

## INTRODUCTION

Well, hello, and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. We're having a conversation about the Word of the Lord, as it was preached to us on Sunday, and as we encounter it in our everyday lives.

My name is Jack, and I'm being joined today by Ben, Jono, Tristan, and a very special guest, Stephanie Long. Welcome to the podcast, everyone.

How are we going?

Doing well.

Any dancing on the weekend, Jono?

No, no dancing for me. Though Stephen wants to teach me. We'll see.

Well, he's a very good dancer.

Yeah.

Our staff meetings are going to be fun from now on.

So yeah, as we said, we've got Stephanie joining us on the podcast.

We're hoping to get some more guests in and get more variety of voices in future episodes. So it's great to have Steph on the pod with us today.

Very happy to be here.

So today on the podcast, we're looking at Jono's sermon, The Joy of Blessing.

## SERMON RECAP

Jono, you want to give us a quick recap of that sermon?

Yeah, very quickly. It's the wrap up of the four week series. So we had the plan of blessing, the conduit of blessing, the cost of blessing, and now really the joy of being a conduit.

That's what I would say it was about.

And looking primarily at Deuteronomy 14, which has this odd situation where God asks His people to bring a tithe into the storehouse and for that offering to basically just take it to a place that He hasn't told them yet, but where His presence is,

and basically to have a big party and celebrate His goodness. And so we just tried to unpack what it means to experience the joy of being a conduit of God's blessing.

## SERMON REFLECTIONS

Yeah, absolutely.

What reflections did you guys have on the sermon as listeners? Any initial thoughts?

I love that line from early in the sermon. This question, does God want something from us when it comes to blessing and generosity, or does He want something for us?

Such a, I think, important reframe that the reason God invites us to generosity is not because He needs our gift.

This is the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, but He desires that our generosity would do something to our hearts, to form us into generous people that He can use for His kingdom. So, I thought that was a cool point.

It reminds me of Paul's words in Philippians. I have them here. Paul says in Philippians 4 verse 17, It's not that I desire your gifts.

What I desire is that more be credited to your account. That's in the context of Paul actually raising money for a fundraiser. But it's not that he desires the gift.

He desires that the Philippians hearts would be bolstered by their generosity. So, I found that quite a helpful way of wrapping up our mission month.

Yeah, I like the concept that even though we are giving with joyful hearts, we're still gaining in that moment.

So, it's not that we're just giving, giving, giving the whole time with joyful hearts, yes, but you're also gaining that level of happiness and just community to what you're giving to. So, I think that's important as well.

Yeah, and I think that's so contrary to what a lot of particularly non-Christians imagine the Christian life to be, that it's this life of self-flagellation, of just pain and cost and struggle. But what God's heart is, is to bless.

And part of that blessing is that we get to enjoy it, that there's joy for us.

I was actually thinking about Ecclesiastes, of all things, post listening to the sermon and thinking about where they say, so I commend the enjoyment of life, because there's nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be

glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.

Yeah, good quote.

Yeah, I just was thinking, yeah, so much of it is about the joy that God wants to give us, and this life, we have many gifts, and God's heart is that we enjoy them, give them back to him, and then mysteriously get to enjoy them more.

And which takes you into more and more of what he wants, the joy-filled giver. That's what 2 Corinthians says.

Yeah.

HOW DO WE REMEMBER TO "REJOICE ALWAYS?"

It was interesting, Ben, that you mentioned Philippians 4 there, because I also thought of Philippians when I was preparing our questions for today.

And I thought of a different part of Philippians 4, which is this idea of rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again, rejoice. And obviously that was such a theme of this sermon.

I guess a question I have is, Joni, you talked about this idea of rehearsing and then remembering, and then remembrance shapes expectation, and expectation shapes how we live.

And I mean, part of, I guess, these ceremonies in Deuteronomy is, you remember to be joyful, you remember to be grateful to God. How do we remember to be joyful outside of our Sunday celebrations in our everyday weeks?

How do we be people who rejoice ever more? You know, on Monday, when I'm going to work, when I'm on my commute to and from, how can we remember to be joyful amidst everyday distraction?

