

Opinion

Ordinary Days By Lauren Denton

The contradiction of the holidays

Holidays are a mixed bag of emotions, aren't they? On the one hand, it's a time for celebration, gatherings, feasts and the giving and receiving of gifts. On the other hand, we exhaust ourselves with pre-holiday pandemonium, we miss those who are no longer with us and, amidst all the revelry and excitement, we sometimes feel a sense of longing and disappointment that we can't quite put our finger on.



Denton

We recently received some discouraging health news in our extended family, and my mind went straight to the holidays. It felt so unfair that in a time when we should be celebrating and joyful, we would instead be full of sorrow and despair. Then my mom pointed me to scripture. She reminded me of Psalm 103, which begins, "Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name."

I immediately thought, "No, I do not feel like praising. This is not a praiseworthy moment." But then I kept reading ...

"Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits — who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

This psalm has nothing to do with feelings. God isn't telling us we should feel like praising; he's telling us to do it even if we don't feel it. But not only that — we're also to remember all he's done for us and praise him for those things: he forgives, heals, redeems, crowns and satisfies.

As I focused on all he's done in the past to

bring me to where I am now with the people he's given me and all he'll continue to do until I'm with him in heaven, I was finally able to praise him. I'm still not grateful or thankful for the unwanted health news, but I can better focus on "all his benefits" rather than the pit that's always there waiting to swallow us when bad things happen.

If you keep reading Psalm 103, you come to this line: "The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all." What comfort to know that in the middle of all that plagues us — whether it's discouraging news, holiday sadness, parenting struggles, the disappointment and anxiety COVID has brought into our lives, political and societal upheaval or the myriad of other battles we all fight daily — God is on his throne and his kingdom rules over all.

While that truth doesn't make the hard things go away, there's a measure of comfort and peace that those pits can't steal. So in this holiday season, my hope is that we can focus on his benefits and praise him for all he's done for us, focusing our eyes not on what is seen and temporary, but on what is unseen and eternal.

"Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul."

When I'm not writing about my family and our various shenanigans, I write novels and go to the grocery store. My novels are in stores and online. You can reach me by email at Lauren@LaurenKDenton.com, visit my website LaurenKDenton.com, or find me on Instagram @LaurenKDentonBooks, Twitter @LaurenKDenton, or on Facebook ~LaurenKDentonAuthor.

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