

Shall You Not Drink the Cup?

Matthew 26:36-39

“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go and pray over there.” {37} And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. {38} Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.” {39} He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me;

...nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”

(See also, Mark 14:36, and Luke 22:41)

And so Jesus went to His divinely ordained destiny - all the way to the cross, for you and for me! The resistance of His flesh was unimaginable, but it paled in the power of His divinity. His love won the day, even at a terrible cost to Him. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord’s response to when Peter he tried to take up the sword to fight those who were there to arrest Jesus was among the most profound statements of love ever recorded:

John 18:10-11

“Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus. {11} So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into the sheath...”

“Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?””

Matthew 26:55-56a

“Then Jesus said to the crowd, “Am I some dangerous revolutionary, that you come with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn’t you arrest me in the Temple? I was there

teaching every day. {56} But this is all happening to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures.”...

What are these cups God has given each of us to drink? After giving it some thought, I believe God gives each of us these four cups (and perhaps many others).

1. The Cup - Filled with Life's Experiences. It contains...
 - a. A Drink of Obedience
 - b. A Drink of Discovering and Knowing Him
2. The Cup - Filled with Our Personal, Individualized Calls from God. It contains...
 - a. A Drink of Sacrifice
 - b. A Drink of Righteousness
3. The Cup - filled with His Sufferings (and Ours). It contains...
 - a. A Drink of the Fellowship of His Sufferings
 - b. A Drink of Remembrance
4. The Cup - Emptied to Completion . It empties itself through our faithfulness.

Each of these cups has your name on them. Each has purpose... for us and for those who are present when we drink of them. Each cup carries potential. Each cup is filled with God's love. Let's look at these four cups individually and then, see what they say to us.

1. The Cup - Filled With Life's Experiences

Psalm 139: 14-18

*"I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.*

*{15} My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.*

{16} Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed...

*And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them."*

Dr. David Jeremiah, Pastor of Shadow Mountain Community Church in San Diego, California has said, “Has it occurred to you that nothing occurs to God?” It’s a thought you may need to reflect on. Here’s a simple explanation: Psalm 139:14-18 tells us that the God of this universe wrote a book about you before you were ever born. It’s not a book written with the purpose of controlling your life, but a book filled with the foreknowledge of God. You still have freewill. You can still make your own choices; but God was aware of every one of them before you were even in your mother’s womb. When God wrote your book, He recorded it all, but His heart’s desire for every day of your life was that you would make good choices. His hopes for you were filled with good things and grace.

This first cup has the primary characteristic that it’s filled with life’s tests. Every experience you have, every choice you make, every fork in the road may not be of God’s making, but He will use it to reveal something to you. He will ask you to drink of it for these and many other reasons:

1. It may be to reveal your purpose
2. It will certainly test your obedience to Him
3. It may be to reveal conviction of sin and draw you to repentance - to help you make a course correction and get you onto the path of His grace filled will for you.
4. It may be to reveal His assurance that you’re on the right path.
5. It may be to reveal the assurance of His love, just when you need it.
6. It may be to help you learn and grow, whether from something good or not so good that life has caused you to experience.
7. Fill in the blank: It may be to reveal _____.

In all these things and more, it’s the Holy Spirit, lovingly at work in you. So, what’s the ultimate purpose for our life’s experiences and the tests they hold? It’s actually the same answer for all four - It’s His paramount purpose for us - *that we would know Him* in the closest, most intimate and personal way we can... and that we can be intimately familiar with His resurrection power that He has made available to us!

*Philippians 3:10a**“...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...”*

Do you know Him? How well? How often are you aware of His presence? How informed are you of what He wants for you? How often to you make it your aim *“to be well pleasing to Him?”* (2 Corinthians 5:9b) We could all say there’s plenty of room for improvement in all these issues. When you know Him well, you will determine your own choices by whether they are well pleasing to Him. It’s a byproduct of knowing Him.