I think the first thing that comes to mind is just conversational intimacy with the Spirit. If you're driving, it's easier. You can just have a chat.

And, but be coming towards the Lord with a sense of respect and reverence. It's not just a totally casual chat, but just coming with an attitude of gratitude. Yeah, simple.

It's conversational intimacy, just like, thanks for this Lord, thanks for this, thanks for this. And if you can't think of anything, just thank Him for your breath, because it's pretty core, isn't it?

Just my life, because that's ultimately what I want to be. Thank you for my life. Thank you for, oh wow, you've given me everything.

And then the sort of regular giving of either money or other resources or, okay, so from that framework, I'm going to be generous with my words today. So yeah, I think it just starts with that, talking to the Spirit.

And I think it's helpful. I found that helpful when you put everything under a microscope for even a day, where you notice the small things. Because often we always see the big things and we look out for the big moments.

But it's the small things that where you can see God in everything. And that's where that overflowing heart of gratitude and that intimacy comes from. Because like, I was walking in the rain on the way here, I was miserable.

And then at a moment of pause on the way, I was like, Well, thank you for the rain. Because then I started reflecting on last week's podcast when we were talking about the rain. So, you notice him in the small things.

And that comes with that intimacy, which is a beautiful thing.

I remember preaching on Philippians chapter 4, the passage that you're talking about a couple of years ago. And in the Philippians 4 verse 4 to 7, there's two absolutes. He says, rejoice always, be anxious for nothing.

And both of those things are kind of insane commands that God gives to us. Rejoice always, be anxious for nothing. But wedged in between those two commands, it says, the Lord is near.

And that's what you were saying before, that if you have a deep knowledge that God is present with you by His Spirit, of course, yesterday is Pentecost Sunday, so we reflect on the fact that God is with us by His Spirit.

That's a reason why we can be joyful always, and why we can be anxious for nothing, because the Lord is near. And so, I think that's the fundamental habit of keeping the presence of God before your mind.

I mean, God is present always, but keeping that fact before your mind is important for joy, I think.

Definitely.

And I think that practice, looking through your whole day, I think of what you're saying, Jono, the sort of start of the day conversation, and also the end of the day conversation, what happened today, all the things that I prepared my heart for in

the morning, and now in the evening, I look back and go, oh, that conversation at work, oh, that went really well, thank you, God. And yeah, my lunch was really delicious, and it was so nice to come home to my husband at the end of the day, like

And that teaches you how to find God's presence in the future as well.

You reframe the past to see how God was actually present with me today. Then that starts to train your mind to see God's presence in your present and your future as well.

I want to kind of ask that same question, but in the context of celebration, because Jono, you talked in the sermon about the idea of celebrating and being grateful for the things that God has given us, to have a party, as it were.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO DO CELEBRATION WELL?

And we get to do that through all sorts of church events and stuff. But I was wondering, you know, you used the example of your own family celebrations.

I know my family does similar things where we just thank God for the good things He's given us and get to be together in relationship.

But when we're having these celebrations, how can we do it in a way that shows gratitude to God outside of church in our own private celebrations?

How do we, because I think it would just be so easy to just, yeah, have a family gathering where we celebrate stuff and not think about God at all, save when we say grace before we eat.

Like, is there a way that we can orient those more towards gratitude towards God? What do you guys think?

Good question.

James 1 says, Every good and perfect gift comes from God. And so this beautiful meal that we're enjoying, this fellowship with family, every good gift comes from God.

And that's why we say grace, to recognize God's provision of everything that we have.

We shouldn't minimize grace, even though it's just a short prayer. But it's putting... It's a habit that you're sharing with all the family.

And so everyone is seeing that as a potential habit for their life. But I think adding to that specific prayer, just being aware of acknowledging God's handiwork in the other conversations, just in simple ways, just to say, praise God.

Like, that's a very simple way, two words. But you're just acknowledging, oh, praise God for that news that you've just told us. I think that's a huge way to bring Him into it explicitly.

And, of course, there's using conversation and encouragement to just point people's eyes up in the conversation. Oh, you know, God's in this, I think, you know, and not to feel like that's cheesy or predictable.

