

A close-up, profile shot of an elderly woman with short, grey hair. She is holding a white ceramic mug to her lips and drinking. She is wearing a black and white vertically striped shirt. The background is a window with a wooden frame, looking out onto a green, slightly out-of-focus landscape. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window.

JUNE

THE LORD'S TABLE:
Where Broken Things Are Mended

BY: Brenda Evans

In 1934 on an ordinary Saturday afternoon in Neptune, Tennessee, my 50-year-old grandfather climbed a hog-wire fence in his feedlot. He used a five-foot tobacco stick to steady himself, an action he had done many times. But somehow, that day he lost his balance, fell, and impaled himself in the groin with the tobacco stick. Two days later, Granddaddy D died in a Nashville hospital. My grandmother, Mama Eliza, wrote about that event in her diary:

Saturday, May 26, 1934—D got hurt today. We had Dr. Bell and also Dr. Cunningham and lots of others were here.

Sunday—All D's people came today and we took him to the hospital in Nashville.

Monday—Oh this awful day...D died about 8 o'clock. It sure is the awfulest thing I ever experienced. We Brought him home.

Tuesday—We buried D today at Rock Springs Church.

Mama Eliza was 42. Many things were broken that day and for years following, as she recorded in her diary for forty additional years. Often, she was literally trying to fix broken things—fences, the contrary flat-bed truck, farm equipment, drought, failed crops, dead calves, chicks, piglets, or lambs. But mostly, Mama Eliza wrote about simply running the farm, going on as best she could, providing for her eight children and two half-brothers, putting in crops, birthing livestock, and laying out heaping bowls of food on their kitchen table.

That year of 1934 in Middle Tennessee, Mama Eliza needed so much. There was drought. She needed rain for corn and tobacco crops and for garden vegetables. With hope, she recorded every cloud, every dew and drizzle, every sprinkle, waiting and praying for dark clouds and downpours. Precious rain would provide for her eight children and two half-brothers.

Our Need

We, too, need so much. Rain for our spiritual drought, nourishment for our hunger, and protection for our

fears. So, we count on the downpour of promises of Psalm 23 and similar passages. David says our Shepherd-Host takes care of us. As shepherd, He protects, guides, and restores. As host, He lays out a satisfying spread at His table.

Look first at the Lord our Shepherd. He promises, “we shall not want” or lack His care. He promises to lead us into green pastures and along still waters. One translator calls these peaceful places, places of rest and reviving. I count on that leading, that guidance to peaceful places. You do, too. My life verse is Psalm 32:8—“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will guide you with my eye upon you.” I want green pastures and still waters. I need protection, satisfaction, and peace.

Our Restoration

He also promises to restore my soul. Our Shepherd's restoration is about healing. That may mean physical healing, new flesh growing over an open wound. But also, His healing can mend wounds of the heart, wounds of the soul, wounds of the mind. Restoration also refers to a repair or return. Sometimes I need new flesh growing over old wounds, but other times I need to be repaired or to turn back to better, holier ways. A writer in my prayer guide reminded me today that “when God restores you, He doesn't just bring you back, He brings you forward.” That's the restoration I want, a way to go forward on the way everlasting.

Jeannie, a writer I often follow, recently wrote about her family losing their home and all their belongings in a fast-moving Colorado wildfire. Recovery was slow and daunting. She spent days making a detailed inventory of their losses for the insurance company. Most things on the list were replaceable. Still, the process was tedious and left her despondent because irreplaceable, precious things were not on the list: photos of their wedding and their children over all the years and other special memorabilia. Some things money can't replace.

One day her sister-in-law knocked on their door. She

held out a silver-framed photo album with Jeannie's wedding pictures and photos of family gatherings that included Jeannie's children and other relatives. Jeannie had never known about her sister-in-law's album—this unexpected and precious restoration of lost things. A miracle of sorts to Jeannie, and a reminder to her of the restoration Jesus makes when we come to His table. A restoration that heals and moves us forward.

C. S. Lewis says it this way in *A Grief Observed*: “God, who foresaw your tribulation, has specially armed you to go through it, not without pain, but without stain.” Pain, loss, and tribulation come. Jesus, our Shepherd, promises to restore us and bring us forward. That's His promise to us, the sheep of His pasture.

I love the last part of Isaiah 43:1, where the Lord says, “I have called you by name; you are mine.” Hundreds of years later, Jesus affirms that in John 10:3-4. “He calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out ... they know his voice.” That's us—His sheep, called by name, healed, guided, protected, led out, restored, brought forward.

Think About It

1. Be honest with yourself and with the Lord. Do you

ever act as if you can handle things on your own or even handle them better than God can—or at least how you want them handled? Check your actions before you answer. Actions tell the truth about us. Think about it.


