

A SEVEN DAY DEVOTIONAL

What's in the House

Seven readings on what God has already put in your hands.

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Before you begin

A woman came to Elisha with a debt she could not pay and two sons about to be taken as collateral. She had run out of everything. Elisha asked her a question that sounds almost careless when you first read it.

What do you have in the house?

She had nothing, and she said so. Then she corrected herself. Nothing except a little oil.

I have sat across from hundreds of women at Foundation House who would have answered him the same way. Nothing. Then a pause, and then the correction, because there is always a correction. Nothing except my hands. Nothing except my grandmother's recipes. Nothing except the fact that I am still here, which after the year I have had is not nothing.

This is a short book about that pause.

Seven readings, one page each. You can read the whole thing in twenty minutes or take one a day for a week. There is nothing to buy at the end and nothing you have to sign up for twice.

I am not going to tell you that what you have is enough. Most of the time it is visibly, measurably not enough, and pretending otherwise is the kind of encouragement that makes people stop trusting preachers. What I am going to tell you is that God has a long habit of starting with the thing already in the room, and that He has never once asked anybody to go and acquire something first.

So before you ask Him for more, let Him ask you His question.

Suzanne

The Pot of Oil

2 Kings 4:1-7

She had already done the arithmetic. That is the part people skip when they tell this story. She had counted what was in the house, and the counting had produced a number, and the number was no.

Elisha did not argue with her arithmetic. He did not tell her she was being negative or that she needed more faith. He asked her what she had, she told him the truth, and he built the entire miracle on the truthful answer.

Then he told her to go and borrow jars. Not a few, he said. Many.

Here is the part I think about. Nobody counted the jars for her. She decided how many to collect, and the oil flowed until the last jar she had gathered was full, and then it stopped. The oil did not stop because God ran out. It stopped because she did.

I have watched women at Foundation House borrow three jars when they could have borrowed thirty, because thirty felt greedy and three felt humble. It is not humility. It is a small opinion of God wearing humility's clothes.

The little oil was never the limiting factor. It never is.

The question. What have you already decided you do not have enough of, and how many jars have you actually gone out and collected?

Pray this. *Lord, I have been doing arithmetic instead of obedience. Show me what is in the house, and make me brave enough to go and borrow more jars than look reasonable. Amen.*

The Rod in Your Hand

Exodus 4:1-5

Moses had a list of reasons, and the reasons were good ones. He had been gone forty years. Nobody would believe him. He was not a speaker. Every objection he raised was accurate.

God did not address a single one of them. He asked what Moses was holding.

A staff. A stick. The thing a shepherd carries so unconsciously that he has to look down to answer the question. It had been in his hand for four decades and it had never once been the subject of a conversation.

Throw it on the ground, God said. And the ordinary thing became something Moses ran from.

Then came the harder instruction. Pick it up. By the tail, which is the one way no sensible person picks up a snake. And in his hand it went back to being a stick.

That stick parted a sea. It struck a rock and water came out of it. It stayed exactly what it had always been, a piece of wood belonging to a man who kept sheep, and it became the most consequential object in the Exodus.

God did not give Moses a better tool. He gave the tool back.

The question. What is in your hand so constantly that you would have to look down to name it?

Pray this. *Father, I keep asking You for equipment. Show me what You already put in my hand, and give me the nerve to pick it up again. Amen.*

The Lunch in the Basket

John 6:1-13

Five thousand men, plus the women and children nobody counted, and one boy with a packed lunch.

Andrew is the one who mentions it, and you can hear him deflating as he speaks. Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many?

He is right. That is the thing about Andrew's objection. It is not faithless, it is arithmetic again, and the arithmetic is correct. Five loaves against five thousand is not a shortage. It is a rounding error.

Jesus took it anyway.

Barley was the cheap grain, the poor family's bread. This was not a hamper. It was the smallest, least impressive food in the crowd, brought by the person with the least standing in it, and it fed everyone and left twelve baskets over.

I think about the boy handing it across. He did not know what was going to happen. He knew only that he was giving away his lunch to a stranger on the word of another stranger, and that he would be the hungry one in a field full of people.

The question was never whether it was enough. The question was whether he would let go of it.

The question. What are you holding onto because it is too small to be worth offering?

Pray this. *Jesus, what I have is embarrassing next to what is needed. Take it anyway. I would rather be hungry in Your hands than full in my own. Amen.*

The Stones in the Streambed

1 Samuel 17:38-40

Saul did what a generous man does. He gave David the best he had, which was his own armor, and it was a real gift. It was also the wrong gift.

David put it on and could not walk. I cannot go in these, he said, because I am not used to them. And he took them off.

That sentence costs more than it looks. He was seventeen or so, standing in front of the king, handing back the king's personal armor in public, about to go and fight a giant in the clothes he had walked in wearing.

Then he went down to the stream and picked up five stones.