Just know we need to, every, you know, the psalmist, they always need someone to come in and let it be you next to the person on the couch. But lift your eyes up, look to heaven from where your help comes from.

Yeah, I think there's sometimes, depends on the kind of celebration at times, but, and who you're going into that space with.

I know as a family, if we're going to an event where other family is not Christian, or going to celebrations where other people aren't Christian, the power of preparing our hearts to enter that space is really helpful.

Sometimes in the car or on the way there, we might have set a prayer together about help us to be lights in this space, that the Holy Spirit would do something through our love for each other and for our family, that that would be something that

communicates something about God to people who need to see that. So yeah, I think the power of preparing your heart before a celebration, to be full of joy and full of life, because many people will come to that space, even though it is a

celebration, people will come there heavy-laden. And for us to have a yoke that's easy and light, I think, says Volumes.

I think there's a level of purpose-driven intentionality behind it, because like my family does this, when we get together in December, and now it's different if I go back, we have a year-in-review type of conversation.

So it's all my cousins, grandparents, parents, and we just sit there and we say, this is what impacted me this year. And it's that moment of intentionality, where it's not like overbearing almost, it's just at the right point.

And you talk about being a conduit of blessing to others, there's that level of discernment of being intentional, of how can I be a blessing? So I think that's an important factor to, in that moment of celebration, to be intentional.

That's awesome, the rhythms that we're seeing, like you, Steph, mentioned, I think it's the Exum in prayer, is the end of day reflecting on God's presence. And now Tristan, you're saying the end of year reflection, looking back on God's presence.

That's the pattern that you see in Scripture, like in Deuteronomy 14 from the sermon, that God commanded Israel to hold the Sabbath every single week. And then once every seven years, there's a Sabbath year of a significant celebration.

And then every seven times seven years, there's the Jubilee year. And so God is commanding his people to remember and to celebrate and to see his faithfulness. And we can do the same thing, maybe not quite so significantly taking an entire year off.

But at the end of every day, reflecting on where God's presence was, at the end of every week, if you practice Sabbath or have a day off, you can reflect on the week. At the end of every year, reflecting on God's presence.

That kind of rhythm, I think, is quite helpful for us.

HOW DO WE BEST WELCOME NEW PEOPLE INTO COMMUNITY?

One of the points I really enjoyed in the sermon, Jono, was this idea that whilst Christianity is the most exclusive in terms of there is one way to get to God, it is also inclusive.

And I love this idea that there's always a seat for the new person at the table.

And so that got me thinking about sort of one aspect of church life, which is welcoming new people and how we as a church can always offer a seat to a new person or someone who's different.

And so I guess on a practical level, what are some tips you guys might have for how to welcome new people or engage with new people? I'm thinking, you know, you're at church, someone new walks through the door.

It can be a little bit, I think, daunting for some people who haven't done it before. How do we chat with new people, make them feel welcome, make them feel engaged in the church? What do you guys think?

A couple of really practical things I think of are don't feel like you have to have that conversation alone, depending on their age group and things like that.

Find someone who's sort of a similar kind of demographic to them and feel free to include them in a group. Often that's way more comfortable for you and for them. They can kind of join in with group conversation.

And then another purely practical tip for welcoming people and helping with the kind of stickiness if they come back is a Karen Braiding classic, which is write down their name and just something about them from that conversation.

So might be Darren and he wore a blue shirt and he works in finance. Like you just write down those things and then if Darren comes back, you have some kind of stickiness to remember something about them and bring up, oh, you know, how's work going?

I know it must be a crazy time with the budget coming out, whatever it is, that really makes people feel appreciated and known. And yeah, welcome.

Yeah, I'm a product of the Karen effect. She's the first person my family spoke to when we joined the church.

I must say I'm not very good at this, to my shame, but you have your first couple of questions ready. What's your name? Do you live around here?

Is this your first time coming to church?

You can kind of ask those questions, but I'm always looking for the next level of some connection, a hobby, or I'm listening for hints of things that they're interested in, hopefully that I'm interested in as well.

