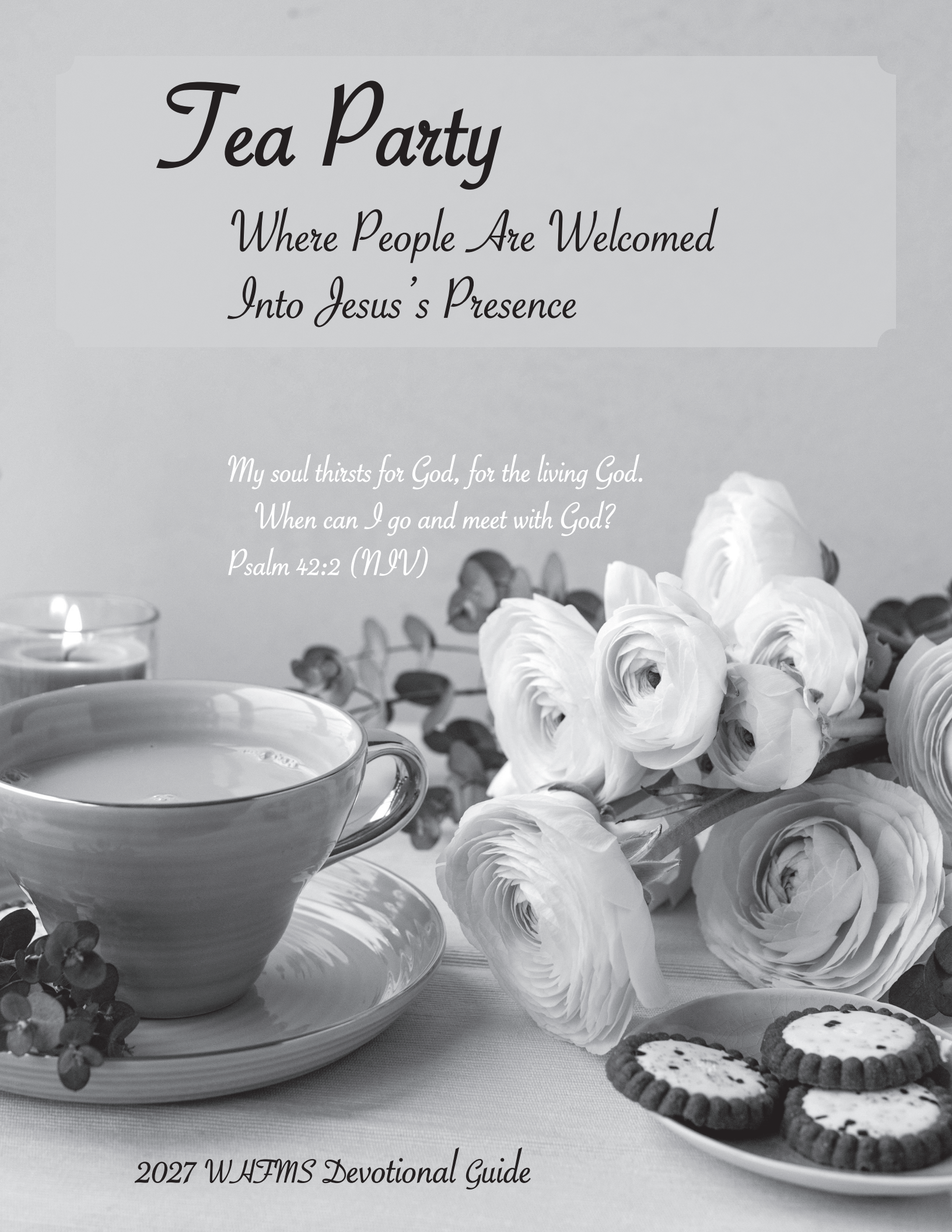
Tea Party

Where People Are Welcomed Into Jesus's Presence

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?
Psalm 42:2 (NIV)



2027 WHFMS Devotional Guide

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Tea Party: Where People Are Welcomed Into Jesus's Presence

WHFMS Devotional Guide 2027

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2027 WHFMS Devotional Guide

Dear Tea Party Invitees,

I have a confession to make; I never pretended to have a tea party as a little girl. I guess it never occurred to me to plan something so elaborate. (I did make my share of mud pies, however!) But I have a friend who loves to have tea parties, so much so that when she and her husband remodeled their home, they added a tea party room. When she first showed me the room, I was so surprised and truly did not know how to respond. Why would anyone want a room entirely designed for tea parties? As I got to know her better, I understood her joy in planning this unique event for others. She loves the quietness, the ritual, the beauty, and the time of sharing. A tea party is not held beside a busy highway; the food is always planned for both its flavor and appearance, the cups and teapot are reserved for the occasion, and it is never rushed. She shows her love for others by hosting them in this very special way.

Even so, when the women of the Appalachian Region chose the "Tea Party — Where People Are Welcomed Into His Presence" for the 2027 Devotional Guide I was a little surprised. At first glance it may seem a little frivolous and we WHFMS women are not known for that! But as I listened to their plans and through them could hear their hearts I again understood. This Tea Party, this planning, this type of sharing is about spending time with our Lord and with each other. It is about spending time together in a way that requires thoughtful effort and a desire to get to know each other more intimately.

As you look through the Devotional Guide, you will see the steps needed to plan such a time. From the invitations to the clean-up, each task represents how we can get to know our Father better. The theme song "Come and Dine" is the invitation of our Master to dine with him. The theme verse, Psalm 42:2 "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet God?" should be the plaintive cry of Christians looking forward to that "glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

We are looking forward to this year of "Tea Party — Where People Are Welcomed Into His Presence," but, even more we are looking forward to our time with him for eternity.

Tea, anyone?



Karen Hall
National WHFMS President

Theme Verse:

Psalm 42:2

"My Soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"

Theme Song:

"Come and Dine" – Charles Widmeyer

(Public Domain)

Jesus has a table spread where the saints of God are fed. He invites his chosen people "Come and dine;"
With His manna He doth feed and supplies our every need. O 'tis sweet to sup with Jesus all the time.
(Refrain)

The disciples came to land, thus obeying Christ's command, For the master called unto them "Come and dine."
There they found their hearts desire - bread and fish upon the fire;
Thus, He satisfies the hungry every time.
(Refrain)

Soon the lamb will take His bride to be ever at His side. All the hosts of heaven will assembled be.
Oh, twill be a glorious sight - all the saints in spotless white. And with Jesus they will feast eternally.
(Refrain)

<u>REFRAIN</u>
Come and dine the master calleth, come and dine. You may feast at Jesus' table all the time.
He who fed the multitude, turned the water into wine To the hungry calleth now "Come and dine!"

One Body, Many Parts:
2027 WHFMS Installation Service

Janelle Walsh

SCRIPTURE: *1 Corinthians 12:12*

PREPARATION: *Have Bible verses ready, along with the song. You may decide to have a box of tea or a teabag for each person attending: peppermint (president), peach (vice president), orange spice: consider Bigelow's Constant Comment (secretary), English Tea (treasurer), chamomile (spiritual life coordinator) and chai (attending members)*

SUGGESTED MUSIC: "*Bind Us Together" #426 in "Hymns of Heritage & Hope"*

INTRODUCTION: When planning a party, there are many elements that come ahead of the actual event. The planning includes theme decisions, the menu, supplies and invitations, just a few of the items that need to be brought together to create an event that welcomes people and surrounds them with love and care.

The author Janelle shares this reflection. "I have a friend who is very good at this. Her preparations show her special care for each of the people invited. From New Year's Eve parties that start the year with prayer, to women's craft afternoons or surprise birthday parties, she does it with her unique touch. The hospitality she shares blesses everyone who enters. Place cards, favorite foods and decorations are arranged just for the event with details tailored to who is coming and what will be most important. As I enter her home, I am fully aware of the care she has taken, thinking of each individual long before the invitations were made."

This year's devotional guide theme is Tea Party. In it, we will be addressing many elements of holding a tea party, including the invitation and preparation refreshments, activities and finally through to the goodbyes and clean-up.

Today, we will be talking about the types of tea that might be offered at a ladies' tea as we install our officers in preparation for their years' service."

Address each of the officers with their charge for the year.

Since our theme is tea party, each of the offices are being given a tea flavor to ponder, even if we aren't sipping on it.

PRESIDENT: Your tea flavor is peppermint. Peppermint tea has a strong flavor; it brings some zing when you drink it. Like the tea, you, as president will need to be strong this year, bringing some of your own zing. You'll have ideas that help us reach out to share Jesus with others while pulling us together as sisters in Christ. We are grateful for your prayerful leadership.

VICE PRESIDENT: Your tea is peach. (I recommend it with a little bit of honey.) The tea is sweet and carries a fragrance that everyone in the room can enjoy. Your job as vice president is to come alongside, helping our president and assisting to meet needs within the group. We appreciate your sweetness as you fill in gaps and support our president.

