

2 Kings 6: 1 – 7

There are many wonderful stories in the Bible, some fascinating and seemingly impossible events, interesting, larger-than-life heroes, and great life-changing lessons to be learned. It is sometimes hard to imagine that these were real people with strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, good times and bad times, just like you and me. Among the great stories from the Old Testament is one about a miracle performed by the prophet Elisha. It is found in **2 Kings 6: 1 – 7**. It is a short story, one that we might easily overlook, but it is packed with meaning and powerful lessons that are relevant to our time and especially to Christian educators.

The prophet Elisha was an educator. The principles of Christian education were alive and practised in Israel, and Elisha was committed to this important ministry. He followed the example of Elijah, moving from school to school to ensure that the principles and mission of true education were accomplished. In the book **Prophets and Kings p. 260**, Ellen white speaks of Elisha's work as Director of Education, supervising and teaching in the schools in places such as Bethel, Ramah, Gilgal and Jericho. She says, "As long as Elisha was able to journey from place to place throughout the Kingdom of Israel, he continued to take an active interest in the upbuilding of the schools of the prophets. Wherever he was, God was with him...". "These schools proved to be one of the most effective means in promoting the righteousness which 'exalteth a nation'" (Ed. p. 47).

And this is where our story in 2 Kings begins. It seems that the school in Jericho was doing well, that enrolment was up and the quality of the programme was so good that they were running out of space. Looking at this problem and how they

dealt with it can give us some insights into basic principles of Christian education and how it works in the lives of students and teachers; lessons we can apply to our practice of education today. Let us read the passage together again. (**2 Ki. 6: 1 – 7**).

And the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, “See now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us. ² Please, let us go to the Jordan, and let every man take a beam from there, and let us make there a place where we may dwell.”

So he answered, “Go.”

³ Then one said, “Please consent to go with your servants.”

And he answered, “I will go.” ⁴ So he went with them. And when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. ⁵ But as one was cutting down a tree, the iron axe head fell into the water; and he cried out and said, “Alas, master! For it was borrowed.”

⁶ So the man of God said, “Where did it fall?” And he showed him the place. So, he cut off a stick, and threw it in there; and he made the iron float. ⁷ Therefore he said, “Pick it up for yourself.” So, he reached out his hand and took it. (NKJV)

At first glance, it seems that the most exciting and meaningful part of this story is found in **verses 4 – 7**. However, for the next few minutes we will focus mostly on **verses 1 – 3** because God has a message and some important lessons for us today in those verses, principles we can apply to our situation. These verses tell of some qualities that should be seen in the students being educated in our schools, in the teachers who teach them, and in the schools where this teaching is done.

In verse one, we see the students making an observation: “This place where we are, this school of ours, is too small”, they said. They probably did not have enough classrooms to accommodate the number of students comfortably. Perhaps there wasn’t space for a science lab and a Home Economics lab. Perhaps there wasn’t

enough space to set up an agriculture plot, or a place where all students and staff could meet together for general worship. It was just too small.

But notice who made the observation: the students! They had not just been taught. to think for themselves, to analyze the situation they were in and identify what needed to change. They apparently understood what was required for good Christian education and also felt free to express their opinions and make their suggestions.

This is the kind of thinking good education should produce. EGW – *Every human being created in the image of God is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator – individuality, power to think and to do. The men [and women] in whom this power is developed are the [persons] who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men's thought.* (Mind, Character and Personality p. 361)

Secondly, the students were not content just to identify the problem. They were also able to propose a solution: go to a new site and build a new school. Christian education develops and encourages positive, productive thinking. It teaches the student to make a difference, to improve his environment. Ellen White puts it this way: “*Instead of educated weaklings, institutions of learning [should] send forth men [and women] strong to think and to act, who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions*” (Education. p. 17 – 18.)

Some students have no awareness of what is happening around them. They are distracted by constantly being on their electronic devices.... Others are just content to let older people think for them, while they simply accept information. They

don't question anything, don't disagree with anything, have no personal opinion. This is not how God wants His children to grow. Then there are those who, following the example of many of their elders, are able to see all the problems, describe them, analyze them, discuss them, and keep complaining about them, but can offer no meaningful solution, and are not prepared to be part of the solution. They constantly murmur and complain, always being negative in their thinking.

The student of Christian education, learning in an environment provided by the church and being taught by servants of Christ, comes to see himself/herself as a part of the church, owning it with all its faults and being anxious to see it improve, and searching for solutions to its problems. This attitude is highlighted in **1 Chron. 12: 32** which speaks about the sons of Issachar in the time of David. *“And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do”*. This is what we see in Elisha's students: the ability to understand the problems they were facing, and to propose effective solutions.

But the quality of these students did not just stop there. A third quality needs to be highlighted, because they were not only able to analyze the problem and suggest a solution, but *they were willing to get out and do the work!* And not just to do the work, but to lead out in the work. They said, ***“Let us go...”*** Listen to Ellen White. *“Let the youth be impressed with the thought that education is not to teach them how to escape life's disagreeable tasks and heavy burdens; that its purpose is to lighten the work by teaching better methods and higher aims. Teach them that life's true aim is not to secure the greatest possible gain for themselves, but to honour their Creator by doing their part of the world's work. (Ed. p. 222).*

Love for God and for the cause of Christ is not just expressed in words, but moreso, in action. When Paul met Jesus on the Damascus Road, his question was,

“Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do”? When Isaiah caught a vision of the awesomeness of God, he quickly volunteered, saying, “I will go!”

The aim of Christian education is to bring students to see Christ for themselves; to see His love and goodness and understand His mission. When they see Jesus for themselves, they will want to do something for Him, to become active in His church and to do His work. They will be true to the AY motto when it says “The Love of Christ *compels* me!” Elisha’s students were excited and rearing to go.