2. Rummage through your past with the Lord. List times your Shepherd provided so you had no lack. List other times when He called you by name, guided and restored you physically, emotionally, or spiritually, and moved you forward.

3. Now spend time in a prayer of gratitude, confession, and petition.

4. Prayer: Thank you, O Lord. You are my great Shepherd, Guide, and Savior. I confess my failure to see and trust you for all I need. Keep me from blindness to your provisions, from pride that thinks I can do it alone, and from a self-will that only wants my own way not yours. Restore me. Lead me forward. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Our Protection

Even in the “valley of the shadow of death,” our Lord is there. In peril and in threat, His rod and staff direct and comfort us. How can we forget that? Remember the Red Sea? Revisit Exodus 14. Read how the Lord's



*“When God restores you, He doesn’t
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presence as a pillar of cloud “moved before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel” (verse 19). Wow! The Lord stood before, behind, and between the enemy and His people. He still does. And if that isn’t enough, Moses adds in his final words to the Israelites before they cross the Jordan forty years later, the Lord was underneath with His everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27). We are His sheep. We are His people. We are His saved ones. We are covered: before, behind, between, beneath. How can I ever worry or be afraid, even in the valley of the shadow of death?

Trouble is, I’ve always been afraid of the dark. I was as a child. I am now in my 80s. I clinch, especially when alone among shadows, dark corners, moonless paths, and unlit streets. An unreasonable creepiness and unease and even terror grab hold of me. My mouth goes dry. My legs feel weak. I loathe that fear, for as I said, it is usually unreasonable. In the light, I scoff at monsters. In the dark, I feel them everywhere.

So, David chides me. Don’t be afraid even in the “valley of the shadow of death.” David means real death, not metaphoric death. So, there it is: fear. In the shadows of night, closed-in, shaded valleys of trouble and worry feel more threatening than open, well-lit plains and grassy hillsides.

The odd thing is as far as I can tell, I am not afraid of death itself or of dying. It’s the shadowy precursor, the moving up to or into death that brings on my dread. I fear incapacitation and impairment that is so often part of that long process of moving from earth to glory. Moving to glory will be—well, glorious! The process of getting there may be wretchedly inglorious.

It’s the WHAT-IFs, the big WHAT-IFs, that disturb me. What if I don’t lie down in peace? What if suffering becomes intolerable for me or for my family? What if days stretch into months and months stretch into years? What if I don’t meet the Lord with grace and patience? What if my final fear brings on guilt and shame?

And so, I am chided. Perhaps you are, too. And we’re

reminded by the writer of Hebrews to look to Jesus, our Shepherd. We’re urged to “lay aside every weight [of worry], and the sin [of worry] which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (12:1-2). Jesus didn’t just start us on our faith journey. He finishes it with us—before, behind, between, beneath. With our Shepherd we can endure and prevail.

Think About It

1. We are often flops or failures. The Word is full of God’s people who were flops and failures: David, Elijah, Moses, Gideon, Peter—all of these had their moments of failure. Read Psalm 40:1-11. Look especially for what this Psalm says the Lord does for those who flop and fail.

2. Prayer: Thank you, O Lord, for this precious reminder that you can pull me out of the mire and set me on a rock. Thank you that your thoughts are turned toward me and my open ear. Thank you for writing your law in my heart. Help me to speak and not conceal your steadfast love and faithfulness to me. Please do not restrain your mercy from me. I need you, Lord, my Shepherd and Friend. Amen.

Our Help

David mentions two instruments of comfort: the Shepherd’s rod and his staff. There are multiple meanings for both words, but I prefer the simplest. The rod for protection, the staff for direction. As a fearful woman, I’m very aware that protection—or safety and security, to put it another way—are important to me. I list them among my needs. I think they are important to many women.

I learned that most graphically in 1992. Because of a bad pathology report, two oncologists told us my husband Bill had zero chances of surviving stomach cancer. Cancer had broken through the wall of the stomach. Nine lymph nodes were cancerous. Fear and grief ravaged me. Terror of the future haunted my sleep and my dreams. Dread sat on my shoulder

like a ruthless monster. So did guilt. Guilt that I could not simply rest in the Lord in peace and grace. It was a horrendous year.

For much of that year, my Shepherd's rod and staff were invisible to me. But they were still there. Looking back later, I saw His protection and guidance through our valley of the shadow of death. And as it turned out, it was only a shadow of death, not the real thing. Bill—miracle of miracles—lived and still lives more than thirty years later. Even his main oncologist, who was not a Christian, called him a miracle. He was. He is.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that the Lord's rod and staff always keep us from death. A pastor we knew, also with stomach cancer, died from its ravages a year after Bill's diagnosis. A dear friend died later that very year of a different cancer. I am saying, however, our Shepherd's rod and staff are our comfort in our valleys, as David says. May we accept that comfort—always—and never doubt. No matter how dark and deep and fearsome those valleys are.