SECRETARY: Have some Orange Spice tea. I especially like the Bigelow brand where it is called "Constant Comment." As secretary, you'll be listening closely to the constant comments during the meeting and keeping records of them. You hold our comments in the records so that our history of meetings is kept for us to look back on as well as to plan for the future. We are thankful that you listen and record what we are planning, keeping us organized and on track.

TREASURER: As treasurer, we invite you to sit down and enjoy some English tea. Because like the English, who have tea at regular times, you will be sitting down with the budget to write checks and make deposits outside of the meeting times. You'll be actively working on WHFMS ministry on a regular basis. We are grateful for your skills as you keep track of all the money.

SPIRITUAL LIFE: The calming chamomile tea is for you. As chamomile is known for its calming properties. In the midst of our meetings that can be filled with plans and budgets and details, you remind us that we need to start with Christ. You remind us to wait on the Lord and to seek him first. We need to fill ourselves with his words; it's a priority that you help us to cultivate.

WHFMS MEMBERS: Blend is unique to the tea chosen by the tea master. Our group blend is uniquely our own; each of you is important to the group, chosen by our Maker. We need you here with your talents and skill sets. Working together, we can minister to others in our community and around the world. You are welcome here. Indeed, you are needed here.

Just as there are many flavors of tea that all provide tasty hot drinks, there are many people in our group and together, we make up one WHFMS group. 1 Cor. 12:12, (ESV)

says: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for our leaders. Guide them as they make decisions about the direction of our group. I pray they have your heart for the people we minister to. Thank you for each of our members. Together, help us to work together to show Christ to each other and everyone we meet. Thank you for the opportunity to come together today and throughout the coming year. Amen.

Close by singing “Bind Us Together”

AUTHOR: *Janelle Walsh is a member of the Princeton, W. Va. Advent Christian Church where her husband serves as pastor. They have two adult children who serve alongside them in church and a dachshund who keeps life interesting. Janelle is an itinerant Pre-K and elementary school music teacher.*

Invitation

Evelyn Bricker

SCRIPTURE: *Matthew 22:1-14*

PREPARATION: *You will need Bibles and "Hymns of Heritage and Hope." Put on the tea and provide light refreshments. Consider making a centerpiece with a vintage tea pot and/or cups. If you are crafty, or know someone who is, consider making a teapot or teacup shaped card with Psalm 42:2 printed on the card for each participant.*

SUGGESTED MUSIC: *"Only Trust Him," # 324 "Hymns of Heritage and Hope." Feel free to substitute any good hymn or song of invitation to trust the LORD with which your group is familiar.*

INTRODUCTION: *You may want to share your experiences attending a tea party or you may share the author's thoughts.* "Now that I think of it, I don't recall ever having been invited to a tea party. But as I write, my daughter and I have recently enjoyed a cup in the kitchen together. Perhaps that speaks something of my culture. I can assure you that I have been invited to a banquet, several actually, and I have been invited to The Banquet — I don't plan to miss it!" Ask the group if anyone would like to share their experience of being invited to a tea party.

PRAYER: *Seek the help of the Holy Spirit to guide you as you prepare to study God's Word.*

MESSAGE: As we begin our study of Matthew 22:1-14, we will find it helpful to consider the context of Jesus' teaching of this parable that can be found in Matthew 21. On the previous day, Jesus entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey to the shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David" and proceeded to clear the thievery out of the temple. The religious leaders are angry, and Jesus isn't exactly thrilled with them. Jesus spends the night at Bethany. He returns to the temple in Jerusalem the next day to address the crowd of worshipers and religious leaders who were there to celebrate the Passover. In the course of his teaching Jesus, uses three parables to illustrate who will enter the kingdom of heaven: 1) The Parable of the Two Sons; 2) The Parable of the Tenants; and 3) The Parable of the Wedding Feast. Today we will discuss The Parable of the Wedding Feast.

Read Matthew 22:1-14

Lead with the following discussion questions:

Reread verses 2 and 3. What is the significance of the wedding feast? How did the invited respond?

Reread verses 4-6. Discuss the various responses to the second invitation. What spiritual hinderances are reflected in these responses?

Read verses 7-10. How did the king respond? What was the result?

Read verses 11-13. Now attention is shifted to a guest who came to the banquet without a wedding garment. Read Isaiah 61:10. Do you suppose some sort of garment might have been distributed to the guests prior to entering the banquet hall? And this poor guy refused to wear it? How did the king respond to this offense? Allow time for discussion.

Jesus summarizes the parable in verse 14, "For many are called, but few are chosen," (ESV). Try to express the meaning of this verse in your own words.

Leon Morris wrote, "We know those who are elect [chosen] by their obedient response."[1] Do you think this is consistent with Jesus' teaching in this parable?"

APPLICATION: Consider the invitation of the LORD in Isaiah 55: 6-7, (ESV):

> Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Consider Jesus' words to Nicodemus recorded in John 3:16, (ESV):

> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.'

Consider Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28-30, (ESV):

> Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

[1] Morris, Leon, Pillar New Testament Commentary "The Gospel According to Matthew". W.B. Eerdmans, Inter Varsity Press. 1992. Page 553.

Consider the compassion and love of God, demonstrated at the cross.

Consider yourself invited ... how will you respond?

PRAYER: Father, thank you for the many invitations you have given to us. Thank you for loving us, protecting us and providing for us a yoke that is easy. Open our hearts to recognize your invitations.

AUTHOR: *Evelyn Bricker is married to Paul Bricker pastor of the Beckley Advent Christian Church in West Virginia, retired nurse and full-time grandmother. She is a member of the Clear Fork WHFMS.*

Preparation: Are You Ready For the Party?

Shirley Ross

SCRIPTURE: *Luke 15:8-10*

PREPARATION: *Copy any of the sheets of Scripture or readings or songs that you will need to distribute. Consider making a poster to use throughout the year with the following: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? - Psalm 42:2 (NIV)"*

SUGGESTED MUSIC: *Sing or read together the theme song "Come and Dine."*

INTRODUCTION: Our Scripture lesson today talks about preparing a house in order to find a lost item. We have all lost things at home, in the car, at work, on the road, at church and even in cyberspace! It is a frustrating situation. Depending on the lost item, we can become quite desperate. *(Have your group share a few stories about lost items that were not found. Be prepared to share one to start the participation. Sharing the story the author wrote would spark much interest.* Shirley says, "I have a bunch of frustrating hunts since I do house cleaning for a number of clients. One of the worst situations involves the loss of $1400 in cash! Although the couple says they, 'searched everywhere', they still have not found it.")

MESSAGE: *Read or have read the Scripture for this lesson: Luke 15:8-10. Ask your group to share some stories with happy endings when something lost was found.*
In Luke 15, we read "The Lost Parables" - The Lost Sheep (1 out of 100); The Lost Coin (1 out of 10) and The Lost Son (1 out of 2). The lesson we are now looking at is The Lost Coin — perhaps because it involves a woman. Maybe at first it sounds like a minor issue, "a coin." It was not like a mere penny. According to translators, this coin was a drachma — equivalent to a full day's wage! Why this woman had 10 such coins is not explained. Was it part of her dowry? Was she a wealthy business woman who dropped a coin when counting her day's profit? We don't know. But we know it meant a LOT to her, as she lit a light and swept her house top to bottom, "searching carefully." Her efforts paid off and after the coin was found, she rejoiced with her friends and neighbors! She "called them in." She celebrated. Her discovery may not have been $1,400 but it caused her great joy. The conclusion to the story was a reinforcement of the other "Lost Parables:" There is GREAT rejoicing when a lost PERSON is found, when a sinner repents!

APPLICATION: There are several poems that talk about sharing the gospel with others and not giving up. One is called "Hound of Heaven" written by Francis Thompson and

first published in 1890. This illustrates the perseverance it sometimes takes on our part to keep witnessing to an unbeliever. This poem is long, but describes how the "Hound of Heaven" goes after someone. We are to prepare for the Lord's return (the party) by fulfilling the task we have been given in Matthew 28:19 tells us "Go or "as you are going" make disciples ... "

There is an old song whose lyrics I will read to now expresses our role in preparing for the party. This causes us to consider if there will be others at the party because of our invitation?

Nothing But Leaves
Mrs. H.S. Lehman
Late 19th Century
(Public Domain)

The Master is seeking a harvest in lives He's redeemed by His Blood;
He seeks for the fruit of the Spirit and works that will glorify God. (Refrain)

He looks for His likeness reflected in lives that are yielded and true;
He's looking for zeal in the winning of souls He's entrusted to you. (Refrain)

He's yearning ·for someone to carry the lifegiving word far and near.
He's waiting for hearts that are willing, for ears that are open to hear. (Refrain)

REFRAIN
Nothing but leaves for the Master. Oh, how His loving heart grieves,
When instead of the fruit he is seeking, we offer him nothing but leaves.

