even be that God kept him in seclusion with the birds for months to convince him of his need for people. Elijah, this woman and her son lived together until the end of the famine – several years. They
became like a family. Elijah’s presence met their need for companionship, and they met his need for the same.

If you’re lonely and afraid, find others who are lonely and afraid, and work to meet their needs. Soon, you will discover that your needs have disappeared.

3) God met their spiritual needs. (v. 17-24)

This beautiful story almost had a tragic ending. The widow’s son got sick and died. Both Elijah and the mother reacted with agony.

The mother did what many of you have done in a time of need – you blame yourself. She said, “Are thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance?” Whenever you are in need, it is wise to evaluate the reason. Did you do something that created that need? In her case, it was not her fault. But the thought that it could have been made the pain so much worse. Not all your needs are your fault.

Elijah reacted with just as much pain as the mother. The boy had become like a son to him, and the mother had already suffered enough with the death of her husband. Elijah questioned the justice of God in taking her son too. And then, Elijah prayed for the same God who had taken her son to give him back. God did. Her suffering was over. But why take the boy to begin with if God was just going to resurrect him? Why put her through that torture? One reason. It built her faith (v. 24). Her greatest need was not food or companionship. It was faith.

Conclusion: Needs that get met one day are going to show up again. The time eventually came for Elijah to leave this family and go back to Israel to face Ahab. Israel had a spiritual need that God wanted to meet through Elijah. God had met his need. Now it was time for him to meet someone else’s.

It was hard for Elijah to walk away. It was hard for them to watch him fade into the distance. Regardless of their separation, they both had the presence of God. God would continue to meet their needs. And because they had God, they would see each other again in the place where God eternally meets the needs of all His children.

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