

# THE GENEROUS HEART

• A BIBLE STUDY FEAST FOR ALL •

## Session 3 - Elisha and the woman of Shunem: **WORSHIP**

### ..... **APPETISER** .....

The following background notes are provided to help you in preparation for the main teaching and follow-up activities. A summary of the content is provided in the teaching video to be shown in the 'Today's Special' section of this session.

*'Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.'* (Psalm 100:2)

In Psalm 100:2, we are called to *'worship the Lord with gladness'*. The original Hebrew word used in this verse is *abad* which points to the idea that service is an act of worship. Rather than saving our worship for Sundays, we need to look for the opportunities God provides to serve him every day. In today's session we meet a wealthy woman who saw an opportunity to honour God by serving the prophet Elisha.

*'One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he passed by, he stopped there to eat. She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."*

*One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the*

*army?'" She replied, "I have a home among my own people."*

*"What can be done for her?" Elisha asked.*

*Gehazi said, "She has no son, and her husband is old."*

*Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms."*

*"No, my lord!" she objected. "Please, man of God, don't mislead your servant!"*

*But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.'*

(2 Kings 4:8-17)

After taking over responsibility from the prophet Elijah, Elisha regularly travelled to Mount Carmel to pray. As Elisha made his journey he passed through the village of Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived with her husband. We never find out her name but we know from Scripture that she was independent, financially secure and that her act of service played a key role in supporting Elisha's ministry. She spotted the man of God and saw an opportunity to serve. She urged Elisha to come to her home for a meal, and this continued as he passed through the village regularly. Not simply content with providing meals, the woman felt prompted to do more to help.

*'She said to her husband. "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us." (2 Kings 4:9-10)*

Rather than setting up a camp bed whenever Elisha was in the area, the woman provided a fully-furnished room where he could stay in comfort. If she had ignored that initial prompt from God, then the opportunity to be part of Elisha's ministry would have been missed. Elisha stayed regularly when passing through Shunem, and while resting on one particular visit, he asked his servant Gehazi to bring the woman to him.

*'Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'" She replied, "I have a home among my own people.'" (2 Kings 4:13)*

Although she was wealthy, the security of that wealth depended on the favour of the king and the commanders of his army. Elisha's offer to put in a good word with the king was significant, potentially protecting the family's wealth and security. The woman turned it down.

How often do we think we are giving with a heart full of love for God and yet secretly hold on to the hope that we will receive something in return? The woman of Shunem gave with a glad heart and expected nothing in return.

*'Later Elisha asked Gehazi, "What can we do for her?"  
Gehazi replied, "She doesn't have a son, and her husband is an old man."  
"Call her back again," Elisha told him. When the woman returned, Elisha said to her as she stood in the doorway, "Next year at this time you will be holding a son in your arms!"*

*"No, my lord!" she cried. "O man of God, don't deceive me and get my hopes up like that."  
But sure enough, the woman soon became pregnant. And at that time the following year she had a son, just as Elisha had said.'*

*(2 Kings 4:14-17 NLT)*

Elisha identified the place where the woman had lost hope: a place where she felt God could no longer reach. She was willing to step out in faith for others, but believing in God's power for herself was more challenging. Elisha knew that big dreams and hopes were possible with God, but the woman of Shunem couldn't let herself hope as she had walked through this disappointment many times.

Just as Elisha had said, the woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. At this point it's tempting to wrap everything up with 'and they all lived happily ever after'. It's appealing to believe that the woman of Shunem gave abundantly to God and he 'rewarded' her with a son. That's often how we want things to be in our lives. She gave to God, he blessed her and everything from then on was perfect. But that's not how the story ended. Her abundant giving to Elisha wasn't an insurance policy to protect her from hardship – far from it.

When the boy was a little older, he was helping his father in the fields when he fell ill. He was taken home to his mother and sadly died. In desperation, she immediately went to find Elisha to help her son and said. *'Did I ask you for a son, my lord? And didn't I say, "Don't deceive me and get my hopes up?'" 2 Kings 4:28 (NLT).*

Understandably, the woman was distressed that her son, a gift from God, was taken from her. Elisha responded to the woman's cries and God restored the boy to full health. The boy's healing was a gift from a loving Heavenly Father, rather than a reward for the woman's generosity. Our giving is not transactional, black and white, give and receive. It's about building relationships with others and giving from a heart of love.

