



THE BEST LAID PLANS

*Karin Peabody
New Day Church
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I am so excited to talk to you all on this Mother's Day. I've been to other churches where the pastor's wife speaks on being a Mom and it's always been very encouraging and convicting because they were always such good spiritual Moms.

Unfortunately, that is not what's going to happen today. I love being a mom and I'm so thankful that I get to be one – but most of the lessons I've learned are not the kind that you pass on to other people. They're more like realizations. Like – I never knew how hard it would be to be kind to my own children. Or, I never realized how selfish I was until I became a mom, or how easy it is to make a plan and how hard it is to do it. Like the time the kids were down for a nap and I decided to have a nice cup of tea and read a book. And it tasted odd. I opened up the teapot, forgetting that Addison had played with it earlier, and inside were two dice, a few small plastic animals and two old foam earplugs. Good times.

I have so many plans that I have made that have never happened. Big things, like getting my Master's degree, and small things like journal entries that end mid-sentence, and cold cups of coffee all over the house. My ambitions have become smaller the older I get, they sound more like "today I will be nice." Plans I have a slight chance of accomplishing.

When Jeff asked me to speak on Mother's day I was really nervous at the thought. But the thing was, I knew exactly the passage of scripture I would talk about. And it's all about a Mom's plans gone awry, and taking care of kids and having company and food preparation and understanding God. All the things that make up my days.

So let's look at the story:

1 Kings 17:7-24

Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the LORD came to him: "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in

a jar so I may have a drink?" As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

"As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread-only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it-and die."

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'"

She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

"Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"

Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth."

This past winter I taught this lesson to the 3rd – 5th grade class here at New Day. And I had so many questions about it. First of all, why didn't God just give the Widow a ton of food right away? And why DID her son die? And what made her even want to give Elijah her last meal anyway? I just didn't get it, and so it really stuck with me. So I started reading it over and over again and I started to like it! Because I can relate to this woman. I relate to her fears as a Mom. I make plans that I think are better than God's. More than that I think her path of faith is much like all of ours. Because when we first believe in God, we don't understand Him

all at once – it's a process of experiencing what the Bible says is true about Him, and it takes some time.

Here's Elijah, a prophet (which was a representative for God -- someone God chose to speak for him.) And he needs help because there's a famine going on and there's no food or water for him. And there's also a widow who needs help because there's no food left and she has no way to get any more. So clearly they are going to be a lot of help to each other! If we were making a plan to help them, we would never hook up the two of them. But God has a plan, and his plans are better.

Elijah asks for water – and for the widow that's no problem. But when he asks for the bread, she is stopped in her tracks. This man of God is asking her for her last meal – not just her last meal but her son's as well. She has made a plan, to go home, eat some bread and die.

She had to be thinking, "This man is asking me to give up everything I have!"
GOD'S PLAN IS TO LEAVE ME EMPTY-HANDED.

But Elijah says, "Don't be afraid, Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son, For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, "The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry...:

I think it's remarkable that the woman actually did what Elijah asked her to do. But remember at the beginning of this story, God tells Elijah, "I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." So, on some level, this woman has been prepared to help him. And she does. She brings Elijah the food, with her hungry little boy watching. And God starts the miracle – when she returns after delivering the bread, there is more oil and flour – so she makes food for herself and her son. Can you picture her? She used up all she had, but she reaches her hand in the jar, and there's more flour. And she pours the bottle, and there's more oil. And she has more food. God had a plan – and His plans are better.

When my friend Debra got cancer and started chemo, we went wig shopping together. I asked Jeff if I could buy please buy her wig for her, (I felt so helpless and somewhat angry at God and I wanted to help her so bad) and told him the amount I thought it was going to be. So she picked out this wig that was just the right one, and I went up to pay for it and it was more than twice as much as I thought it was going to be. I quietly panicked a bit, and put it on the credit card and hugged her goodbye.

And then the "it's all about me" voice started. I don't know if you have an "it's all about me" voice, but I have one. She pops up on a regular basis. Mine started

saying things like, “Oh my gosh. That was so nice of me. I mean, that was huge. – I mean like, super nice. I wonder if anyone will find out that I bought her the wig. Like I wonder if someone will just say, “Oh did one of your really really good friends buy that for you? And then she’ll say, “Yes my friend Karin did wasn’t that so nice of her?” I wonder if anyone will ask her that... I hope so.” Aren’t I so impressive?

Then I remembered that it really was more than I thought it was going to be and so I called Jeff and said, “ummm, it was a little more than I thought...and I told him the amount” Jeff said, “No way – I just got a check in the mail today for just about that amount.” It was an unexpected check that arrived that day.

I had made a plan to help my friend by buying her a wig. But God had a plan, and his plans are better. God bought Debra’s wig that day, and it did two things in my heart. He graciously put my focus back on him, and killed my “it’s all about me” voice – thankfully. But it also spoke to those shadowy dark places in my heart that were angry at God. Because it was like he was saying, “Karin – I love Debra, I will give her everything she needs – I will be her support, and I will be her God and I will buy her wig.” And that was the truth. Today Deb is recovered and has gorgeous dark curly long hair. And God was her strength every day through that hard season. Praise God!