*2 Corinthians 5:9**“Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.”*

The New Living Translations says, *“Our goal is to please Him.”* The Message Bible says, *“Cheerfully pleasing God is the main thing, and that’s what we aim to do, regardless of our conditions.”*

Shall you not drink the cup?

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2. The Cup - Filled With Our Personal, Individual Call from God

I’d like to share with you two distinct drinks we are all offered from this cup. The first is the drink of sacrifice. This is normally going to have some bitterness to it; but when you look back at the things God called you to do, you may find something that sweetens this cup. It will be your memories of the fruitfulness of the drink.

The second drink is the drink of righteousness. What’s so beautiful about this drink is that it often becomes the sweetener for the drink of sacrifice. At times, the memories of the sacrifice, as bitter as it may have been, become reminders of how righteousness triumphed in you through of your determination to grow in God’s grace - in all

things. You never compromised your devotion to God and chose to do the right thing!

It's never wrong to do what's right.
It's always right to do what's righteous.

There will be times when the sacrifice may be costly and really difficult. There will be other times when the sacrifice seems fairly easy. God sees both as righteous acts. They both please Him. It's certainly significant when the sacrifice is deeply hurtful or costly. However, never think even the smallest sacrifice is not significant to God. Both indicate commitment to doing what's right and displaying *"the righteousness of God in Christ."*

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. {18} Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, {19} that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. {20} Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God..."

{21} For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

At this point I'd like to share with you two stories that display differences in the degree of sacrifice. They're both fictitious stories. I'm certain that if they were factual, God would find each equally pleasing; as they both speak of uncompromising commitment to do the honorable and right thing that's fitting for the moment... and indeed, for all eternity.

The Fire Tower

There have been an unusual amount of fires in Northern California this year. The danger is so much higher than usual. A longtime firefighter, with his son (a new fire fighter,) was aware of the deadly dangers of these fires and the need to report them quickly. They unselfishly volunteered for to spend the coming days and nights on the fire tower to report any smoke or flames. The tower was in a secure place, well protected from fire. It was surrounded by cleared land and had plenty of water in a sprinkler system that washed over the metal roof to keep any stray embers from causing harm. It was safe from the flames.

One night, they saw a strong glow to the east and the father reported it to his superiors at the fire fighting command post. Teams were dispatched and the battle began. In just a matter of hours, the winds whipped up and the flames began to unexpectedly roar across the hills. Soon, the fire grew with the fierce winds and whipped into a frenzy. The battle took on a fury of its own and was out of control. The father and son were trapped but safely insulated from the flames, through the design of the fire tower and its safely cleared location.

As the days passed the fires raged. Then a radio message from a team of firefighters came across the fire tower radio. "We're trapped and the only way out is a winding narrow road that will soon be engulfed in flames. We don't think we can escape by walking down the road. Is there anyone who can help us?" The command post replied that they could not reach them. They were on their own.

The father looked at to his son, saying, "There's no time to lose. Let's gear up and take our truck to try to rescue them. We need to go now!" The son looked at the flames in the forest around them and then to his father. "But dad, we might not make it back!" The father looked again at the fire raging in the distance, thinking of those trapped men out there. "Son, honor and duty demand that we to go out... and it doesn't require that we have to make it back."¹

The Boy and the Sundae²

"Many years ago, a 10-year-old boy walked up to the counter of a soda shop and climbed onto a stool. He caught the eye of the waitress and asked, "How much is an ice cream sundae?" "Fifty cents," the waitress

¹ My original story. It was inspired by a story I heard many years ago, of a lighthouse keeper and his son, but I have no idea who originated it.

