

**Lesson Title:** Failed Expectations - The Woman of Shunem

Key Concept: The Bible is filled with people for whom God did not do what they expected. Like the woman of Shunem, we must allow God to touch our deferred hopes and do with them as he pleases.

**Scriptures:**

"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 4:16–17 *New Living Translation*)

Then she 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 *New Living Translation*)

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life.

(Proverbs 13:12 *New Living Translation*)

Context Scriptures: 1 Kings 4:8–36, 1 Kings 8:1–6, Psalm 33:18, Psalms 119:81–88, Lamentations 3, Isaiah 43:1–3, Romans 15:13, Hebrews 11:33–38

**Lesson Thoughts:**

(Start by doing the play, "The Shunamite Woman: 2 Kings 4:8–37." See attached.)

Psychologists tell us that the things we do not talk about are the things that control us. Sometimes we have lived with a hope deferred—a failed expectation—for so long that we have accepted a sick heart as part of our life. The only way we have been able to deal with the pain is to bury it and avoid it, leaving it as our constant, painful, ignored companion.

The Shunamite Woman is introduced to us as a kind, strong, wealthy woman as she takes initiative to build Elisha a guest room on her house. Looking for a way to thank her, he asks if there is anything she needs or wants, but she says no. From the outside it would seem she has everything: money, a kind husband, influence with the prophet... It is Elisha's servant, Gehazi, who notices that she is childless. (Elisha is a prophet, but in this story he isn't very observant.) When Elisha promises her that she will soon have a child, she responds with the heartbreaking cry we read above: "Don't deceive me and get my hopes up like that" (2 Kings 4:16). She does have a son as promised. Imagine the joy this fulfilled dream brings her! But then as an older child, he experiences a severe headache and dies in her arms. Her fulfilled hopes are removed from her.

She rushes to Elisha's home, and with an accusatory tone she declares the equivalent of "I had my pain under control, and now look what you've gone and done! I was better off before my dream was fulfilled!" The story ends well with Elisha resurrecting the boy and returning him to his mother.

As with the woman of Shunem, God will sometimes ask us to be vulnerable and allow him to touch things we have buried, things we have tried to come to peace with by shutting them out and thinking we have moved on with life. He will also sometimes, after fulfilling our dreams, ask us to give them back to him.

God does not promise to remove our troubles, instead promising that he will be with us through our "rivers of difficulty" and "fires of oppression" (Isaiah 43:2). We must trust that God is good. He is faithful and will carry us through, and sometimes, in spite of a painful process, he will guide us to a life that is better than we ever allowed ourselves to hope.



Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is a hope you had deferred and buried, but God fulfilled? What hope(s) are not yet fulfilled?
- 2) In this context, what is faith? If we have faith, will God fulfill our hopes?

Next Lesson: John the Baptist

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1. Think about the story of Abraham and the promise of being the father of many nations. What has God promised that he hasn't answered? Think about God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. What has God given you that you now claim as your own and you would have trouble giving up?
2. Listen to song "Hope Again" by Ayiesha Woods and make a list of hopes you have let die. Pray that God will help you to trust him with them once more.
<https://youtu.be/0KTFolc2WA4>
3. Read the story of Thomas Chisholm's "Great is Thy Faithfulness" at:
<https://www.staugustine.com/article/20160204/LIFESTYLE/302049909>
4. Read the story of Fanny Crosby at:
https://www.eaec.org/faithhallfame/fanny_crosby.htm
5. These two hymnists turned their pain and problems into a blessing for others. How do you think God can turn your "hope deferred" into a positive?

The Shunamite Woman: 2 Kings 4:8–37

Cast: Narrator, Woman of Shunem, Elisha, Gehazi, Husband, Son, Servant (Silent)

Narrator: One day Elisha passed through Shunem. A leading lady of the town talked him into stopping for a meal. And then it became his custom: Whenever he passed through, he stopped by for a meal.