Because when you build that mutual interest, you're kind of set for a conversation. So I met somebody a couple of weeks ago who's South African, and Tristan has taught me some words in Afrikaans. And so we're talking about Afrikaans.

And that was quite an easy conversation to get into and to connect with a new person. Again, I should say, I'm not good at this on the whole, but those are some of the tips that I've picked up.

And also I think listening for interests that you know that other people might be able to connect with as well. Not that you necessarily wanna entirely just pawn them off to people that have similar interests to them.

But at the right time.

Yeah, but at the right time, it's like something to keep in mind.

Yeah, for sure. What's your perspective, Tristan, as a relatively newcomer into our community?

Yeah, so my perspective as being that new person, walking through the door. Yes, I agree with everyone in what we said of welcoming people when you're in the church and you're in that space.

And there's that level of dropping your guard for the sake of the kingdom and welcoming people. At the same time, it's for the new person as well.

You cannot, I found it super helpful to not come into a new space with my own standards, almost, if I can put it that way. You have to be willing to be engaging and drop your guard almost to see what's this new place about and just experience that.

So I think it's very helpful that yes, we must be willing as a church to welcome people, but be willing as the new person to be welcomed, which is super important.

Any thoughts, Johnno? You've been doing this longer than any of us.

I agree with everything people have said. Part of it, I think, is recognizing that having an extra seat at the table is sometimes inconvenient. And just to sort of girt up the loins and go, there's a cost involved in this.

But to also remember, rehearse, some of my best friends started out as that inconvenient add-on to the table, because we talked about the seat at the table in the sermon last night yesterday. Yeah, just there's an incredible joy.

It's some of the best stuff in life is on the other side of that welcome. I'm sometimes disappointed because I psych myself up to go, wow, this could be the time that you become really good friends. And it doesn't normally happen.

It's not that you don't have community that's built, but every now and then you meet someone and you're like, wow, that was a very significant meeting.

## HOW DO WE OVERCOME WELCOME FATIGUE?

Actually, that kind of leads into my next sort of question about that there is a bit of a sacrifice when you do this.

And I guess I call this welcome fatigue. Some of you would know that, you know, you want to be welcoming new people and you go up to that person, you invest in conversation and then you never see them again.

And I think a lot of us know how that can be disheartening, how it can kind of tie you out when you feel like you're constantly talking to people and then, you know, a lot of the time they never come back and you sort of feel like you're wasting your

time or investment. How do you guys, I know you touched on it a little bit, Jono, but how do we deal with welcome fatigue? How do we keep ourselves fresh and not be put off by the inconvenience of that extra chair at the table?

I think going back to the sermon and the passage, Deuteronomy 14, it's really having God's heart because it's for the foreigner, it's for the outsider, it's for the poor, the widow. It talks about the Levite who doesn't have access to land.

So it's important to keep remembering that that person has needs and they deserve to be loved. And so even though there's fatigue, for sure, that's sort of the first port of call. So this person deserves to be loved and God would want them loved.

And so we do our best. And do as much good self-care with your fatigue as you can. I feel like it's a massive thing.

It doesn't verge on sin. It becomes sinful. Because you're like, go away.

I don't have anything left because we're going to have a big conversation and then you're just church shopping or whatever. But of course, it's bigger than just the church. It's wherever you go in life to have that attitude.

I'll never look into someone's eyeballs that doesn't have infinite worth before God. And so, Lord, help me to be the channel of blessing you want me to be. And that is an attitude of welcome.

And I wonder if part of it is sort of picking up on what you say about when we're in that space of feeling, oh, I don't have anything left, like remembering again, God's blessings that we have.

We have every spiritual blessing in Christ. And if we need more energy and we need more passion or we need more insight to be able to love that person well, that we can ask for it and that we have the Holy Spirit with us to help us.

And perhaps it's partly making sure we don't rely on our own strength, our own energy and charms and conversational skills, that we rely instead on God and the Holy Spirit to lead us, give us the words to say, even if that is just, hey, what's your

I recall last week we spoke about how, or the idea or the theory that when we put the numbers up of how we're feeling for the week and being supportive for one another, it's coming to what you say is when you're in that fatigue, you don't, yes, we

must be always ready to have that conversation, but you don't always have to be the person that has the conversation. Use the church.