² Written by Joshua Becker www.becomingminimalist.com/the-boy-and-the-sundae/

replied. The boy reached into his pockets, pulled out a handful of change, and began counting. The waitress frowned impatiently. After all, she had other customers to wait on. The boy squinted up at the waitress. “How much is a dish of plain ice cream?” he asked. The waitress sighed and rolled her eyes. “Thirty-five cents,” she said with a note of irritation. Again, the boy counted his coins. At last, he said, “I’ll have the plain ice cream, please.” He put a quarter and two nickels on the counter. The waitress took the coins, brought the ice cream, and walked away. About ten minutes later, she returned and found the ice cream dish empty. The boy was gone. She picked up the empty dish—then swallowed hard. There on the counter, next to the wet spot where the dish had been, were two nickels and five pennies. The boy had had enough for a sundae, but he had ordered plain ice cream so he could leave her a tip...”

As you read before, “When you know Him well, you will determine your own choices by whether they are well pleasing to Him. It’s a byproduct of knowing Him.”

Shall you not drink the cup?

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3. The Cup - Filled With His Sufferings (His and Ours)

John 18:10-11 (NLT)

*Shall I not drink from the cup of suffering the
Father has given me?”*

I’d like to call your attention to two drinks from this particular cup of sufferings. The first is the drink in which you join with the Lord Jesus Christ in “*the fellowship of His suffering.*” The New Living Translation (NLT) includes powerful words that tell us our Heavenly Father gave Jesus His cup of suffering at His crucifixion. At that time, it was not a welcome drink, but Jesus willingly drank of it. Knowing He was going to His terrible death, Jesus spoke of the second drink that we would often take - a drink of remembrance. He spoke of it at the Last Supper. It seems to me that both drinks paint an indelible picture of the immense significance of being “in Christ.”

The Bitter Taste of Fellowship in His Sufferings

Philippians 3:7-10

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ. {9} And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith, {10} that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...

and the fellowship of His sufferings,

...being conformed to His death, {11} if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

I'd like to share with you why passage of Scripture has great personal meaning for me. It was 1999 and I was church planting in Manhattan, in New York City. I thought I knew a great deal about being close to God and knowing Him on an intimate level. I soon found that He was about to draw me closer than I could have imagined, and in an unwelcome and unexpected way: Here's my story:

His Suffering *For* Me and My Suffering *With* Him

About nineteen years prior to my writing this, I was told I had a particular kind of cancer that had progressed to the point that it was likely to kill me. Immediately my faith arose and I said, “No, that's not in line with what God says about me in Scripture. I have a race to run and I know I'm far from finished.” Still, I had no choice but to go through the fire, knowing it would be white-hot and would try its best to destroy my resolve. Yet, I knew there was a fire burning inside me that far exceeded the natural fires of the disease. It was the fire of faith. I determined to be combustible and let the fire of God burn in me unceasingly through my journey in this burden that would try to challenge my belief in God's unfailing faithfulness. It was my

opportunity to drink of those “*living waters*” - and sharpen my determination to trust God. I didn’t welcome the battle, but I embraced the opportunity to fire up my faith for God. I refused to be denied what His Word promised me.

What I didn’t realize at the time was my bout with this disease would intensify so strongly that I found myself in intense pain and suffering, even as God was doing His miraculous healing work. I have never experienced any other time when all I could do was join with Christ in the midst of my pain. There was no other place to take it. I endured it only by drawing near to Jesus and sharing it with Him. It was in these times that I now understood “*the fellowship of His suffering.*” It wasn’t that I could be there when He hung in agony at the cross. It was that I could now share my suffering with Him and get beyond it because of His suffering for me. I spent so many hours and days with Jesus, learning to know Him because of my suffering. I have no way to explain it to you except to tell you He met me in my pain and carried me through it until He healed me. Never allow yourself to let your suffering take the glory from God. Share the moment with Him and His glory will fill your pain with Him. That’s what “*the fellowship of His suffering*” can bring to you... on the way to your victory!

Isaiah 53:4-5

*“Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
{5} But He was wounded for our
transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was
upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.”*

Life doesn’t always turn out as we wished. We will go through sufferings. Never doubt that God will be with you in your sufferings. He will see you through. Also, never doubt that God has His very best for you; so never think of what might have been. Remember, “nothing occurs to God.” He knows it all and has your book written in His heart and has your best interests there. Even when it seems you

didn't get what you wanted and had to "settle" for a very different life's journey, He is still with you. When disappointment comes, it's always painful. God may not take away your pain, but He will make a way for you to endure and give it up to Him. It's really all a matter of perspective. We have an eternally faithful, loving God, who wants the very best for us, even in those unwelcome, unwanted, painful times our fallen world has for us.