PRAYER: *Before praying ask the group if they can think if there is someone the Lord is speaking to them about seeking for his kingdom and close in prayer asking for God's guidance and direction in the seeking.*

AUTHOR: *Shirley Ross, Hickory, N.C. Shirley and her pastor husband, Dave, have been in ministry for more than 50 years. Dave "retired" Oct. 31, 2024 and is in his second interim pastorate at the time of this writing. Shirley is a member of the Fellowship WHFMS {Bethlehem, N.C.) and also attended one of the Central, Lenoir WHFMS groups during their time there. A few of her favorite ministries are with children and music.*

Tea Party Dress Up

Carol Chambers

This devotion can be easily adapted for a mother/daughter event.

SCRIPTURE: *Colossians. 3:12-14 (ESV)*

PREPARATION: *Encourage those who attend to "dress up". In preparation for your time together, have plates, napkins, cups together. Plan snacks to go along with the lesson like simple cookies, finger sandwiches, and tea to share.*

SUGGESTED MUSIC: *"Let The Beauty of Jesus Be Seen In Me" #600 in "Hymns of Heritage and Hope."*

INTRODUCTION: When was the last time you were invited to a special occasion that required you to "dress up"? To wear something special just for the event? Maybe it took hours to find that special dress and the accessories to go with it; you made an appointment to get your hair and nails done. Dressing up can be fun!

Our author shared this memory. "I remember as a child looking forward to Easter Sunday, because it meant a new dress, patent leather shoes with a small purse to go with it. We even wore small hats and Mom carefully arranged our hair. We had stretchy lace gloves to wear too. We even got to wear a corsage. Dressing up was special." Do you remember doing that as you grew up? Looking in the mirror and hoping others would think you looked nice. When we are comfortable and confident in our clothes, we act differently; as children we practiced our manners and were careful in how we behaved — did not want to mess up our outfits! As children we were not conscious of the expense that went into getting the new outfit, we were just excited and eager to show off our finery.

As Scripture tells us, what we put on the outside is not nearly as important as how we adorn the inside of our hearts. We are set apart "as the elect of God." We are to have different attitudes and responses to the world around us.

MESSAGE: *Read Colossians 3:12-14 (ESV).*

What are we to put on?

- Compassionate hearts is an expression that means sympathy, empathy, caring and

benevolent. In Matthew 14:14 "Jesus went forth and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick." He did not just see their pain and feel sorry about it; he did something to change their situation. He did not judge them for being sick. We show compassion when we offer help and service to improve the lot of others.

- Kindness is being friendly, generous.
- Humility, not thinking too highly of ourselves, not trying to exalt ourselves above others.
- Meekness, to the world, is someone who is spineless or spiritless, but used in God's Word, it means someone who is gentle, slow to anger. Jesus knew he was God's son, knew he was present at the creation of the world; yet he did not boast of his position, he came to do his Father's will. He was gentle and patient.
- Patience, also called "long suffering" in other versions means to bear insults or injuries for a long time. Do you know someone who never says anything nice, is always complaining and hard to get along with? Yet because you care about them, you tolerate their behavior in the hope of showing them Christ in your response.
- To finish your outfit, we are to put on love. 1 Corinthians 16:14 tells us "Let all that you do be done in love." So, in everything we do or say, we must show love.

APPLICATION: If we walked around wearing words that described us, would they be the words Paul has encouraged? Would the word say patient or snippy? Would we have a sign that said compassionate heart or judgmental? What about a sign that said short-tempered? Easily angered? Proud? Arrogant? Thinks very highly of herself? What words would have described you the last time you were waiting in line for a long time? Or, when someone was rude to you? All of us would have had signs with these unflattering words at some time in our lives. But as we grow closer to Christ, those words should describe us less and less.

When we dress up, we start from the skin out and top it all with that special outfit. But the clothes we will get in God's kingdom will be robes of righteousness. Rev. 19:8 says, "It was granted to her that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."

If we practice this kind of dressing up now, we will be ready to meet our Lord and Savior who made us righteous by his sacrifice.

PRAYER: Create within me a clean heart, O Lord, so that others will see Christ in me.

AUTHOR: *Carol Chambers is a member of Adria Advent Christian Church in Tazewell, Va. Our WHFMS is a small but faithful group of ladies who love God and share in his work. She is retired from nursing and enjoy hobbies and gardening.*

Come to the Table: Seat of Honor

Palma Neal

SCRIPTURE: *Luke 14:7-11*

PREPARATION: *Chart paper or white board divided into two sections labeled with Pride at the top of one side and Humility at the top of the other.*

SUGGESTED MUSIC: *"Let The Beauty of Jesus Be Seen In Me" #600 in "Hymns of Heritage and Hope."*

INTRODUCTION: The plans are made. The invitations have been sent. The table is set. The day has arrived! Party time!

Oh, wait! Who sits where? Can "A" sit beside "B"? Will conversation flow if "C" sits beside "D"? "E" might be offended if I seat her near the end of the table or farther away from the head of the table than "F." Who gets the seat of honor?

MESSAGE: *Read Luke 14:7-11 Then share the following thoughts.*

The seat of honor at the time this Scripture was written was closest to the host. It was reserved for a well-to-do, prominent person invited to the event. Sitting in the seat of honor was desired so others could see and he would be recognized for his status.

In the parable Jesus warns those attending a wedding feast to resist taking the seat of honor in order to avoid shame if a more distinguished guest should arrive and he be asked to move to a lower seat. Jesus said it was best to take a less prominent seat so that the host might honor him by asking him to move to a higher seat.

Jesus was teaching an important lesson to the wedding guests and to us - humility over pride. Pride desires status and humility desires service. Pride leads to shame and humility leads to honor.

Jesus is the perfect example of humility. To him, position meant nothing. However, his Father exalted him above all! (Read Philippians 2:5-11.)

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: This activity may be used to extend the lesson, to encourage more group participation or be omitted.

Divide a white board into two columns or have two pieces of chart paper to record information. Label the top of each column – one pride and the other humility. Lead a discussion comparing and contrasting pride and humility. I used our senses to compare/ contrast in this example with possible answers or you may use your own.

Pride	Humility
*Eyes look at oneself	Sees God first, then others
*Looks at others to see faults.	
*Mouth brags about himself; and his accomplishments	Talks about awesome God, Praises and encourages
*Does not like to hear his own faults or mistakes	Understands he is weak in some areas Apologizes
*Wants his own way	Honors others above self; Wants others to be happy Helps without being asked
*Destroys relationships	Makes others feel loved and accepted

APPLICATION: Rick Warren, in his book, "The Purpose Driven Life" (Zondervan 2002, page 147) said, "True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less." This begins with admitting we would love to be the star and receive praise for our achievements. When we ask God to remove the pride, we then choose a life of service to others. The desire to lift others up instead of tearing them down becomes our priority. We begin to volunteer for activities where needs of the neglected and disadvantaged are met.

Proverbs 22:4 (NET) reminds us that "The reward for humility and fearing the Lord is riches and honor and life." This is a promise and God is faithful in keeping his promises. The same lessons about pride and humility are reiterated in Proverbs 29:23 (NET).

Peter encourages us with these words: "…Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5, NET).

Our Bible is full of verses that emphasize how much God values us. From Genesis telling us we are made in God's image to David in one of his psalms reminding us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. The New Testament emphasizes Jesus's sacrifice for our sins because of his love for us, and we can see the truth of our value in God's eyes. And,

nothing we own or do and no ability we may have qualifies us for the way he values us. So, we have nothing on which to base pride in ourselves. Our value is only found in Christ. When we admit and accept this reality, humility will replace pride and we will be exalted because of our desire to serve others following the example of Jesus.

Let's not be so full of pride in ourselves and our accomplishments that we are like Speedy Morris, a basketball coach for LaSalle University. Max Lucado in his book, "And the Angels Were Silent: Walking with Christ toward the Cross," (Multnomah Books 1992, page 59) tells a story about a time Morris was shaving and there was a phone call from Sports Illustrated. He got so excited, he hurried his shave and nicked his face. Hurrying to get to the phone, he stumbled and fell down the stairs. He finally made it to the phone and once he answered, he was completely disappointed. The call was only to offer a year's subscription for a reasonable price!

Being full of ourselves can lead to being brought low. Remember Jesus's example of humility and also the lesson from Luke's gospel. We can avoid the embarrassment and learn to appreciate opportunities of service to others.

PRAYER:

- *Thank God for his grace even when you find yourself being prideful.*
- *Thank God for creating you in his image and for giving you a purpose in him. (Ephesians 2:10)*
- *Pray Psalm 139:14*
- *Ask God's forgiveness for your prideful ways.*
- *Ask God to take away the pride so that Satan cannot use it to lead you into other sins.*
- *Ask God to help you understand your value in him.*
- *Pray that God will open your eyes to opportunities of service, anoint your hands to willingly help, stir your heart to acts of compassion, and ready your feet to go wherever he leads.*

AUTHOR: *Palma Neal served in ministry with her pastor/husband, the late Rev. Ed Neal, for more than 50 years. During that time, they were blessed with two talented sons and three precious grandchildren. Palma, a retired elementary school teacher, has served in various capacities of WHFMS from local to conference to regional to national. Her free time is spent writing, reading, attending activities of the grandchildren and enjoying music.*

Napkins of Dignity and Strength

R. Faye Richards

SCRIPTURE: *Proverbs 31:25: "Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future" (NASB). "She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come" (NIV).*

PREPARATION: *A napkin for each person on which you use a sharpie to write Proverbs 31:25 (either the whole verse or the reference)*

SUGGESTED MUSIC: *"Be Thou My Vision" ("Hymns of Heritage and Hope" #601)*[1]

INTRODUCTION: When I think about napkins at any party, they are not exactly the star of the show; however, they are a foundational piece that keeps the party moving forward. It is awkward being with others when you have a stain on your clothing; it is impossible to have dignity when you have food on your face; it is also difficult to demonstrate strength when your hands are covered with food! Strength and dignity are not often the "stars" of the show in our lives. They are both foundational disciplines from the Lord that require work and effort for us to keep our lives moving forward.

