



In the Presence of My Enemies February 25, 2011

My parents just celebrated their 65th birthdays and we threw a surprise party, inviting 20 or 30 of their closest friends and family members to share this milestone with us. We had a great time of sharing and laughing and reflecting on memories. It was a very rich evening, full of blessing.

Since that evening, one phrase has been running over and over in my mind. It may seem a bit odd but I hope it will make sense when I explain. The phrase is this: Living in the presence of your enemies.

You see, my Dad has had cancer for 15 years. It isn't threatening his life at the moment, but it isn't going away either. He is living everyday in the presence of an enemy.

Can you relate to this thought? Maybe it's not cancer. Maybe it is financial stress, or discouragement or depression, tension or fractures in your relationships, worry or exhaustion. Whatever the enemy is, it's definitely there, and it's not going away any time soon.

I have asked God why He would choose to stop the progression of my Dad's cancer but not take it away. Every 6 months when Dad goes into the hospital for testing I wonder if, this time, it will show a reversal in results. So far, nothing has changed, and he keeps on living in the presence of an enemy.

I may not be closer to understanding why God has chosen this path for my Dad, but I added a piece to the puzzle a few weeks ago. Pastor Bev was leading our staff through a reflection on the very familiar Psalm 23, when one phrase jumped off the page: "He prepares a table for me in the presence of my enemies".

How does God prepare a table for us, I wondered? Why does He do this in the presence of our enemies?

I reflected on the process of "table preparation". It's a beautiful act, isn't it? Think of visiting the home of a friend or family member who has invited you to dinner. While you are grateful for the food they have made, having a table prepared for you means more than physical sustenance. The image is permeated with emotion: relationships, friendship, love, support and most of all, refreshment. A prepared table means that you have been invited, watched for, expected, wanted.

After mulling over the image of God preparing a table for us in the presence of our enemies, I was left with a few solid impressions. The first is a basic recognition and acceptance that we all do live and will live in the presence of enemies. The second is that God doesn't leave us alone there and, instead, He prepares tables for us. He provides us with opportunities for rest, refreshment, community and encouragement right there, in the presence of our enemies.

What "tables" has God prepared for my Mom and Dad? Here are a few ideas...

Tables of support: Since being diagnosed with cancer, they have discovered anew the strength found in relationships within the family of God. They have been encouraged, prayed for, lifted up and blessed by people all over the world. This "table" has provided them with rich experiences in the presence of their enemy.

Tables of perspective: They have always been grateful people, but the knowledge that an enemy surrounds them has made my parents even more intentionally grateful for every day and every year. As their scheduling permits, they attend every grandchild's hockey game, basketball game, speech competition, music recital and drama production. The "table of perspective" has helped them to evaluate where they spend their time, and has made their grandchildren feel loved, supported and important.

The list could go on. I could describe tables

- of faith,
- and of contentment,
- of peace
- and of praise,

but I think you understand what I mean. God has prepared tables for them which have given them the strength they need to live in the presence of their enemy.

God prepared tables for David and Daniel and Elijah and many other characters throughout the Bible and within history, and I believe that He wants to do the same for all of us. We are all facing enemies today. Let's come before God and ask Him to show us His table.

Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths

for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,^[a]
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

Blessings to you today,

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