The Beautiful Prayer

"I asked God to take away my pain.

God said, No.

It is not for me to take away, but for you to give it up [to Me].

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole.

God said, No.

His spirit is whole, his body is only temporary.

I asked God to grant me patience.

God said, No.

Patience is a by-product of tribulations; It isn't granted, it is Learned.

I asked God to give me happiness.

God said, No.

I give you blessings. Happiness is up to you.

I asked God to spare me pain.

God said, No.

Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to Me.

I asked God to make my spirit grow.

God said, No.

You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to make you Fruitful.

I asked God for all things that I might enjoy life.

God said, No.

I will give you life, so that you may enjoy all things.

I ask God to help me LOVE others, as much as He loves me.

God said...Ahhhh, finally you have the idea.

...To the world you might be one person,
But to one person you just might be the world.”³

Drinking in the Gratefulness of Remembrance

There are moments when I dwell on the amazing intervention of God in my life. I think of those times when I experienced sufferings, both physical and emotional. I still have vivid memories of how Jesus drew me to Himself and gave me new life in Him. He became my hope and has remained so all these years. I try never to take for granted how redemption cancelled my hopelessness and brought me new joy and peace. Have you considered the same and yourself? Have you remembered what the Lord has done?

Jesus asked us to do many things. Most have to do how to act and think so we can improve our daily lives. There is a moment in history when knowing He would soon die for our sins, Jesus asked us to remember why He left Heaven and took on the form of a servant. Here is the Apostle Paul’s inspired record of Christ’s words, with which the Lord commanded us to remember the moment:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; {24} and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” {25} In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” {26} For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”

³ Poem by Hendra Lisda.

Why are these memorable words so significant for us? Well, we could certainly see the value in remembering the Lord's death on the cross through the holy ordinance of communion. For me, it's not really different from remembering what He did for me when I was fighting cancer. The same emotions and sense of gratefulness for my healing come to me every time I take communion. What is there you think about when you take communion? Do you think about those times when Christ intervened in your life? And what about those times when He did but you were not even aware that it happened? We need to be deliberate in drinking in the gratefulness of remembrance. There's not much that's more edifying, encouraging or faith-building than keeping the memory of such unfathomable love alive in us. The cup filled with His sufferings and ours is never far away. It always asks the question:

Shall you not drink the cup?

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4. The Cup - Emptied to Completion It Empties Itself Through Our Faithfulness.

Let's go again to Philippians, Chapter 3. Earlier we looked into Philippians 3:7-11. Now, let's take these Scriptures to their next relevant point, in which Paul spoke of his ultimate goal for drinking the cups God has allowed in his life. I've chosen the New Living Translation and then the words of The Message Bible, adding the next two verses, for clarity.

Philippians 3:12-14 (NLT)

'I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. {13} No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, {14} I press on to

reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Philippians 3:12-16 (MSG)

“I’m not saying that I have this all together... But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. {13} Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward - to Jesus. {14} I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back. {15} So let’s keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision - you’ll see it yet...”

{16} Now that we’re on the right track, let’s stay on it.”

Paraphrased: Drink the cup until it’s empty!

Have you diligently sought the Lord for the next step in a life of personal fruitfulness? It may be radically different from what you’ve done in the past. You may not have the physical or emotional capacity to expend the same kinds of energy, but love takes little effort and entertains no excuses! There’s always *something* you can do with who you are today; and with what you have to give someone in your tomorrows. *“Stay focused... You’ll see it yet.”* Drink the cup until it’s empty!

Shall you not drink the cup? Let’s all drink it until it’s empty.

*With every blessing,
Dr. Bob Abramson*

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