MESSAGE: Strength:
"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" (Ephesians 6:10, NASB). Our strength is not in ourselves, but in God. Our strength will fail every time at the difficulties of this world, but God's strength is preparing us for the day of his return.

"You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near" (James 5:8, NASB).

Dignity:
Dignity can mean pride in ourselves or an honorable position. We understand as Christians, that our pride and honor is in Christ alone. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NASB). However, in Christ we are made heirs into an honorable position that can enter God's kingdom but only through Christ. "And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified in him."

[1] General Conference, Advent Christian. *Hymns of Heritage and Hope: Be Thou My Vision (Washington Gladden, H. Percy Smith).* Charlotte, NC, Advent Christian General Conference of America, 1 Oct. 2001, p. 601.

Because our strength and dignity are in Christ, we can smile at the future as Proverbs 31:25 states. When you know that your strength is in Christ, the daily difficulties become less of a burden and more of an opportunity to share God's hope with others. When you know that your dignity is in Christ, the need to share the gospel should fill us with a desire to see others come into inheritance of God's kingdom.

APPLICATION: I encourage you to try for one week to find time for a meal with your family together. At this meal, place napkins with each person's place setting. The napkins can be paper or cloth, but set the intention that this meal is meant to build communication with your family and thereby build strength and dignity. Share at the meal with your family, a time in that week when you saw each of them exhibit strength or dignity in a biblical way in their life. If you live alone, look for times to share with others the times you have seen them show strength or dignity in a biblical way. Encourage each other.

PRAYER: Lord, we pray that we will not overlook the strength and dignity in our lives. We pray that we continually will look for your second coming and tell others about the gospel.

AUTHOR: *R. Faye Richards is the WHFMS coordinator and a K-12 librarian, wife of Rev. David A. Richards and mom to Emily. She attends First Advent Christian Church, Hickory, N.C.*

My Cup Overflows

Kim Sherrill

SCRIPTURE: *Psalm 23:5 (NIV): "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."*

PREPARATION: *Have hymnals or copied lyrics of the suggested music if you plan to use them as part of the devotional time. Copy and cut out the tea tags with the scripture readings for volunteers to read during the devotional.* ***Tea tags on page 26***

SUGGESTED MUSIC: "*The Lord's My Shepherd" (#73 "Hymns of Heritage & Hope")*
"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" (#96 "Hymns of Heritage & Hope")
"Great Is Thy Faithfulness" (#90 "Hymns of Heritage & Hope")
"There Shall Be Showers of Blessings" (#501 "Hymns of Heritage & Hope")
"Count Your Blessings" (#666 "Hymns of Heritage & Hope")

INTRODUCTION: Today's devotional is based on a very familiar passage of Scripture from Psalm 23. As a child, I spent many afternoons sipping tea from our little yellow teacups, memorizing Scripture with my Granny. The 23rd Psalm was one of her favorites and one of the first longer passages of Scripture she helped me memorize. Through the years it has come to have great meaning for me and my faith journey.

Sing: "The Lord's My Shepherd"

MESSAGE: *Share the following with the group.*

The Divine Host

Imagine an elegant round table covered with a beautiful lace tablecloth. A vase of hand-selected flowers stands in full, fragrant bloom. Fine china, trimmed with a lovely rose pattern, is placed at each setting. Delicate teacups sit poised, ready to receive sweetness. The fragrant tea steeps quietly in the pot while plates are arranged with sweet and savory delights.

Every single detail has been intentionally and lovingly prepared just for you. The room radiates warmth, care and a heartfelt welcome, underscoring the nature of the one who welcomes you. Our gathering is not just about the tea and the treats, but more about the host, the table prepared, the refreshment given and the cup that overflows.

Let's begin by introducing the Divine Host.

Read tea tag Isaiah 6:3b (NIV)

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Read tea tag Isaiah 44:6 (ESV)

"Thus says the Lord, the King of Isarel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts; "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god."

Our Divine Host is characterized by his supreme holiness, majesty and sovereignty. He is referred to as "the Lord of hosts" showing he is entirely holy, sovereign, powerful and full of authority. Yet, this same majestic God who holds all power also draws near to us with tenderness.

Psalm 23:1 gives us his most intimate name in this context:

"The Lord is my shepherd," (NIV).

The first word of the psalm is The Lord, which suggests the protection and provision of the covenant-God. In Exodus 34:6-7, The Lord proclaimed himself to Moses. He promised to take care of his people and revealed himself to be full of love, compassion, patience and forgiveness. David continues the imagery by calling the Lord, "my shepherd," which indicates a more personal relationship with the Lord.

Read tea tag John 10:14-15b (NIV)

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me — I lay down my life for the sheep."

Just as a shepherd knows each sheep in the flock, our Good Shepherd knows each of us. A shepherd tends to the flock by making sure that they have a nice field for grazing and water to drink, and he protects the flock from danger. Our Good Shepherd voluntarily gave his life as a sacrifice, the ultimate act of love and protection that gives us eternal life through salvation. Psalm 23:1-4, continues to paint a vivid picture of the shepherd caring for his sheep. I shall not want, he leads me, he restores my soul, he guides my path, he is

with me, and he comforts me. Here we can clearly recognize the great care, provision and protection that our Divine Host provides to his children.

Reflection & Application

- The Divine Host is both the mighty "Lord of hosts" and the tender "Shepherd." How does knowing both the majesty (authority and power) and the intimacy (care and provision) of your Divine Host change the way you approach his table?

Sing: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

The Table Prepared

Read tea tag Psalm 23:5a (NIV)

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies…"

David highlights God himself acting as the host. It is a table set by the Shepherd for his beloved child. David was dependent on God to provide for his needs. Your place at this table is not earned; it is a gift of free grace, given even as you are surrounded by troubles, trials and the enemies of your faith.

Isaiah 25:6 (NIV): "On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all people, a banquet of aged wine — the best meats and the finest wines."

Sharing a meal with a host establishes a special bond of hospitality, protection and even respect. As honored guests in this imagery of God's preparing a lavish table for his children even in the midst of our enemies, believers are assured that they are under God's sovereign authority and protection. Our place at the table is a place of peace and security with our Shepherd, echoing God's promise to be a shield. "The LORD is my strength and my shield," Psalm 28:7 (NIV). "You, Lord are a shield around me," Psalm 3:3 (NIV). "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31 (NIV). Ultimately, God does not merely help us survive our enemies and opposition, but he demonstrates his victory over it.

Reflection & Application

- What does it mean to you personally to have a seat at this table?
- What emotions rise in you as you imagine God — the Divine Host — preparing this table specifically for you?

- What current enemies or challenges make it difficult for you to sit and rest at God's table?

Sing: "Count Your Blessings"

Refreshment Served

Read tea tag for Psalm 23:5b (NIV)

"…You anoint my head with oil…"

Before entering the banquet hall, in ancient times, a gracious host welcomed honored guests by anointing them with fragrant oil. It was a deep symbolic act of honor, acceptance, refreshment and renewal.

God extends this very same welcome to his children. He not only prepares a table, but also refreshes weary souls and reminds us that we are deeply loved, valued and cherished. This divine act is promised in Scripture:

Jeremiah 31:25 (ESV) assures us, "For I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish."

Furthermore, the anointing is permanent and personal because of the Holy Spirit:

Read tea tag for 1 John 2:27 (NIV)

"As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you…"

Read tea tag for 2 Corinthians 1:21–22 (NIV)

"Now it is God who makes us stand firm in Christ. He has anointed us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."

Reflection & Application

- How has God refreshed, renewed, or "anointed" you recently?

Sing: "There Shall Be Showers of Blessings"

<u>The Overflowing Cup</u>

Read tea tag for Psalm 23:5c (NIV)

"…My cup overflows."

The Shepherd's final act of hospitality is one of extravagance. The cup doesn't just reach the top — it overflows. This is a powerful, visual representation of God giving his best to his child. The overflowing cup signifies provision that goes far beyond mere need; it is unlimited, lavish and perpetual. Let's look at how God's abundance in Scripture exceeds expectation, is complete provision and is to be reciprocated.

God's Abundance in Scripture

Exceeding Expectation:

> "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20, NIV).
> Isn't it a comforting to know that God's power has no limit! He is able to do far more than we can ask or even imagine. The cup overflows!