That's one thing one of my mentors is so good at, where he was like, okay, this person has a different line of interests. I know exactly who I compare you up with.

And that's the power of a group conversation and using the church to like really becoming a body and supporting one another. So I think that's helpful.

I'm reminded of the parable of the sower that Jesus told. He says, the farmer sows his seed and that's God. And the idea that there are different responses to the word of God, that we're kind of applying that parable in a different context.

But the key insight for our purposes is that some of the seed bears a harvest that's 30, 60, 100 times what was sown. I remember meeting you, Tristan, at a newcomer's afternoon tea. And I didn't even really speak to you.

I was speaking to your mom, and you were kind of there in the conversation. And then I started speaking to you, and I'm like, Oh, who's this guy? He seems cool.

I wonder if he'll be one of those people that I never see again. But that's not what's happened. And God has multiplied that harvest.

Not that I was the person that's the reason that you're here still. But God has multiplied that 100 times. And now you are bearing weight and doing ministry at this church.

And so, yes, there are the types of seed that don't bear fruit that we can see in our church context. Maybe God plants them somewhere else and that's awesome.

But we're looking for the ones that God is calling us to invest into that there might be 100X harvest. Yeah, it's cool.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF TONGUES TODAY?

All right, we have a question submitted to our new question, Kyuako.

We won't always do all of the questions that get submitted to this, but we will do this one. So how about I read it out and then we can sort of address it. It's a bit of a big one.

One of the most significant manifestations on the day of Pentecost was speaking in tongues. The Bible also mentions that this is a gift from God.

I understand that we all have different gifts as Christians, but what is the purpose of tongues in this modern age?

If it is a coded message from God that has to be interpreted by someone who is similarly gifted, why can't both participants in the exercise merely use their common language, with the other gifted recipient merely confirming the message's

authenticity? I presume the person speaking in tongues knows that it is a message from God, but he or she is not aware of the content until a similarly gifted person reveals this.

Thus, anyone listening could take this opportunity to impose their own wisdom by claiming to be interpreting the message. How important and in what way is this gift in today's world?

There's a whole essay.

There's a lot we could go into with a question like that. I would offer maybe a slight correction to this question is understanding of what speaking in tongues is.

So there's a lot of different ideas of what exactly this word tongues mean, especially being a big, it's a big aspect of charismatic worship and obviously Pentecostal churches.

I would say though, if you look especially at what it means the day of Pentecost, and what it may mean in 1 Corinthians 12, which I think is where they're referring to the interpreter thing, is it's talking in another human language.

So the day of Pentecost, it says they go, they're speaking Latin, they're speaking Samaritan, they're speaking all these different languages.

So it is a supernatural ability of the Holy Spirit that are now someone to speak to someone else in their own language.

That doesn't necessarily have to be a coded message that the speaker doesn't understand, but it's a supernatural ability of the speaker to suddenly be able to speak and understand a language that they normally would not. Other thoughts?

I don't think I've ever seen someone speak in another human language who did not have an ability to do that.

It's easy to say, well, the person that is endeavoring to communicate cross-culturally, is very gifted and spiritually enabled to learn language very quickly. I mean, we can say that.

Yeah, I totally believe in the gifts of the Spirit for today, not just for the first century, but it seems like there was something special on that day. God can do anything. But the heavenly language type of tongues is I think much easier to explain.

It's just a language that edifies the person or edifies the church. Both are true. To speak out in a tongue requires an interpreter for the group.

That doesn't happen very often in our context. But the benefit of tongues for today is the edification of the person.

And if you speak in tongues and pray in tongues, the spirit is communicating with God on your behalf with groans and utterances that you don't understand. And sometimes in words that are described as a heavenly language. So it certainly has benefit.

And I think connecting to the sermon can be an expression of joy. Experiencing the blessing of God, it's also a way of entering spiritual warfare, as well, but definitely joy.

I think of a couple of times in the New Testament where it talks about the fact that some things just transcend words in known languages. I think it's one Thessalonians, or is it one Peter? Peter says you're filled with a joy inexpressible.