God’s plan is not to leave us empty-handed, **GOD’S PLAN IS TO GIVE US EVERYTHING WE NEED.** The Widow was given food every day. And it was the beginning of faith for her. Because she was going to die of starvation and now she’s not because God has cared for her. When God asked her to do something – he provided everything she needed to accomplish that task.

But it does bring me back to my question about God’s sense of efficiency. Why didn’t he just load her up with food and overwhelm her with his goodness? I mean, he’s GOD! It just didn’t make sense to me. I hate shopping so much and when I go to Winco, I come out with two carts full. Because I don’t want to have to go again for a long, long time. But then I thought about how God is our Heavenly Father - our–Parent, And I thought of how every morning I make breakfast for the kids – and it’s always bagels or cereal or toast or oatmeal. I get up and make it for them every morning day in and day out without much variation. And I’m not upset that it’s not efficient. I don’t throw a bunch of breakfast stuff in the freezer and say, “Hey kids – I feel that it’s not efficient for me to keep doing this each morning – I’ve got better things to do with my time, so go ahead and take care of it yourself ok?” I do it every day because I care every day.

Sometimes we think we got this big dose of God’s mercy and grace when we first believed in him and it’s supposed to last the rest of our lives. And we think God has better things to do and so we’d better not expect him to care about our daily lives. But God cared for the widow’s oil and flour every day. That very small

thing – he paid attention to. Have you ever not prayed about something because you thought God wouldn't care? That he's too busy? I have – but that was not the God of the Bible I was thinking about. God is big enough to handle all the crisis in the world and your daily needs as well. **GOD'S PLAN IS TO GIVE US EVERYTHING WE NEED, EVERY DAY.** He is our perfect parent who doesn't neglect or get needy or frustrated or tired. He's not like us. If he's called you to be a mom, you can get new patience every day. If He's called you to a tough job – he will supply you with strength every day. If you're in a painful family situation right now, He will give you new help and hope every day. God is still in the business of giving out oil and flour.

He has said

Isaiah 41:10

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

And

Lamentations 3:22

“Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail, they are new every morning...”

GOD'S PLAN IS TO GIVE US EVERYTHING WE NEED. EVERY DAY.

So day after day, the widow sees God's provision. I wonder if she was surprised every time? Like if it was me, I would have been speechless and teary at first and then I would have been thinking “this is amazing!” Then I would have been inviting my girlfriends over, “You're not going to believe this!”

And for a period of time she sees that God's prompting to feed Elijah that first day was a part of a bigger calling. He needed someone to help him, to feed him and give him a place to stay. She thinks OK God's plan is not that I have to give up everything - I mean, he's taking care of me every day. **GOD'S PLAN MUST BE FOR ME TO DO GOOD THINGS.**

Have you ever felt like that? Like you want to do good things for God? I have – I want to do lots of good things for God. And it is a part of his plan for us.

But I have a huge capacity to take one truth and run with it until it is no longer balanced. There have been many seasons in my life that I've let “doing good things for God” become my focus and my basis of my relationship with him. I can easily let my desire to do good things for God to become all about me and not about God at all. I think, If I do these things, serve these people, make everyone in my life like me, then I will improve my rank.

I am convinced that when doing good things for God becomes our focus, instead of God himself, we are in a worst case scenario for our faith.

1.) When we do good things, we get prideful – compare ourselves to other people .

2;) When we don't do good things we feel shame and far away from God.
So we're constantly on this holy yo-yo and it's exhausting.

A few years ago when I had three really small children a realized how much I had bought into that whole system. It was one of the driest times in my life spiritually. Because I wasn't doing good things for God. I was living in this teeny tiny world with teeny tiny people who didn't say thank you. I was changing diapers, and cleaning up juice and cracker messes and doing laundry and vacuuming, and then in the afternoon, I'd do it again. Many days I didn't even like my children by the end of the day. I felt useless and unappreciated and exhausted. But what felt very heavy was that thought that said, "You're not doing enough for God."

But God is my good Father, and He wasn't willing for me to live with bad theology. I had planned on not measuring up, not being good enough for God. But God had a plan for me and it was better.

During that time we were just thinking about church planting, and I read a book called the Emotionally Healthy Church and I read a few lines that rocked my world. The author talked about his struggle of being a good Christian. He said, "I ignored my human limits and ran myself ragged to do more and more for God! I fell into the trap of living as if spending all day in prayer and the Word was more spiritual than cleaning the house, doing laundry, or taking care of the kids."

That was big. I needed to hear that. I had unknowingly categorized my life into spiritual and unspiritual. It never occurred to me that this job – this taking care of small children every day, was where he had placed me. It never occurred to me that doing laundry could be an act or worship. It never occurred to me that God can be honored by our every day lives, not just church stuff.