Complete Provision:

> "But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well" (Luke 12:31, NIV).
>
> Above all else we are to seek God's kingdom, putting his will, righteousness and purpose first in our lives. He is faithful to provide what we need at the perfect time. Complete provision is not rooted in self-reliance, but in trust and obedience. When we align our priorities with God's kingdom, we will strive to live in obedience and the cup will overflow

The Law of Reciprocity:

> "And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8, NIV).
>
> As believers, we are to reciprocate God's abundant grace by generously sharing with others. Sharing the good news of salvation, sharing and being a blessing to others. All the while trusting that God will supply all we need to abound in every good work. The cup overflows!

Reflection & Application

- How have you experienced the "overflow" of God's goodness in your life recently?
- In what ways has the abundance God has given you been used to bless others (your family, your church or your community)?
- What does it mean practically to live life with a sense of overflowing abundance rather than scarcity?

Sing: "Great Is thy Faithfulness "

APPLICATION: Through this verse of Psalm 23, we have witnessed the intimate and extravagant hospitality of our Divine Host. He is the majestic Lord of hosts and our tender Shepherd. He invites us not just to a meal, but to a continuous, deliberate experience of his goodness. He sets a table of free grace in the face of our enemies, offering us peace and securing our victory. He provides deep refreshment and renewal through his anointing Spirit. Finally, He ensures our life is marked not by scarcity, but by an overflowing cup of provision and blessing meant to spill out into the world.

Our seat at this table is permanent, our welcome is complete and his provision is limitless. We are invited to rest in this truth: we are profoundly loved, unconditionally accepted and eternally provided for.

How will you use the cup that overflows in the world?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, our Divine Host and faithful Shepherd,

We thank you for the truth found in your Word, especially in the generous promises of Psalm 23. Thank you for preparing a table for us in the presence of our fears and enemies, reminding us that your peace and presence are our greatest security.

We receive the refreshment and anointing of your Holy Spirit today. Satisfy our weary souls, replenish our strength and remind us that we are deeply loved and accepted.
May the blessings you pour into our lives not stop at the brim, but may our cups overflow with your goodness so that we may abound in every good work and be a source of blessing to others.

Help us to live every moment in the awareness of your gracious hospitality, trusting in your unending goodness and mercy.

In the name of Jesus,

Amen

AUTHOR: *Kim Sherrill lives in Lenoir, N.C. with her husband of 34 years, Alan. They have two daughters, Victoria and Catherine, plus a furry four-legged dog, Clara Belle. She taught elementary school and has served in many ministry opportunities. She is the president of her local WHFMS circle, the regional women's retreat registrar and is the administrative assistant at Tabernacle AC Church where she attends. She enjoys spending time with family, cooking, crafting, decorating and has a small vintage booth at a local antique shop.*

Isaiah 6:3 NIV

3 And they were calling to one another:
"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Isaiah 44:6 ESV

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.

John 10: 14-15 NIV

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

1 John 2:27 NIV

As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you…

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 NIV

21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Psalm 23:5 NIV

a You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Psalm 23: 5 NIV

b You anoint my head with oil;

Psalm 23:5 NIV

c my cup overflows.

More Than a Meal

Emily Hewitt

SCRIPTURE: *John 6: 26-29*
PREPARATION: *Ask someone to be ready to read John 6:26-29.*
SUGGESTED MUSIC: *"Seek Ye First" ("Hymns of Heritage and Hope" #578)*

INTRODUCTION: What is your favorite party food? *(Allow time to answer).*

Today, we are thinking about the actual refreshments of a tea party. The table is set with all your favorite treats — cookies, scones, tea — but the best part isn't just the food; it's the host who invited you. It makes us think of "tea parties" with young girls. The Play-Doh food, imaginary liquid and probably questionably clean cups are not why we sit down to have a tea party with our daughters, granddaughters or nieces — it's to spend time with those whom we love!

MESSAGE: We are about to take a look at John 6:26-29. To provide some context, if you go back to the beginning of Chapter 6, Jesus feeds the 5,000, a very familiar story to us all. Then, he goes away into the hills by himself, and the disciples then see him walking on the water. The same crowd that Jesus fed then realizes he isn't with the disciples, and the crowd decides to go hunting for him. As a mom, I can really relate to Jesus in this passage — he just needs five minutes of alone time, but everyone falls apart and searches for him while he is gone! When he is finally found, in verse 25, they ask Jesus: "Rabbi, when did you get here?" (John 6:25b, NLT).

This is how Jesus responds.

(Have someone read out loud John 6:26-29.)

> Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

In the beginning of Jesus's response, why does he say the people are following him? *(Allow time for answers — Jesus calls out the people because they want to be with him because he fed them).*

The people are following him because they want more physical food, not because they recognize him as the Messiah. They are interested in temporary satisfaction rather than spiritual truth. The crowd represents the guests who come to the table expecting something tangible and enjoyable. At a tea party, it's the snacks, tea and treats; in the story, it's the bread and fish. They are drawn by the physical, immediate satisfaction.

In verse 27, he points to spiritual priorities: Jesus contrasts "food that perishes" (temporary, physical nourishment) with "food that endures to eternal life" (spiritual nourishment). Just like a tea party has more than just food, Jesus is saying there's something greater than the temporary filling of hunger: his presence gives eternal life.

In verse 28, the crowd seeks action steps: They interpret Jesus' message through a typical Jewish lens — doing works or following commandments to please God — so they ask what actions God requires. It's so easy to see ourselves in this passage. Wouldn't it just be easier sometimes if God just gave us a checklist to complete? As women, we are pretty good at getting work done. How often do we think — "God, if you would just give me a to-do list, I could get it all done to please you."

Jesus emphasizes faith in verse 29: He shifts the focus from works to belief. The "work of God" isn't about a list of tasks; it's trusting and believing in Jesus as the one sent by God. Faith in him is what connects people to eternal life. In a tea party, it's like accepting the host's invitation and sitting down at the table. The "work" isn't about bringing your own treats; it's simply believing in and trusting the host.

This passage shows us that guests first enjoy the physical refreshments, but the real treasure is being welcomed into Jesus' presence, where faith is the invitation to sit at his table.

APPLICATION: What are the "physical refreshments" in your life — things that satisfy for a moment but don't bring lasting joy? *(These could be busyness, material comforts, achievements, or even social approval.)*

How can we practice pausing to focus on Jesus, the Provider, before anything else? *(Allow time to answer — be prepared to answer yourself.)*

(Share the author's thoughts here.) As I read this passage and ponder my own personal motivations, I think we could probably all stand to think of one daily routine where we can pause and focus on Jesus first — maybe starting our day with prayer instead of jumping out of bed to begin our tasks for the day. Maybe it's taking the time to sit down with our family and pray before our meal instead of already thinking about how we're going to get it all cleaned up. Maybe it's pausing in the middle of a busy season to simply sit in God's presence.

Just like at a tea party, the treats are fun, but the true joy is being with the host. Our 'host' is Jesus. He invites us into his presence. Our daily practice is learning to sit at his table and enjoy him first.

PRAYER: *Lead a guided prayer.*

- *Thank Jesus for inviting us to his table.*
- *Ask for help noticing him more than the blessings he provides.*
- *Pray for the faith to "sit at the table" daily and trust him fully.*

OPTIONAL MUSIC: *Close by singing "Seek Ye First" (by Maranatha!)*

AUTHOR: *Emily Hewitt is a high school English teacher, married to James Hewitt, who is also a teacher AND a youth ministries coordinator. She is mom to their 4-year-old, Eleanor. When she's not at school, she can usually be found at church, baking, crafting, reading or just enjoying time with family. They attend Fellowship Advent Christian Church in Bethlehem, N.C.*

Sharing: Do Not Forsake Fellowship

Linda Wray and Karen Farmer

SCRIPTURE: *Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)*

SUGGESTED MUSIC: *"The Family of God" ("Hymns of Heritage and Hope" #375) and "Blest Be the Tie that Binds" ("Hymns of Heritage and Hope" #429)*

INTRODUCTION: This devotion centers on the power of Christian fellowship and the blessings that come from sharing life within a church family. Just as sharing is at the heart of a tea party, Christian fellowship is at the heart of a church family.

MESSAGE: In Hebrews 10:23-25, Paul calls us to hold firmly to our faith, encourage one another, and remain committed to meeting together.

Read Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)

As we hold fast to the hope we profess, the Lord calls us to action. We are called to encourage one another to love and to do good deeds. In addition, as Christians, we are exhorted to encourage believers to not give up meeting together. Moreover, we are to continue encouraging one another until the day of Christ's return.

Have you been encouraged to love and to do good deeds in your church family? Please share examples of how your life is blessed.

Loving one another and doing good things is essential to Christian fellowship. On the other hand, when believers forsake meeting together, they miss opportunities to love, to do good deeds and fellowship with other believers. Just like sitting down and visiting is a necessity to sharing in a tea party, Christian fellowship is a necessity for growing in Christ.

APPLICATION: The following is a testimony of Linda, a WHFMS member who shares how she and her family were the recipients of love, good deeds and fellowship when she first attended the Princeton Advent Christian Church.