The relationship between Elisha and the woman started as a simple invitation to a meal. It then developed into a trusted friendship between the woman and the prophet. This story doesn't tie up in a neat bow or follow a simple plot line. Much like our own lives, it weaves its way through highs and lows. Throughout it all, both Elisha and the woman of Shunem gave to God gladly from a heart of worship and service. They did not give to receive his favour, they gave with gladness and their story encourages us to do the same.

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## STARTERS

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**Choose one of the starters to share with your group. If they are not familiar with Christian music then you can use the first ten seconds of each song of a playlist appropriate for your group.**

### JOYFUL SONGBOOK MEDLEY

Listen to the **'Joyful Songbook Medley'**. Write down all the songs of praise that you recognise from the Song Book of The Salvation Army. There are ten songs to find in total.

1. 362 'Give me joy in my heart' (TB 830)
2. 379 'Lord, I lift your name on high' (TB 948)
3. 401 'We want to see Jesus lifted high' (TB 916)
4. 398 'This is the day' (TB 890)
5. 357 'Come on and celebrate' (TB 583)
6. 370 'I want to sing it' (TB 685)
7. 56 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty' (TB 735)
8. 52 'O worship the King, all glorious above' (TB 481)
9. 231 'Praise him! Praise him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!' (TB 799)
10. 476 'Songs of salvation are sounding' (TB 630)

### SPOT THE INTRO

Access the Spotify playlist, **'Generous Heart'**. \* Play the first 15 seconds of each worship song on the playlist and ask the group to identify the song. There are ten songs to guess and this starter can be completed individually or in teams.

1. 'You are good' - Israel Houghton
2. 'Open up the heavens' - Meredith Andrews
3. 'Happy day' - Tim Hughes
4. 'My Lighthouse' - Rend Collective
5. 'Oceans' - Hillsong United
6. 'Do it again' - Elevation Worship
7. 'Who you say I am' - Hillsong Worship
8. 'I could sing of your love for ever' – Delirious?
9. 'Everlasting God' - Chris Tomlin
10. 'Endless praise' – Planetshaker

*\*If you don't have a Spotify account you can use the login details:  
Username – resources@salvationarmy.org.uk  
Password – Resources2016*

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# TODAY'S SPECIAL

Today we are focusing on the following verse from Psalm 100:

*'Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.'* (Psalm 100:2)

**Watch the teaching video to discover how this verse links with our theme for today - the story of Elisha and the woman of Shunem.**

## MAINS

In Psalm 100:2 we are called to *'worship the Lord with gladness'*. The original Hebrew word used in this verse is *abad* which points to the idea that service is an act of worship.

- **In your** experience, how are worship and service interlinked?
- **Share** a particular experience where you were aware that your act of service was also an act of worship.

In today's session we meet a wealthy woman who saw an opportunity to honour God by serving the prophet Elisha. **Read 2 Kings 4:8-17.**

The woman initially felt convicted to invite Elisha to a meal, but she soon identified there was more that she could do to support his ministry.

- **What** additional provisions did the woman put in place for Elisha's regular trips through Shunem?
- **What** was the woman's motivation for supporting Elisha's ministry? What did she discern about him?
- **Share** an experience where you felt prompted to serve God in a specific way.
- **Did you** follow the prompt? If so, what did your act of service lead to?
- **Share** an experience where you made a decision to serve without God's blessing. How did that impact your ability to stay motivated and serve with a glad heart?
- **Why** is it important to seek God's guidance before we volunteer our service?
- **What** would your response be when asked the question, 'Now what can be done for you?'
- **Why** is it sometimes so difficult to serve God without expecting anything in return?

The woman never asked for a son, but through God's power she gave birth to a baby boy. Years later her son fell gravely ill and died. Rushing to Elisha's side, the woman expressed her frustration at the way things had turned out.

*'Did I ask you for a son, my lord? And didn't I say, "Don't deceive me and get my hopes up?"' 2 Kings 4:28 (NLT).*

- **Have you** ever felt frustrated because you have served God faithfully and things haven't turned out the way you expected them to? If you feel comfortable, share your experience with the group.

In this instance, the son's health was restored, but the woman of Shunem continued to face difficulties in her life. Her obedience to God was not a free pass to avoid suffering.

Our giving is not transactional, black and white, give and receive. It's about building relationships and giving from a heart of love, expecting nothing in return.

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## DESSERT

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In today's session we met a woman who gave to God with a glad heart. When she offered a meal to Elisha all those years before, she would never have known the journey it would take her on and how her simple act of service would be used by God.