Shunammite Woman *(to her husband)*: I'm certain that this man who stops by with us all the time is a holy man of God. Why don't we add on a small room upstairs and furnish it with a bed and desk, chair and lamp, so that when he comes by he can stay with us?

Narrator: And so it happened that the next time Elisha came by he went to the room and lay down for a nap. Then he said to his servant Gehazi...

Elisha: Tell the Shunammite *woman* to come here.

Narrator: He called her and she came to him. Through Gehazi, Elisha said...

Elisha *(to Gehazi)*: Tell her: You've gone far beyond the call of duty in taking care of us; what can we do for you? Do you have a request we can bring to the king or to the commander of the army?

Woman: Nothing. I'm secure and satisfied in my family. *(Woman exits)*

Elisha *(to Gehazi)*: There's got to be something we can do for her. But what?

Gehazi: Well, she has no son, and her husband is an old man.

Elisha: Call her in

Narrator: He called her and she stood at the open door.

Elisha: This time next year you're going to be nursing an infant son.

Woman: No, my lord! O man of God, don't deceive me and get my hopes up like that!

Narrator: The woman conceived. A year later, just as Elisha had said, she had a son. The child grew up. One day he went to his father, who was working with the harvest hands, complaining...

Son *(to his father)*: My head hurts! My head hurts!

Husband *(to his servant)*: Take the child inside to his mother.

Narrator: The servant took him in his arms and carried him to his mother. He lay on her lap until noon and died. She took him up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut him in alone, and left. She then called her husband...

Woman *(to her husband)*: Get me a servant and a donkey so I can go to the Holy Man; I'll be back as soon as I can.

Husband: But why today? This isn't a holy day—it's neither New Moon nor Sabbath.

Woman: Don't ask questions; I need to go right now. Trust me.

Narrator: She went ahead and saddled the donkey, ordering her servant...

Woman: Take the lead—and go as fast as you can; I'll tell you if you're going too fast.

Narrator: And so off she went. She came to the Holy Man at Mount Carmel, about a day away. The Holy Man, spotting her while she was still a long way off, said to his servant Gehazi...

Elisha (to Gehazi): Look out there; why, it's the Shunammite woman! Quickly now. Ask her, 'Is something wrong? Are you all right? Your husband? Your child?'

Woman: Everything's fine.

Narrator: But when she reached the Holy Man at the mountain, she threw herself at his feet and held tightly to him. Gehazi came up to pull her away, but the Holy Man said...

Elisha: (To Gehazi) Leave her alone—can't you see that she's in distress? But GOD hasn't let me in on why; I'm completely in the dark.

Woman: Did I ask for a son, master? Didn't I tell you, 'Don't tease me with false hopes'?

Elisha (to Gehazi): Don't lose a minute—grab my staff and run as fast as you can. If you meet anyone, don't even take time to greet him, and if anyone greets you, don't even answer. Lay my staff across the boy's face.

Woman (to Elisha): As sure as GOD lives and you live, you're not leaving me behind.

Narrator: And so Elisha let her take the lead and followed behind. But Gehazi arrived first and laid the staff across the boy's face. But there was no sound—no sign of life. Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and said...

Gehazi: The boy hasn't stirred.

Narrator: Elisha entered the house and found the boy stretched out on the bed dead. He went into the room and closed the door—just the two of them in the room—and prayed to GOD. Elisha approached the boy and lay down, covering him with his body, mouth on mouth, eyes on eyes, hands on hands. As he was stretched out over him like that, the boy's body became warm. Elisha got up and paced back and forth in the room. Then he went back and stretched himself upon the boy again. The boy started sneezing...

Boy: (sneezes seven times)

Narrator: ...and opened his eyes. Elisha called Gehazi and said,

Elisha (to Gehazi): Get the Shunammite woman in here!

Gehazi (to Woman): Go inside the room,

Narrator: And she did.

Elisha: Embrace your son! He is alive!

Narrator: She fell at Elisha's feet, face to the ground in reverent awe. Then she embraced her son and went out with him.