



40 Days of Prayer and Fasting 2020 – WEEK 4: Delighting in Grace

Day 22 – Monday 16th March

***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Psalm 23.5***

Adapted from a message by John Ortberg,

“This is the question. Can ‘cup-overflowing’ peace and joy be genuinely embraced and enjoyed even in the presence of pain, frustration, or suffering? It is in contemplating this question that we make one of the most surprising discoveries about joy - often it is the people closest to suffering who have the most powerful daily experience of God’s joy and peace.

‘Cup-overflowing’ joy and peace in this world is almost always joy in spite of something.

“Some time ago I was giving a bath to our kids, Johnny was still in the tub, Laura was out and safely in her pj's, and I was trying to get Mallory dried off. She was in no particular hurry. In fact, she was doing what has come to be known in our family as the Dee Dah Day dance. This consists of Mallory running around and around in circles, singing over and over again: "dee dah day, dee dah day."

But on this particular occasion I was irritated. "Mallory, hurry up!"

So she did. She began running in circles faster and faster and chanting "dee dah day" more rapidly. "No, Mallory, that's not what I mean. Stop with the 'dee dah day' stuff and get over here so I can dry you off. Hurry up!"

Then she asked a profound question. "Why?"

I had no answer. I had nowhere to go, nothing pressing to do. I was just so addicted to hurry, trapped in the rut of moving from one task to another.

Here was life, here was joy, here was an invitation to the dance right in front of me, and I was missing it. Ironically, what keeps me from joy is often a preoccupation with myself and my own stuff. That very rut keeps me from noticing and delighting in the myriad of ‘table-prepared’, ‘cup-overflowing’ moments that God offers me each day to enjoy peace and joy with Him.

But for Mallory, life is not yet rutted in that way.

Not every moment for us will be happy, of course. There are times that call for tears. But each moment is pregnant with possibility. Mallory doesn't miss many of them. She is teaching me about joy. And I need to learn.”

- a. What has struck you most from this message?
- b. What do you think, “Can ‘cup-overflowing’ peace and joy be genuinely embraced and enjoyed even in the presence of pain, frustration, or suffering?”
- c. What’s the secret?

Day 23 – Tuesday 17th March

***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
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In common language, to "prepare a table" for someone means to make a meal and then set the table for them. Shepherds obviously don't prepare a physical table for sheep; but shepherds do prepare feeding areas for their sheep by scouting them out ahead of time, eradicating any poisonous plants, and ensuring the water holes are clean and clear from danger and obstructions.

- a. How does it make you feel that perhaps several times a day God "prepares a table" for you to sit down with Him to enjoy good food and fellowship together in the middle of your everyday life?
- b. As you sit journaling now, take time to be conscious of the Shepherd's presence, and thank Him for meeting with you at this table right here and now, and for the good food he has specially prepared for you today.

The shepherd's provision for his sheep takes place in "the presence of enemies" – in this context that might include wild animals like bears, lions, and cougars all living in the same areas as sheep, and it may also include 'wild' people around who are up to no good.

Our Good Shepherd invites us to eat with him, and enjoy his goodness, in the middle of our fallen and messed-up world, and in the presence of our 'enemies'.

- c. How does the presence of Jesus put into perspective the presence of our enemies?

Day 24 – Wednesday 18th March

***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Psalm 23.5***

"You anoint my head with oil" – A host might have shown how much they value their dinner guest by pouring scented oil on their head. This is a deeply significant expression of honour and value. It says, 'you are really important to me'. As our Good Shepherd prepares a table for us, he welcomes us with honour and love – He anoints your head with oil as you come to eat with him.

- a. Enjoying God's goodness is so important that we are *commanded* to do it regardless of circumstances. What insight do you gain from the following verses in this matter of taking and enjoying God's 'overflowing' provision - even in the presence of enemies?

Philippians 4:4-7

Habakkuk 3:17-19

- b. Please read **1 Thess 5.15-24;28**
Do you think that by asking us to "give thanks in all circumstances", God expects us to live in a state of denial or falsehood?

Explain your answer.

Day 25 – Thursday 19th March

***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
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- a. Rate your opinion on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= Strongly Agree, 5= Strongly Disagree) of the following statements:

- ___ Pursuing pleasure tends to lead to wasted time or even harm.
- ___ I think a lot more about work than about play.
- ___ I'm uncomfortable if I think I appear overcome with happiness or joy.
- ___ Life is hard; now and then I get a little relief.
- ___ Life is great, though sometimes I need to be more serious.
- ___ My friends consider me a joyful person.
- ___ I have less fun now that I'm a Christian.

- b. What do your answers tell you about your personal tendencies toward joy and pleasure?
- c. As you look back over the recent past, have you been a little more soul-weary and joyless? If so, what has contributed to that mood? If not, what has kept your joy factor high?
- d. **Ecclesiastes 3.1-4** tells us there is a time for various activities and feelings in life, including a time to laugh and dance (v. 4). How might times of laughter and fun free you from a distorted view of yourself or God?

Day 26 – Friday 20th March

***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
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Rejoicing is so important that the Father invites all to celebrate God's Goodness together.

- a. What do we learn about the value of celebrating God's goodness together from the following passage? **Luke 15.20-24**

Rejoicing is so important that it ought to take place in the midst of our worship gatherings.

- b. What do you learn from **Psalm 149:1-4** and **Psalm 150** about the need for cultivating a spirit of wholehearted celebration as we worship together in our church and small group gatherings?
- c. Some Spiritual Disciplines to consider practicing this Sunday and Next Week.
- When you worship with your church family this week, consider how you might wholeheartedly express your joy to God for the ordinary and extraordinary ways he makes your "cup overflow".
 - Consider planning a celebratory evening with your small group or family - just to delight in God's goodness together.

Day 27 – Saturday 21st March

***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
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Please read **2 Corinthians 6.4-10**

- e. Can 'cup-overflowing' peace and joy be genuinely embraced and enjoyed, even in the presence of pain, frustration, enemies, or suffering?
- f. What's the secret?

Day 28 – Sunday 22nd March

***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
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Sermon – Sustaining Grace

Journal your own notes from the Sermon today...