"In 1981, my husband, son and I moved from another state to West Virginia to care for my elderly mother. She had been attending the AC Church for some time. It was a happy

experience of fellowship for her after attending other churches in the area. We started going to church with her, and the church family received us well. My mother died nine months later, and we were devastated. The pastor and church family reached out to us in love and sympathy. By this time, we were impressed with everyone and continued to attend services. I started going to the WHFMS meetings with the invitation of the members. The programs were excellent, and the fellowship and sharing were very pleasing.

"In the summer of 1983, the Lord blessed us with a family of four children to raise. It was during this time, after much discussion and prayer, we knew God wanted us to be members of the Advent Christian Church. We both felt accepted and affirmed, and our children had a church home. Since 1984, the Lord has given us many opportunities to share in his service."

What opportunities do you have to share in the Lord's service?

How has your faith grown by fellowshipping with other believers?

What can we do as WHFMS members to encourage women to meet together as we wait for the blessed hope?

PRAYER:
Our most gracious Lord,

Thank you for this opportunity to join in fellowship with each other. May we be stirred by our love for fellow believers to do good deeds in the name of Jesus. Convict us Lord when we are tempted to forsake meeting together. Help us to encourage one another until the day of Christ's return.

In Jesus' Name,
Amen

AUTHORS: *Linda Wray is a member of the Princeton Advent Christian Church. She has attended for 42 years, and she has served as a choir member and past president of the WHFMS. At the time of this writing, Linda recently celebrated her 85th birthday. She currently is the Spiritual Life Chair and teaches the Women's Sunday School Class. In addition, she is a retired caregiver. Karen Farmer is also a member of the Princeton AC Church where she is president of the WHFMS. She is an MTI student. She has served in several roles in the church and in the WHFMS group.*

Goodbyes

Jennifer Lee Sherwood

SCRIPTURE: *John 21:15-17*

PREPARATION: *Gather Bibles, "Thinking of You" cards and pens.*

SUGGESTED MUSIC: *"Blest Be the Tie that Binds" ("Hymns of Heritage and Hope" #429)*

INTRODUCTION: *Ask your group the following questions:*

1. What are some different expressions we use for saying goodbye?
   Examples might include, "Bye-Bye," "See you later," "Adios amigos," "Catch you later alligator," "Have a good one," "So long," "Bon Voyage," "Toodle-loo" and "Hasta la vista."
2. In what settings do you dread saying goodbye?
3. Why are goodbyes so hard?
4. How is Jesus a comfort to us when we must part with loved ones?

MESSAGE: As a child I remember seeing my grandparents, Gram and Pappy, standing on the front porch of their home in Clifton Forge, Virginia, waving goodbye as our family pulled out of their driveway. The week spent unwrapping Christmas presents, snuggling in my grandparents' bed, playing in the cold creek and chasing cows in the pasture went by quickly. It would be months before we would see them again. The goodbyes were harder as their health deteriorated and we knew the visits would end one day.

At the conclusion of birthday parties, Thanksgiving meals, Christmas gatherings and other family celebrations, we don't want the joy to end. As Jesus' time on earth, after the resurrection, was ending, he actively prepared his disciples for carrying on his ministry.

Ask a volunteer to read John 21:15-17

Discuss the following questions:

1. Why do you think Jesus felt it was important to have a personal conversation with Peter after Jesus was raised from the dead?

2. What did Jesus emphasize in his conversation with Peter and what should we learn from his instructions to Peter?
3. How was Jesus' goodbye message to Peter different than what we may have expected?

Jesus could have used this last recorded conversation with Peter as an opportunity to admonish him, remind him of his past sin or avoid him altogether. Instead, Jesus revealed to us these three truths:

1. **Restoration –** Jesus intentionally showed Peter that he was forgiven and their relationship was reconciled.
2. **Renewal –** Peter may have doubted whether he could ever serve Christ again and Jesus assured him that there were sheep to be fed.
3. **Love for others –** As Jesus forgave Peter, he demonstrated the mercy Peter would need to show others throughout his ongoing ministry.

God wants us to be intentional as we minister to others. Sometimes, we struggle with connecting or we tend to focus on our own hurts. As we look for opportunities to serve, help us to remember that each time we gather as a church body or ladies' group, we leave believing that we will come together again. Many of us know some farewells are permanent. Scripture tells us that we do not have the promise of a new day. We know the sting of death. The promise of being reunited with loved ones who believed in Christ gives us hope until Jesus' return.

Often, goodbyes involve hugs, laughter and plans to meet again. Sometimes, there are tears, mourning and a yearning for the trumpet sound. Let's make the most of our time together and focus on the same things Jesus did as he reconnected with Peter.

APPLICATION: Think of two or three people in your church or in the community who had to say goodbye to someone or family they loved. It could be parents who dropped their child off at college, a single person called to ministry away from family. This could be a widow, or widower, or parents who lost a child to miscarriage or suicide. We live in a world broken by sin and death. This past Advent season I had the opportunity to visit two widows. The ladies were so appreciative of the time we shared together and I left feeling blessed.

As you close the meeting pass around cards to send to these two or three people. Make a commitment to pray for them throughout the year. Send cards regularly. Plan a visit. Send a meal or a fruit basket. Be intentional in showing kindness. Jesus reminds us daily that we are to continue his ministry by showing love toward others. It's easy to do this at the time of funerals, but grief lingers. We can feed sheep by extending acts of kindness to those feeling lonely, discouraged or heartbroken.

PRAYER: *Stand in a circle, linking hands, and pray for the people who have had to say sad goodbyes. Say a kind word of encouragement to the ladies in your group as you part, remembering how Jesus spoke lovingly to Peter. Look forward to next month's meeting and time of fellowship!*

AUTHOR: *Jennifer Lee Sherwood lives in Lenoir and attends Calvary AC Church. She is the wife of Todd and daughter of Jim and Nancy Lee. She has two adult children, Andrew and Elizabeth, who live nearby. Homeschooling her youngest daughter, Leah, brings her immense joy. Her favorite activities include playing with her orange kitties and yellow lab, walking or hiking with friends, singing in the choir at church and working at camps.*

Clean Up: Second Coming, All Things New

Nancy Okes

SCRIPTURE: *1 Corinthians 15:51-54, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, and other references throughout the program.*

PREPARATION: *Gather hymnals and music; have volunteers ready to read Scripture.*

SUGGESTED MUSIC: *"Jesus is Coming Again" ("Hymns of Heritage and Hope" #687), "Soon and Very Soon" ("Hymns of Heritage and Hope" #706), Cece Winans "Come Jesus Come," Glen Neal recording "Midnight Cry"*

INTRODUCTION: One of the most dreaded chores at the end of a meal or party is cleaning up. This includes storing leftovers, washing dishes, wiping down counters and tables, taking down decorations and taking out trash. To make this chore more enjoyable, my sisters and I would sing and/or pretend we were doing commercials on TV (no dishpan hands, etc.). When finished, we were happy and free to enjoy our time. Everything was fresh, clean and ready for the next meal.

MESSAGE: The second coming of Jesus is similar to cleaning up after an event. After thousands of years, Jesus will return and make all things new. He will get rid of all the mess. No more sin, sickness, depression, hurts, etc. Today, we will look in the Word of God and explore what will happen when Jesus returns.

Ask: How do we know Jesus is coming again?
Read John 14:1-3, Revelation 22:20
Answer: He said he would.

Ask: When will it happen?
Read Matthew 24:36-44
Answer: No one knows the time or hour except the Father. He will come as a thief in the night.

Ask: How long will it take?
Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-54, especially 52.
Answer: In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye.

Ask: What will happen? What is the order of events?
Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18.
Answer:

1. The Lord Jesus comes down with the shout of the archangel (1 Thess. 4:16).
2. The trumpet sounds announcing Jesus is coming.
3. The dead in Christ rise first.
4. Those who are alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.
5. We will live forever with the Lord.

Other Scriptures you may use:

- Revelation 1:7: every eye will see him (no secret rapture)
- Revelation 21:4-5: wipe away all tears
- 1 Thessalonians 1:10: rescued from the wrath of God
- 1 Thessalonians 2:19: hope and joy in his presence

APPLICATION: As Advent Christians we have been known for our second coming teachings. Maybe we have gotten too comfortable with that belief and are not as excited as we should be. Sharing about the second coming of our Lord is a privilege. Let us prayerfully consider how we can share the joy of anticipating his coming. Stay in his Word and be ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ. Share the gospel with others so that many accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Rejoice because Jesus is coming soon! Maybe… today!

PRAYER: God, Almighty, our Heavenly Father, we praise your holy name. Thank you for giving us the gift of salvation when you sent Jesus to the earth. We look forward to the second coming when we can see you face to face and dwell with you forever.
Holy Spirit, guide us daily as we prepare for Jesus' coming.

Amen.

End with playing and singing CeCe Winan's "Come Jesus Come."