Because God's plan isn't that we do good things for him. **GOD'S PLAN IS FOR US TO SEE THAT HE IS GOOD.** He is good. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says, "The chief end of Man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." There is joy in that statement. There is freedom in that statement. We can't enjoy him if He is not good – if he is not God. But he is, and we can glorify him every day – no matter what your day holds. What an honor that we can glorify a Holy God! We can pray while we're driving, thank him while we fold laundry, cast our cares on him in line at the grocery store. **GOD'S PLAN IS FOR US TO SEE THAT HE IS GOOD.**

The widow saw through God's provision that God was good, and he cared for her needs, and then the unthinkable happened. Her son gets sick and dies. She had been prepared for death before – even planned on it. She knew how she and her son were going to starve to death after one last meal. And then Elijah came and changes all that. And she begins to place her belief in God and trust him and then the other shoe drops. It must have been a shock. I mean, didn't she obey? Wasn't she helping out a man of God? Didn't she earn a break? Her perspective changes again and she thinks **GOD'S PLAN IS TO PUNISH.**

She says to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

Sin. It had been there all along and she knew it and now it's time to pay up. Her sins had caught up with her and any good will that she'd thought she'd earned through Elijah was gone and it was just her and her sin and her punishment. Maybe she even blamed Elijah – that since he was in her house God was actually paying attention to her and her sin also caught his attention. So here was the real God – a punishing God.

Some of you have experience huge loss in your lives. Bad things happen in this world. Jeff and I know many of your stories and they're heartbreaking. Maybe you have felt like God is punishing you for your sin, or maybe you're mad at God because you're suffering and you can't even identify what you did wrong. Or you said you were sorry, but it seems like God can't forget.

I don't know a lot about God, but two things in scripture are very clear.

1.) When Jesus was punished on the cross for our sin, the debt was paid. The punishment was complete. God is not in the business of going around punishing people today because Jesus already paid for it.

2.) GOD'S PLAN IS FOR YOU TO BE HEALED UP. When Jesus was here on earth, he spent an enormous amount of time healing people who were sick. And the Bible says that if you want to know God, look at Jesus. God is still in the business of healing up people today.

I say that because some of us are sick with fear, and He wants to make us well. We are afraid about health issues, or families, children, and jobs, our past or our future. And God wants to heal us up.

About five years ago I was so afraid of planting this church I couldn't even say the words without bursting into tears. I was a pastor's kid who married a guy who wanted to be an actor or a writer. I was good with that. When Jeff said he wanted to go to seminary, I was like, "You want to be a what?" As the time got closer I was so afraid – I have church issues...

I remember a period of time before Jeff graduated from seminary, and he would finish studying after the kids had gone to bed and we would kneel in front of our blue plaid couch and beg God to line up our hearts with His. I was so afraid. There were so many things about being a pastor's wife that didn't feel safe to me, that felt like I was walking into a trap. God had a plan, and his plans are better. We cried out to God – because that's what we do when we are hurting or in danger or in pain. It's what he expects us to do.

It's what Elijah did – He took the widows son in his arms and took him upstairs and laid him on his bed and said, "O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with by causing her son to die? Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the Lord, "O Lord, My God, let this boy's life return to him!"

We cry out to God, and ask him for help.

Psalm 34: 17

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

I am the perfect person to be a pastor's wife. Not because I'm good at it or because of anything I'm doing. I'm the perfect person to be a pastor's wife because God wants to make me well. God wants to heal up all the sore spots in my life because that's what God does. **GOD'S PLAN IS TO MAKE US WELL.** – Body, soul and spirit.

So what happens next? The boy's life returns to him and Elijah delivers him back to his mother, and she says,

"Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth."

The truth. The truth is that sometimes God lets our fears come true to show us how much smaller they are compared to an Almighty God. Sometimes the only way for us to get it is to face those fears head on with Jesus at our side. In those days, the widow's entire future was wrapped up in the well being of her son. Without a son, she would always be poor with nobody to care for her. But God showed her that her true hope was in the Lord – not another person. He would provide for her better than a son – because she was His daughter.

Maybe you have a fear today and it feels like death to you. It's always present, clawing away at your thoughts. Maybe you are a parent who is grieving over a child. Maybe you have issues, like me, that keep coming back to haunt you and you're afraid. Maybe God is asking you to do something and you think he might

not come through for you. Maybe you think God's plan is for you to give everything up and then punish you for your sin.

I don't have the words to express how deeply our Lord cares for you. I can't articulate how deeply Jesus is already in your struggle. Wherever you are in your faith, whatever you think God's plans are. Cry out to Him. And watch him prove himself able to take care of your every need, every day, see how good he is, and then let him heal you up!

I know this life is hard, and not all answers are going to be taken care of as quickly as this widow's story. But God has a plan, and His plans are better. He is trustworthy and good. His arms are mighty for the task at hand, and his plans are full of hope and redemption.

On this Mother's Day, I hope that in the midst of all the flowers and cards that are given and received, you'll remember that you are also God's son or daughter. He is our perfect parent – trustworthy and true.

When Addison was 5. He made up a song while he was on the swings, and I had the presence of mind to write it down. I think it's as true as anything else I've said today, so I'm going to share it with you. He sang,

"God is going to take us to Heaven and God had a baby and his name was Jesus... and He will never leave you. And God sees me on the swings and he sees me on the slide and he lives in my heart".

God sees you, and He loves you.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

And you know what? I believe it.

Will you all pray with me?