There aren't words to contain the joy. Or as you just quoted Romans 8, Paul says that the spirit groans with groanings that are too deep for words. And so it seems like God gives voice through the spirit to that which can't be put in normal words.

But then again, the other testament of the New Testament is that there's a hierarchy of helpfulness of the gifts. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, if I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but don't have love, I'm nothing.

He also says in, sorry, did I steal your thunder? He says in, I think it's 1 Corinthians 12, eagerly desire the spiritual gifts, especially prophecy. So maybe tongues is the most glamorous and supernatural kind of thing.

But he says, it's far more helpful to build up the church and to edify the believer than it is to have some ecstatic experience. So the spiritual gifts get subordinated to love and to what is useful for building up the church.

I think that's the overall emphasis of the New Testament.

Well, I hope that was helpful to the question asker. It is a big topic and there's so many rabbit holes. We could go down with it, but we'll have to park that there.

## SHARING MEMORABLE CELEBRATIONS

We'll finish up with our little fun question, our palate cleanser. One of the themes of the sermon was celebration. So I wondered what is a celebration that was particularly memorable for you guys.

For those of us who are married, you can't use your own wedding.

When I graduated with my arts degree, it was in the middle of COVID. I also studied online in Perth. So I never stepped foot on a physical campus, and my graduation was in COVID.

So I would have flown to Perth to be there for the graduation.

But instead, we had a little huddle in the kitchen and had a cake and a nice dinner, and celebrated my graduation that way, which was kind of sad that it wasn't all it could be, but it was meaningful and memorable in a different way.

This is a funny one.

For my high school formal, it was quite a big deal at my school for some reason, like the arrivals, like people came in fancy cars and stuff like that, and it was this big kind of other people from other schools would come and watch, it was a big

deal. And so for my arrival, I had like a nice fancy car that one of the people from my church in Townsville had and that was super cool. But my dad surprised me by organizing some trumpet players from the Army band.

To play like, I think it was like the 20th Century Fox theme or something as I got out of the car. And I'll tell you what, I felt really celebrated.

Mine would have to be my 18th birthday. And because it was COVID, every time we saw family, it was another celebration. So I had four 18th birthday parties all in COVID.

But the wolves, I can say this, the most special one for me was we finished up on Sunday. I was in Durban at my uncle's church in South Africa. And they sent me to the shops to get some random thing.

I left, got to the shops, came back, and I noticed some of the cars in the parking lot. And I was like, something's going on. Like, why would you send me to the shops for this like small thing?

They went into the house, house was empty. Then I was like, okay, nothing's happening. And then my gran called me, and I went down to like the coffee bar hall place.

Everyone was there and it was a big surprise party. So that was, especially after hard lockdown COVID, it was nice to see everyone. So that was so special.

I think of my, my 30th birthday, which was a surprise party that Leanne, my wife, had organized.

And I remember it because, like I don't remember another surprise party, to be honest. But you walked, I had no idea, it was after church on a Sunday and you walked up these stairs into the area of the house upstairs, the living room.

And I just, I just got such a shock when I walked up. I always thought, oh, I'm going to have a heart attack. I was just like, what?

Sort of went into sort of ninja warrior. What's going on? What's going on?

But yeah, it's cool when you have a surprise that works.

Jack?

Yeah, for me, it would have been, I think it was my parents' 30th wedding anniversary, and they had a little party to celebrate with a lot of their friends and family.

And I, it was a little sneaky mission for me because I had found somewhere in there the videotape, the old school videotape of their wedding, which I sneakily went and got transferred onto a USB and set up as a little surprise for them.

That was a really nice celebration for them and to just celebrate their marriage and yeah.

Bless them.

Bless them. Yeah. All right.

So I think that is our time for today. I want to thank all of you for coming on the pod. Thanks especially to Steph.

Always great to have a bit more, another voice other than the boys and hopefully we'll have some other, some other voices.

I've had so much fun. Thank you for having me.

The extra seat at the table.

Indeed. Well, as I said, hopefully we'll have some more guests, some more voices in future. But for now, thank you all for coming on.

Thank you all for listening. Have a great week.