AUTHOR: *Nancy Okes accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior at 12 years old and grew up in the Princeton, W.Va. Advent Christian Church. She attended Concord University in Athens, W.Va., graduated from Berkshire Christian College and received a Masters Degree in Special Education from WV College of Graduate Studies (West Virginia University). Nancy retired as an elementary school teacher after 35 years.*

Women's Sunday

Karen White

This is a service outline for Women's Sunday that can be altered to fit the needs of your congregation. Some items have been omitted so that you can customize the service to fit your needs and reflect your congregation's preferences. Items you may wish to include are: announcements, special music, corporate prayer requests, tithes and offerings time to name just a few.

PREPARATION: *In addition to prayer and selecting leaders, you will need one teacup, tea bags for the presentation; tea bags for the members of the congregation (see Remembrance and Handout Introduction at the end of the service) or make teacup cutouts for everyone (see last page.)*

Service Outline

Welcome

Leader: Good morning, church family. Welcome to Women's Sunday, led by our WHFMS group. We're so glad each of you is here today — women, men, children, youth, grandparents and friends. Today we worship together as one family. Our theme this morning is: "Tea Party: Where People Are Welcomed Into His Presence." Think about what happens when you are sharing time together having tea:

- You slow down.
- You sit.
- You talk.
- You rest.
- Someone is caring for you.

In the same way, Jesus invites each of us to come, sit with him and be refreshed.

- Not rushed.
- Not perfect.
- Just present.

Today, we accept his invitation together.

Call to Worship *(Responsive Reading)*

Leader: My soul thirst for God, the living God.
Congregation: When can I go and meet with God?
Leader: Come, all you who are weary and burdened.
Congregation: We come to meet with you Lord.

Opening Hymn

"Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" ("Hymns of Heritage and Hope" #64)

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for welcoming us into your presence today. Prepare our hearts, quite our minds and fill us with your grace. Help us to slow down and truly sit with you. Meet us here and refresh our souls. Amen.

Scripture and Reflection — The Invitation to the Tea Party

Scripture reader reads: Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Leader reflection: Every tea party begins with an invitation. Invitations are personal … intentional … thoughtful. And Jesus invites us in the same way. Not because we are perfect. Not because we have earned it. But simply because we are loved. He doesn't say, "Fix yourself first." He simply says, "Come." Today, we accept his invitation again just as we are.

Object Lesson — The Empty Cup

(Hold up and empty tea cup.) When you come for tea, you don't bring a full cup. You bring an empty one. An empty cup is ready to receive. Jesus welcomes us the same way. We don't come full of ourselves or pretend to have it all together. We come open … honest … empty. And he fills us with his love.

Hymn

"Just As I Am" ("Hymns of Heritage and Hope" #338)

Scripture and Reflection — A Prepared Table

Scripture reader reads: Psalm 23:5: "You prepare a table before me … my cup overflows."

Leader reflection: Before we ever arrive, the table is already prepared. God has already made room. Already poured grace. Already planned a blessing. There is a place for every person here. No one is forgotten. No one stands outside. At Jesus's table, everyone belongs.

Chorus

"Come and Dine" (one verse and chorus).

Scripture and Reflection — Clothed in Love

Scripture reader reads: Colossians 3:12: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience."

Leader reflection: When we spend time with Jesus, something changes. We don't leave the same way we came. He shapes us. Softens us. Clothes us with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Not perfection, but love. Time with Jesus changes us from the inside out.

Intergenerational Participation Moment or Children's Sermon

(Invite children forward if desired. Time 5-7 minutes.)

Object Lesson — The Cup

(Hold up empty cup.) What has to be true before we can pour something into a cup? *(Wait for responses.)* Yes, it has to be empty. We come to Jesus the same way, open and ready.

Object Lesson — The Tea Bag

(Hold up the tea bag.) The tea bag won't change anything if it stays in my hand. But when it goes into the water… *(place into cup)* it changes everything. The color changes. The flavor changes. The whole cup is different. When we stay close to Jesus, he changes us too — not just on the outside, but from the inside out. No matter how young or old we are, he is always at work in us.

Pouring Moment

(Slowly pour water into cup.) Just as this cup is filled, Jesus fills us with love so that what overflows from us blesses others.

Scripture everyone reads together: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Affirmations by age group.

Leader: If you are a child, say: Jesus welcomes me.
Children: Jesus welcomes me.

Leader: If you are a teenager or young adult, say: Jesus walks with me.
Youth: Jesus walks with me.

Leader: If you are an adult, say: Jesus strengthens me.
Adults: Jesus strengthens me.

Leader: If you are a senior, say: Jesus is faithful to me.
Seniors: Jesus is faithful to me.

Leader: And all together we say: We are welcome at Jesus's table.
All: We are welcome at Jesus's table.

Remembrance and Handout Introduction

(Helpers prepare to distribute teacup cutouts or tea bags either during the service or at the end of the service.)

Leader: Today, you'll receive a small teacup cutout *(or tea bag)*. Printed on the teacup cutout are the words: "My cup overflows with blessings." Psalm 23:5 Place it somewhere you will see it this week. Perhaps your Bible, your desk, your kitchen counter or even your car. Let it remind you to slow down, sit with Jesus and spend time in his presence. Because when you stay close to him, he fills your cup, and what he pours in overflows to others. *(Distribute items however is best for your setting.)*

Closing Prayer

Jesus, thank you for welcoming us. Fill our cups with your grace. Change us from the inside out. Help us welcome others just as you welcome us. Amen

Closing Hymn

One verse and chorus of "Blessed Assurance" ("Hymns of Heritage and Hope" #643)

Benediction

May you leave today knowing there is always a seat for you at Jesus's table. May your heart

be rested, your cup be filled, and your life overflow with his love. Go in peace and invite others to the table. Amen

AUTHOR: *Karen White and her husband, Tony, live in Bethlehem, N.C., and attend Fellowship Advent Christian Church. Originally from northern Maine, Karen has always loved serving through music ministry and being part of a faith-filled community. Together, they share a blended family of give grown children and Karen is "Googa" to seven wonderful grandchildren. For more than 30 years, she has taught in public schools, a calling that continues to bring her joy. In her free time, you'll find her kayaking, quilting, working with pottery or serving at the Appalachian Advent Christian Campground — one of her favorite places to be.*

Print this teacup out on cardstock or scrapbooking paper if you desire for your takeaway from the service.



Prayer Emphasis: Steeped in Prayer

Pat Havener

PURPOSE: *The Prayer Emphasis material is designed to be used as a special program time. It can be used in its entirety for a large group prayer service, a tea party with a prayer theme or a prayer brunch. To use as a devotional for a regular meeting, choose sections of it to present to fit your group's needs.*

SCRIPTURE: *"Therefore the Lord is waiting to show you mercy, and is rising up to show you compassion, for the Lord is a just God. All who wait patiently for him are happy." (Isaiah 30:18, CSB).*

PREPARATION: *Print sweet tea recipe for group, this recipe is on the last page. Have a container of instant tea, a bottle of tea you have purchased and tea bags to be used during the presentation.*

SUGGESTED MUSIC: *"In His Time" Songwriters: Linda Diane Ball*

In His Time lyrics © Universal Music - Brentwood Benson Publ., Cccm Music, Universal Music - Brentwood Benson Publishing (Use this song wherever you think is best for your service. If you are having a tea perhaps have this song sung in the background, you may play it while the groups are working, or if you have a vocalist, have it sung perhaps at the end of the program.)

INTRODUCTION: The theme for 2027 is "Tea Party — Where People Are Welcomed Into His Presence" *(Begin by asking the group to share a special memory involving food and family. If the group is large, you may have them share at individual tables. Then share the following story written by this Prayer Emphasis author.)*

"My twin sister Kaye had quite the gift for writing. We grew up on a dirt road in Southeast Georgia, and ran barefoot most of the year until it was required to wear shoes. Kaye wrote, 'Now we was raised pretty poor. Don't get me wrong, we always had a roof over our heads, and somethin to eat, and plenty of soap and water. So I reckon we were better than a lot of people back then.' (Kaye Carter)

"I took to the kitchen much faster than she did, but once she got the hang of it, folks would come to her house for whatever she had on the stove. And she always had a big jug of sweet tea. I was thinking about her while I was preparing this devotional and thought I

would include her tea recipe." *(The recipe is on the last page of this program, you may give them out whenever you desire.)*

MESSAGE: *Share the following:*

Tea is the most widely consumed beverage in the world. When we think of tea, Great Britian may be the first country that comes to mind. We think about the afternoon teas with scones, sandwiches and fancy desserts. But, per capita, Sri Lanka is the greatest tea consumer. Of course, China, with its large population is the greatest consumer overall. However, the US drank 39 billion gallons of tea in 2021!

If you are a tea drinker, you may easily become a "tea snob." You may only drink a certain brand or refuse to drink any except what you have made for yourself. But there are many ways to consume tea if you are not too much of a "tea snob." (Hold up the jar of instant tea.) You may make instant tea if you are in a hurry, or just don't want to take the time to wait on a tea bag to steep. (Hold up the bottle of purchased tea.) You may buy your tea at a local store or even gas station! (Hold up the tea bags.) Or, you may only make tea by taking the time to carefully steep the bags in the right water temperature for the exact amount of time.