- **What** small acts of giving have you seen blessed by God in ways you could never have imagined?
- **In what** ways can you ensure that you are living out the words of Psalm 100:2?

### PRAYER

Lord,  
We thank you for the way you love us and give with such generosity.  
May we live our lives reflecting that same generosity and love to others.  
Help us to give from a place of service, as an act of worship, expecting nothing in return.  
Amen.

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## SIDES

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The *'Sides'* and *'For Sharing'* courses provide additional activities that can be used as part of the main session or at another time. Ideally these would be used after the *'Mains'* course of the main session.

### GOD-INCIDENCE?

The story of the woman of Shunem didn't end when her son's health was restored. Her friendship with Elisha continued and he never forgot the way she supported his ministry in the early days.

Read 2 Kings 8:1-6 to discover what happened next in life of the woman of Shunem.

- **How** do we know the relationship between Elisha and the woman of Shunem continued?
- **What** had the woman of Shunem experienced since we last saw her in 2 Kings 4?

- **How** do we know that she held on to her faith throughout the difficulties she faced?

The Collins dictionary defines a coincidence as ‘when two or more similar or related events occur at the same time by chance and without any planning’. The term ‘God-incidence’ is sometimes used within the Christian Church to demonstrate God’s hand in the seemingly random events of our lives.

- **How** would you define a ‘God-incidence’? How is it different to a coincidence?
- **What** ‘God-incidence’ does the woman of Shunem experience in 2 Kings 8:1-6?
- **Have you** ever experienced a ‘God-incidence’? If so, share it with the group.

### MOTIVATION

In the book *Boundaries*, Dr Henry Cloud and Dr John Townsend highlight the different ways we may have questionable motives when giving to others. Read Stan’s story:

**Stan was confused. He read in the Bible and was taught in church that it was more blessed to give than to receive, but he found that this often was not true. He frequently felt unappreciated for ‘all he was doing’. He wished people would have more consideration for this time and energy. Yet, whenever someone wanted something from him, he would do it.**

**He thought this was loving, and he wanted to be a loving person.**

**Finally, when fatigue grew into depression, he came to see me.**

**When I asked what was wrong, Stan replied that he was ‘loving too much’.**

**‘How can you “love too much”?’ I asked. ‘I’ve never heard of such a thing.’**

**‘Oh, it’s very simple,’ replied Stan. ‘I do far more for people than I should. And that makes me very depressed.’**

**‘I’m not quite sure what you’re doing,’ I said, ‘but it certainly isn’t love. The Bible says that true love leads to a blessed state and a state of cheer. Love brings happiness, not depression. If your loving is depressing you, it’s probably not love.’**

**‘I don’t see how you can say that. I do so much for everyone. I give and give and give. How can you say I’m not loving?’**

**‘I can say that because of the fruit of your actions.’ (Cloud, H & Townsend, J, *Boundaries*, Michigan: Zondervan, 2017 2nd Ed)**

- **How** do you feel Stan may have lost his way when it comes to serving others?
- **What** do you think his motivation for giving might be?
- **In what** ways do you relate to Stan’s experience of giving?
- **How** can we ensure that we reflect the words of Psalm 100:2 and avoid giving with the wrong motivation?

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**FOR SHARING**  
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### GIVING ART

Take time to look at examples of [Hannah Dunnett’s artwork](#).

Using Hannah Dunnett’s artistic style as inspiration, create your own artwork using verses of Scripture that speak about giving. Some examples are listed below.

*'Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.'* (2 Corinthians 9:7)

*'But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.'* (1 Chronicles 29:14)

*'A gift opens the way and ushers the giver into the presence of the great.'* (Proverbs 18:16)

*'And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.'* (2 Corinthians 9:8)

*'Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.'* (Deuteronomy 15:10)

### **BACKGROUND MUSIC**

**Listed below there is a selection of music that fits with the theme of today's session.**

- **Dream Small - Josh Wilson**
- **Do Something - Matthew West**

### **SALVATION ARMY SONGBOOK**

6. 'Blessing and honour'

39. 'Joyful, joyful, we adore thee'

331. 'Come into his presence'

337. 'I will enter his gates'

343. 'O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!'

350. 'All people that on earth do dwell'

380. 'Lord of creation, to you be all praise'

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# THE GENEROUS HEART

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## Takeaway!

A psalm. For giving grateful **PRAISE**.

**SHOUT** for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

**WORSHIP** the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

**KNOW** that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

**ENTER** his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his **LOVE** endures for ever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

(Psalm 100: 1–5)

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