

LADIES NIGHT OF WORSHIP

What's on your Plate?

By Lynn Shultz

As many of you know, my daughter Lilly has special needs. One of the interesting aspects of the way her mind works is that she takes everything at face value. Because of this, understanding common idioms doesn't come easy to her. Phrases like, "It's raining cats and dogs" or "He is hard-headed" or "I'm sick and tired" can cause her confusion, much in the same way it would for a small child or a person learning English as a second language. However, once she learns the meaning of a phrase, she will incorporate it into her own language. One of Lilly's favorite idioms is, "What's on your plate today?"

This evening, I want us to take a moment to examine what is on our plate? What are those things in our lives that take up our time, our energy, and our thoughts? When we are done, each of us will have a different looking plate. However, being women, I'll bet that most of us have a plate that is rather full. I'd also be willing to take a good guess that there are times when our plate is overflowing with things to do...with tasks to accomplish...with jobs to complete...with people to see...family to take care of...events to plan and attend...obligations to fulfill...promises to carry out...goals to achieve...conflicts to resolve...friends to connect with...The list could go on and on and on. I'm not sure if it has always been this way for women, but we are definitely caught up in a task-oriented world. There is sooo much to do! In my life, I struggle with the effects an overflowing plate can have on my emotional and spiritual well being. You see, when our plate gets too full, we often have a tendency to prioritize. We immediately address the crisis situations first...doctor appointments for a sick loved one, overdue paper work, manic housecleaning for the spur of the moment guest.

Once the crisis situations have been resolved or at least addressed to the point where they are no longer "fires to be doused," we move down our list of priorities to address the needs of those around us. For me, those things often include food to eat and clean clothes to wear for my family. For you, they may include visits to the nursing home, watching grandchildren, farming obligations, or projects for your employer. In conjunction with this, is the fact that often times, as daughters of the aging parent, wives, and mothers our plate includes making sure our loved ones are able to accomplish the tasks on their plates, such as, taking mother to the hair dresser, picking up our husband's dry cleaning, or driving the youngest to dance class. These obligations of our loved ones most often out rank our own.

For many of us, caring for our home is the next priority to follow. Washing, scrubbing, disinfecting, organizing, and categorizing take up time and energy we thought we didn't have. And for many of us...it is never done. There is always one more room to clean, one more closet to organize, one more load of discarded items to go to Goodwill.

In addition to the tasks, events, and activities our plate is often filled with emotional, mental, and physical burdens that consume our thoughts and energy. Relationship problems, physical illness, family conflicts, loneliness, loss, and unemployment are just a few of the burdens we carry. But just as we women fill our plate with the tasks of others, so do we fill our plate with the burdens of our loved ones. Our heart grieves for our friends for whom suffering, in one capacity or another, is a daily reality. For our parents or children, we worry and wish that it would be us, instead of them, enduring the pain. For our spouse, the desire...the need that their burdens be lifted and that they have peace and joy in their life sends us to our knees in prayer. There are seasons in our lives where the burdens we carry, our own and those of others, take up so much of our plate that we become incapable of addressing any of the tasks yet to be done.

As we move down our list of priorities on our plate that is overflowing, it is very common to become completely drained. Do you ever wake up in the morning, tired before your feet ever hit the floor? Does the thought of the day's tasks to be completed ever sap your energy before you've even had breakfast? It has happened to me – many times. I had a dear friend tell me this week that she ended up in the ER on Monday due to a piercing pain in her head. After several tests, the doctors informed her that she suffered from a stress induced migraine. There are times when we are so busy, our body screams, "I've had enough...that's it....you're done" and sure enough, we end up with a virus that lands us in bed for three days. But wait, we don't have time to just lay around for three days, so what do we do? We get out of bed and continue through our list...sick. Before we know it, the day is done. The week is over. The month has passed. We can't get through the entire list. It's too long. Often, we neglect those things on our plate that are not the "fires to be doused." We skip over those "nice but not necessary" experiences. We move past the "good for the spirit - but not required for the body" items.

There is a danger here with this overflowing plate. As a matter of fact, for some of us our plate doesn't have to be overflowing for the danger to exist. What is the danger? Well, as the day goes on, as the week passes by, as the month moves forward, we add jobs to our list, tasks to our agenda, activities and events to our calendar, and our plate begins to fill. As our plate begins to fill and we begin to prioritize, all too often we push God off to the side of our plate. And if we are not careful, we move God off our plate altogether. Time with God - Time pursuing a close personal relationship with Christ, begins to fall in one of those "good for the spirit - but not required for the body" categories.

One of the most harmful effects of moving God off of our plate is that it allows a space, however small, for the enemy to creep in. Oh be wary. He is subtle. He can be very quiet. He often has hold of some part of our life before we even realize it. And because the enemy is the master deceiver we may not recognize his handiwork, . . . we may not recognize the sin that has so cleverly and subtly crept its way onto our plate.

I believe Satan is very adept at making his way around the plates and hearts of women. He knows our weaknesses well and in them he implants deception. His deceit can take many forms including; pride, guilt, self-pity, fear, hopelessness, and defeat. The lies of the enemy convince us that we must do such and such to make others happy and that we must participate in this and that to keep our friends. We buy into the deception that in order to have the respect of others we must fit the cookie cutter pattern the world has deemed worthy of praise. When we move God off our plate, when we take our eyes off Christ, the enemy snatches up the opportunity to lead us in the ways of the world and steers us away from Victory: Victory that only comes from having faith in the risen Lord. Victory that comes from daily communion with our Savior through prayer. Victory that comes when we seek God's guidance about the tasks we should put on our plate. Victory that comes when we ask our Father to lead us through our list in order that we may prioritize in a way that is pleasing to Him. Victory that comes only when we ask Jesus to carry our burdens, that our load may be lightened, that through him we may find peace and joy and grace.
Amen.