Do you think prayer is similar to tea? Does God prefer "instant prayers," does he favor "bottled prayers" or does he only hear "steeped prayers?"

(You may wish to divide your group into three parts. If the group is large you may assign more than one group to the three topics. If your group is small you may choose to keep them together as you share. The instructions for each of the three topics for discussion are the same and are further explained in the sections.)

Instant Prayer, Bottled Prayer, Steeped Prayer

Now, a true "tea snob" would rather have no tea at all than to have to drink instant tea! They may be highly offended to be offered such a poor substitute for the tea that has been carefully prepared.

But, what about "Instant Prayer"?

First, what is instant prayer? What are the bad things about instant prayer? Are there good reasons for it?

Instant prayer is just what it sounds like. Prayers offered quickly. They are short, take little preparation and are said almost on the spur of the moment.

Let's take a minute and list the bad things about instant prayer. *(If the group does not share after a short time offer a few suggestions to get them started. If you have divided the people into smaller groups, give them a certain amount of time to talk among themselves and then have each group share a thought or two.)*

BAD REASONS FOR INSTANT PRAYER — *suggested thoughts*

1. May take God for granted.
2. May not take the time to honor him.
3. Does not allow time for God to speak to us.

Allow time for the groups to share. If the group is large you may want to list these on a whiteboard at the front of the room, or each person could be given their own paper for notes.

So, let's take a minute to list the good reasons for instant prayer. (*As above allow time for the groups to think and talk, then share. If they have difficulty offer these suggestions to get them started or in addition to their thoughts.)*

GOOD REASONS FOR INSTANT PRAYER — *suggested thoughts*

1. During a crisis — sudden illness, accident, fear.
2. The Holy Spirit may bring someone or something to our mind and we pray immediately for them.
3. Recognizes that God is always near to us, so we can always pray.
4. In Luke 18 we learned about the Pharisee praying long prayers in the temple just to be heard. But the instant prayer of the tax collector is the one God heard and justified when he said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Hold onto the thought of instant prayers. Let's think about "bottled prayers."

First, what is a bottled prayer? Just like bottled tea, it is an already prepared prayer. Just like instant prayers there are both good and bad things to consider in bottled prayers. Bottled prayers are found in the Bible — a perfect example is the Lord's Prayer. Other examples are prayers found in both the Old and New Testaments. Paul offered many prayers for the people of the churches he started that are repeated today. Yet another

example are prayers found in prayer guides, devotional books or even on the internet.

So just as before let's consider bad and good reasons or concerns from bottle prayers.

BAD REASONS, OR POSSIBLE CONCERNS RE: BOTTLED PRAYERS — *suggested thoughts*

1. They may become so common to us they lose their meaning and purpose. The prayer we teach children when they are learning to say grace at the table is an example. The words "God is great, God is good, and we thank him for our food. By his hands we all are fed, thank you Lord for our daily bread," is a beautiful prayer. But if the child does not go beyond this prayer as they grow it becomes a substitute for true communication with God.
2. Reading a prayer from a devotional guide has a great purpose, as long as we are focused on the Father to whom we are praying, and not just on saying the words in front of us.

GOOD REASONS FOR BOTTLED PRAYERS — *suggested thoughts*

1. They provide models for us as we pray, especially the Lord's prayer or other prayers found in the Bible.
2. They allow us to pray together in unity.
3. They address issues we may not know how to address — prayers for children: Philippians 1:9-11; prayers for ministries: Philippians 1:3-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4, etc. *(You may ask someone to read these verses aloud as you share.)*

As you think about instant and bottled prayers, let us also consider steeped prayers. Just as with instant and bottled prayers, we can recognize both bad and good things about them. First, what are steeped prayers? They are prayers that take time. They are not rushed, they are intentional. It is more difficult to find problems with steeped prayers, but as we have before take some time to think about this.

PROBLEMS WITH STEEPED PRAYERS — *suggested thoughts*

1. We may put off praying, saying we just do not have the time to do it properly.
2. We may as the Pharisee in the Luke passage above become too wordy and/or only use "religious words" that are not part of how we really express ourselves.

ADVANTAGES TO STEEPED PRAYERS — *suggested thoughts*

1. We take the time to truly honor God, thank him and listen to him speak to us.
2. We are removed from the busyness of the day and meditate on his words and allow the Holy Spirit to pray for us. Romans 8:26
3. We are following Jesus's instructions, "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6 (ESV)
4. We are being faithful to the instruction to "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving." Colossians 4:2 (ESV)

What a blessing that we are not limited to only instant prayers, or bottled prayers or steeped prayers. Our Father wants to have a relationship with us; he is always available to us. He knows the timing, he knows the need and he is waiting to meet with us, his children.

Let me share the author's heart about her favorite time to pray:

"When I pray, I love to pray in the early morning, when the house is still quiet. Most mornings I'll put the kettle on the stove and stand by the window waiting for the water to boil. It feels like the whole world is taking a slow breath. With a warm mug in my hands and my Bible open, it's like I'm about to sit down with Jesus before the day gets busy.

"When I pray, I think about making tea — especially sweet tea. I drop the tea bag in, pour in the hot water and let it sit. If I start stirring and rushing, it doesn't taste right. But if I let it steep, the flavor grows strong and good. Prayer feels like that. When I stay with God, my heart starts to settle, and I start to change.

> "Therefore the Lord is waiting to show you mercy, and is rising up to show you compassion, for the Lord is a just God. All who wait patiently for him are happy." (Isaiah 30:18, CSB).

"I tell God what is on my mind — what I'm worried about, what I'm thankful for and what I need help with. Sometimes I just talk to him like I would to a close friend on my porch. Then I get quiet for a moment. I may not hear a voice, but I often feel the Holy Spirit helping me breathe easier and remember what is true.

"It feels like God pulls up the rocking chair right beside me — like we're sharing a quiet

moment on the porch. Even if I wake up feeling behind, prayer reminds me I'm not alone. God is near, and that kind of closeness can warm a heart.

"I picture it like a front-porch conversation at my sister Kaye's house. I bring my cup and step outside, letting the screen door swing shut behind me with that familiar sound. A morning breeze brushes by, and the birds are already at it — cardinals calling from the trees and little sparrows chirping quick, happy notes along the fence line. Every now and then, one lands at the feeder and flutters its wings like it owns the place. Everything feels a little slower. I sit down and tell him what's been weighing on me. Then I imagine his saying, 'Go on, I'm listening.' So, I talk, and then I stop and listen, too. That quiet pause is where my heart settles — like tea getting stronger while it steeps."

Timing For Tea and For Prayer

Just like a good pitcher of sweet tea, a good cup needs the right amount of waiting. Some teas are ready fast. Others need more time. If I pull the tea bag out too soon, the tea tastes weak. If I leave it in too long, it can taste bitter.

Prayer can be like that, too. Sometimes I want to say "Amen" and hurry on. But when I stay with God a little longer, it's like my soul has time to soak up his love — slow and steady, like tea steeping in the pot.

God knows the best time for everything. I'm learning he is not in a hurry, even when I am. Sometimes he is getting my heart ready. Sometimes he is working behind the scenes, where I can't see. And when the time is right, he opens the door — smooth and sure.

A cup of tea tastes best when it has steeped just right. Time with God is the same. When we slow down and don't rush, God can pour peace into us. He can steady our thoughts and help us trust him like a warm drink in our hands on a cool morning.

(Have a prayer time now with your group, if you have divided them into small groups continue to keep them together. Allow as much time as you think is appropriate for this time of prayer. Then close with prayer.)

PRAYER: Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for meeting with us. When we want to rush, help us slow down and stay close to you, like we wait for tea to steep. Let your peace settle in our hearts. Teach us to trust your timing and your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

AUTHOR: *Currently living in Seffner, Florida, Pat Havener is clinically retired, but active with church, conference and global ministries. Married for 52 years to Rev. Gary Havener, pastor of the Seffner Community Church, she continues when she is home to attempt gardening and whatever project she happens upon, where she lives with Gary, her brother-in-law Keith and Peter and Priscilla the cats, various wildlife of squirrels, crows and whatever else happens to arrive in the yard. She has three grown children and seven grandchildren who lovingly call her Mamie.*

SWEET TEA

Get you a good heavy quart pot and fill it to the top with water, now you start that water a boilin'. Then you take 2 family size LIPTON tea bags and throw 'em in that pot. Turn it off, and let that Tea stew in that hot water for about 15 minutes. (10 maybe if you don't like the bitter taste)

Now this makes a gallon of tea. We don't make no little quart pitcher around here.

Take 1 and a half cups of sugar and put in your pitcher. Pour the warm tea over that sugar and start stirring. Then fill the rest of the pitcher with water. Just that simple.

(used by permission of Kaye Carter, who fought the great fight only now to be resting in Jesus. Being a good Southern Baptist, she would be imagining serving Jesus a nice cold glass of tea.)