Think About It

1. Following radical surgery to remove three-fourths of his stomach, Bill was further ravaged by deadly experimental chemotherapy which threatened his life. On one dark night of the soul, when Bill could think only in the very simplest of terms because of the damaging effects of the chemotherapy, he came to Psalm 56:3: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee." Though his brain and soul were seared by chemicals, he held onto those simple words. And in his deepest and darkest valley, they were enough. They are still enough and still his cherished testimony. As I mentioned before, my verse is Psalm 32:8. Bill and I hold onto many promises from the Lord, but these above all.

2. Select a verse to cling to in all your life's circumstances. Memorize it. Emblazon it on the tablet of your heart and speak it to others as your testimony.

3. Prayer: O Lord, thank you for your precious Word. I want to keep your commandments and hold onto your promises. Bind them on my heart. When I walk, may

they lead me. When I lie down, may they watch over me. When I wake, may they counsel me. For your commandments are a lamp, and your teaching is a light and the way of life. Amen. (This prayer adapted from Proverbs 6:20-23.)

Our Table

Now, what specifically should we know about the Lord as our Host—our Host at His table? Several things come to mind. His table is prepared and I am His guest (verse 5). There it is, prepared before me, right in front of me. No need to Google the address or go searching down the street or call to make reservations. His table is already there, reserved, in front of me, and ready. I need only to come, sit, and feast.

As Host, the Lord also anoints my head with oil. In our century, we try to avoid oily heads. But here the oil of anointing suggests the Lord's approval. He wants us at His table. He has chosen us, invited us to be there. The anointing shows His hospitality, His welcome, His gladness that we came. He applies the oil onto our heads, graciously stroking us with honor, respect, and favor. What a Host!

In addition, David notes that He brings us to His table "in the presence of my enemies" (verse 5). Imagine the scene: the enemies of our soul watching helplessly as we are feted at the Lord's table. Those enemies, whoever they are, have no power to snatch us away, to threaten or intimidate or send us away from the Lord's table.

Think About It

1. What are some ways you know today that you have the Lord's approval and are welcome at His table? How has He "anointed your head with oil," shown you favor, extended hospitality, made you welcome at His table?

2. Think about times you have felt your enemy (Satan and his cohorts) or other enemies of the faith "watching" or even lying in wait for you? Were you afraid? What did you do or not do? After reading Psalm 23:5, what might you do in the future?

3. Prayer: Oh, Lord, my Host and my Friend, thank you

for bringing me to your table. Help me as I accept your grace and favor and anointing. Help me to truly feast there with you, feed on your precious favor, and rest safely and satisfied in your presence. Amen.

Our Cup

And finally, we can say, “my cup runneth over.” On Sunday morning, I usually get up a few minutes before Bill and head to our bathroom for a shower. Pretty soon I hear him stirring in the kitchen, rattling coffee cups, putting K-cups in the coffeemaker. Shortly, there’s a cup of hot brew on my vanity counter, brimming full, almost running over. I relish that once-a-week ritual he has established. He knows I like coffee right away. He doesn’t want me to wait. He fixes it for me. A gracious act.

How can we ever fail to see the Lord gives us just such a cup—full, even running over with “goodness and mercy” and all the spiritual benefits of His close attention to our needs and wants? And it’s not only for a rushed Sunday morning getting ready for church. It’s for “all the days of my life” (verse 6).


I remember cupping my hands at a little spring beside the highway in Dickson County, Tennessee, back in the 1950s. A pipe gushed a small stream of good water. The way to drink it was to cup your hands and catch a little, then sip, or slurp, or lap like a dog to quench your thirst. I was never very good at it.

There’s no sipping or slurping or lapping like a dog at the Lord’s cup. It’s brimming full and He brings it right to us every day and every hour and every minute that we pay attention and drink from it. Oh, how good our Host is. How generous and gracious is His steadfast love and provision for us—every day of our life.

Think About It

1. List on paper many of the good things the Lord, your Host, has poured into your cup. Share your list with a friend or family member. We should testify of His provision.
2. Ask yourself, “Who am I?” Here is what the Lord calls us: His child (John 1:12), Christ’s friend (John 15:15), a saint and faithful one (Ephesians 1:1), His coworker (2 Corinthians 1:24), His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10), a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20), His adoptee (Ephesians 1:5)—and many more.
3. Prayer: Turn to Psalm 103 and read it aloud as a prayer of gratitude for all His “benefits,” for all He says we are in His Word, and for the overflowing cup of blessing and help and provision He gives us.

And Finally

Peter’s benediction: “May the God of all grace, who called us to eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect [restore], establish, strengthen, and settle you. To him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:10-11). 

About the Writer:

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