Not a sword. Not a borrowed spear. The stones were free, the sling was the thing he had used since he was a boy, and both of them were already his.

There is a particular kind of failure that comes from fighting in somebody else's armor. It looks like obedience and it feels like humility and it will get you killed, because the thing that makes you effective is the thing you have practiced in the field where nobody was watching.

God had been training him in the pasture for years. Saul's armor would have wasted all of it.

The question. Whose armor are you wearing, and what did you learn in the field that you have been treating as too ordinary to count?

Pray this. *Lord, I have been trying to fight in equipment that does not fit me. Send me back to the stream. Let me use what You actually trained me with. Amen.*

The Needle in Her Hand

Acts 9:36-42

When Tabitha died, the widows stood around Peter and cried, and they did not make speeches about her character. They held up the clothes.

Robes and other garments she had made while she was still with them. That is the whole testimony. She sewed, and the women who had nobody left to provide for them had something to wear because of it.

Nothing in that story is a platform. She did not preach, she did not lead, she did not found anything with a name. She had a needle and a skill she probably learned as a girl from a woman who is not mentioned in the text.

And when God raised somebody from the dead in Joppa, that is who He raised.

I have a suspicion that we have badly miscounted what qualifies as ministry. I have watched a woman at Foundation House teach four others to make a pot of soup stretch to a week and genuinely believe she had contributed nothing that day, while the thing she taught will outlive her in four kitchens.

Tabitha's gift was so ordinary that its evidence was hanging in people's houses. That is not a smaller ministry than preaching. It is just quieter, and it lasts longer than most sermons.

The question. What do you know how to do that you have never once thought of as something God gave you?

Pray this. *Father, I have been waiting to be given something impressive. Let me use the needle. Let the evidence of it hang in somebody's house. Amen.*

What She Could

Mark 14:3-9

She broke the jar. That detail matters, because a broken alabaster jar cannot be resealed and half-used. Once it was open there was no version of the evening where she changed her mind.

The room turned on her immediately. A year's wages poured out in a few seconds, and the objection was a good one, which is what made it dangerous. It could have been sold and given to the poor. That is not a wicked sentence. It is the kind of sensible thing that gets said over every extravagant act of love.

Jesus stopped it with six words that I have never fully recovered from.

She has done what she could.

Not what was strategic. Not what scaled. Not what somebody with more resources would have done better. She did what she could, with what was hers, at the only moment it would ever have been possible, and He said the story would be told wherever the gospel went. It is being told right now, in your kitchen or your car or wherever you are reading this, which means He was not exaggerating.

What she could is the standard. It has always been the standard. The reason it does not feel like enough is that we keep measuring it against what somebody else could.

The question. What could you do, actually do, this week, that you have been disqualifying because somebody else could do it better?

Pray this. *Jesus, I keep waiting until I can do something worth doing. Let me do what I can, now, and let that be enough because You said it was. Amen.*

The Land You Are Standing On

Luke 15:25-32

The younger son gets the parable named after him, but it is the older one who breaks my heart, because he is standing in a field he owns and does not know it.

He will not go in. He tells his father he has slaved for years and never once been given a young goat to celebrate with his friends. And he is not lying. Nobody ever handed him a goat. That part is true.

What is not true is the picture underneath it, where he is a servant working off a debt in a house that belongs to somebody else.

My son, the father says, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

Everything. Present tense. Not everything will be yours when I am gone, and not everything could be yours if you earn it. The goats were his the whole time. He could have taken one any evening of any year and thrown a party for his friends, and his father would have been glad.

He was poor on his own land because he had decided he was hired help.

I meet this every week. Women who have been forgiven for years and still flinch. Believers standing on ground that was deeded to them at the cross, working like tenants, waiting for permission that was issued a long time ago.

You are not staff. Go in. The music is for you.

The question. Where have you been living like hired help on land that is already yours?

Pray this. *Father, I have been standing outside a house I belong in. Tell me again that everything You have is mine, and help me believe it enough to walk in. Amen.*

After the seven days

You have spent a week with people who had almost nothing and were asked for it anyway. A pot of oil. A stick. A packed lunch. Five stones out of a creek. A needle. A jar. A field somebody had been standing on for years without knowing whose name was on it.

None of them were given something new first.

If this week has done its job, you have an answer to Elisha's question that you did not have on Monday, and it is probably smaller and more ordinary than you would like. That is normal. It is also how this has always worked.

So do the thing. Not next month, when the feeling has worn off. This week, while it is still uncomfortable.

If you want more from me

I write about trauma, addiction, fear, fasting and freedom, mostly for people who are trying to get free themselves and for the people who walk alongside them. Everything is at suzannedburns.com.

I send a note about once a month. Not often, and never long.

At least a tithe of the author royalties from my books goes to Foundation House Ministries, the maternity home I founded and lead. You can see the work at foundationhouseministries.org.