But building a school is not easy. It is not easy now and it wasn’t easy then. It calls for skills in planning, the ability to apply principle to practice, team work, physical strength and exertion, and determination. These students were willing to do the hard work, the dirty work. They were not afraid of manual labour. Christian education teaches the importance and dignity of manual work. In **Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students** we read : “*Physical employment is a part of the training essential for every youth . An important phase of education is lacking if the student is not taught how to engage in useful labour. (p. 308) “God designs that all shall be workers...God is a constant worker...the angels are workers...Those who look forward to a Heaven of inactivity will be disappointed...It is the faithful servant who will be welcomed from his labours into the joy of his Lord (PH 145).*

Back then, just as it is today, they had financial challenges. They could not even afford all the tools they needed to work with. They had to borrow even the axe they needed to cut the lumber. But they were not overwhelmed or discouraged by these challenges. They pressed forward knowing that no matter what the obstacle was, as long as they were on God’s mission, He would make a way and give them good success. If God is calling you today to go on His mission, to take a new path, to embark on a new journey, it is good to remember that He is Jehovah-Jireh, the

Great Provider. He will not fail you. He will provide all that you need to accomplish His will and you can do all things through His strength (**Phil. 4: 13**)

Today, we need young people who will not be overrun by the problems and challenges that we face; positive young people who will say “let us go” and then they will go. Many times students – and their parents – get discouraged by the challenges they face in getting a Christian education. Sometimes school is far away and transportation becomes a problem. Sometimes it is that school just does not seem attractive enough, doesn’t have a high enough rating. Most times the problem identified is difficulty in coming up with the school fees. But it is good to remember that when God gives an instruction, He always makes a way to get it done. He knows our limitations and does not give us more than we can bear. As we rise to obey Him, He uses these challenges to build our faith, reminding us that we are saved by grace through faith (**Eph. 2: 8**) and that the just shall live by faith (**Hab. 2: 4**).

But, back to our story. It is interesting to note that when they decided to go, they consulted with Elisha. They respected his authority and his wisdom and sought his approval. Here the young people with their vision, enthusiasm and freshness of new ideas were willing to consult the wisdom and experience of their older leader. *This is the winning combination:* student and teacher, youth and elders, children and parents respecting each other and willing to work together. This is Christian education at work. This is the kind of school environment in the schools of the prophets back then and in God’s schools today.

Clearly, there was a relationship of love and respect between Elisha and his students. He trusted them to do a good job and gave them permission to go, but even though they were free to go, they wanted him to come with them. They did not feel restricted or diminished by his presence. This relationship should be a

reality in all arena of education: home, church and school. Elisha too was led to say the important words: “I will go”.

So we finally come to verses 4 to 7, the action verses. They tell the result of what happens when God’s students and God’s teachers work together under God’s guidance. Collaboration. Cooperation. “...every man a beam...” (**verse 2**).

Chopping wood together. Shared labour and shared success. When we obey God and when we work together God does marvelous things.

When the axe head fell into the water. The students turned to Elisha. Our students, our youth should be quick to turn to us in a crisis, whether at home, church or school, and expect that something positive will happen because of the connection we have with God.

Elisha did not have the power to remedy the situation, but he knew a God who is all powerful. This was a teaching moment, an opportunity for the students to learn a powerful lesson in faith, and Elisha seized the moment. No panic. Calm and cool. He knew what God could do and he wanted them to know. This is the priority of every Christian teacher: to help God’s children to learn lessons of faith.

God is more interested in His children learning lessons of faith than even the teachers and parents are, and every Adventist teacher can be confident that God is supporting him/her in their work. God is even prepared to apply the laws of science in new ways so that they could learn. Iron doesn’t float on water. But it does, when God tells it to float. God was in the building project for the new school. God is still in the programme of Christian education today. He can do miracles and He does. When our schools are under-financed, but the money is found to keep their doors open, that is miracle. When a child comes in to school not being able to read and in two or three years graduate with three CSEC passes, that is miracle. But the

biggest miracle of all is when a youngster comes in with life all messed up, having no hope, no ambition, no direction in life and leaves as a fine young Christian, motivated and equipped to make a positive difference in the world. This is miracle! God can fix any problem. He can fix lives. Let your children experience His miraculous power in their lives.

Finally, as the axe head floated on the water Elisha told the student, “take it up”. God made the axe head float. He could have made it fly as well. It could have just flown and fitted itself back on to the stick. But God did not do that. He would not work a miracle for the student to do what he could do for himself! He wanted the student to participate in the miracle, to be a part of the process, to learn that he has a part to play. He would not just remember that God made iron float. He would remember his hands getting wet, the feel of cold iron in his hands, as his school mates stared in wonder, and he would be able to testify that God is real.

This is the kind of education that is needed today. This is the kind of education SDA Christian children should receive, the kind of education that brings the student to experience Jesus for himself; the education that enables him to meet the challenges of the times head-on and apply the supernatural power of God to the challenges of everyday life. This is the kind of education that builds a relationship with God, the relationship that will take our children, God’s children, through life here and now, to life everlasting. In the words of Jesus Himself, “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou has sent” (**John 17: 3**).

The great day of the Lord is near...and a world is to be warned...Thousands of the youth...should be giving themselves to this work...Let every Christian educator...encourage and assist the youth under his care in gaining a preparation to join the ranks [of workers] (Mind, Character, and Personality p. 368)

Will you help us make this education available to all our children? Don't rob them of their heritage, or of the faith foundation they need to face the time of trouble ahead. If it is your desire to do whatever is in your power to ensure our children can have such an education, please join me in a moment of commitment to Adventist Christian Education.

Pastor Michael Henry, May 2025