

## ALL THIS COULD BE YOURS

A poor man had wanted to go on a cruise all his life. He saved money for years, carefully counting his pennies, often sacrificing personal needs so he could stretch his resources a little further. Finally he had enough to purchase a cruise ticket. He went to a travel agent, looked over the cruise brochures, picked out one that was especially attractive, and bought a ticket with the money he had saved so long. He was hardly able to believe he was about to realize his childhood dream.

Knowing he could not afford the kind of elegant food pictured in the brochure, the man planned to bring his own provisions for the week. With his entire savings going to pay for the cruise ticket, the man decided to bring along a week's supply of bread and peanut butter. That was all he could afford. The man ate peanut butter sandwiches alone in his room each morning and spent the rest of his time relaxing in the sunlight and fresh air, delighted to be aboard ship.

By midweek, however, the man was beginning to notice that he was the only person on board who was not eating lavish meals. It seemed that every time he sat on the deck or rested in the lounge or stepped outside his cabin, a porter would walk by with a huge meal for someone who had ordered room service.

By the fifth day of the cruise, the man could take it no longer. The peanut butter sandwiches seemed stale and tasteless, he was desperately hungry, and even the fresh air and sunshine had lost their appeal. Finally, he stopped a porter and exclaimed, "Tell me how I might get one of those meals! I'm dying for some decent food, and I'll do anything you say to earn it!"

"Why, sir, don't you have a ticket for this cruise?" the porter asked. "Certainly," said the man. "But I spent everything I had for that ticket. I have nothing left with which to buy food." "But sir," said the porter, "didn't you realize? Meals are included in your passage. You may eat as much as you like!"<sup>1</sup>

God is inviting us to a feast at no cost. What's the catch? We know there's no such thing as a free lunch. We are skeptical. The world at large is skeptical, although there are more people who will believe what they hear on TV or read on the Internet than they will what they hear or read about God.

In His words to Israel God spoke with a tone of pity, calling them to heed His words. God sincerely wanted these people to come to salvation and to be fulfilled. God still cares what happens to us. The invitation is still the same to us. "*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.*" Who among us is not thirsting for God? In an unsatisfied world, God offers true satisfaction. How do we get this thirst-quenching, satisfying offer?

We have to want it. We have to need it. We've got to be thirsty, so thirsty for something meaningful that nothing else will do. They tell us to drink water for good health, so we drink

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article\\_id=104](http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=104)

soda, coffee, tea, juice, power drinks and milk, but those are not the same. Your body is mostly water. It needs water. Your soul was made by God. It needs God.

You also have to be powerless to get it. There is no currency that will obtain this for you. *“Come, buy wine and milk with no money and at no cost.”* Your money is no good here! God gives it all for nothing, at no cost to us, but it cost God plenty.

You can't apply retail therapy to your need for fulfillment and salvation. There is no permanent shopper's high that will achieve this for you. This is something you can't obtain through your usual means of self-indulgence. God wants to know why you are wasting your money on junk spirituality, on the equivalent of theological Twinkies. There is no nutrition for the soul in a prosperity gospel or the writings of self-help authors.

Is it because we doubt the claim of getting something for nothing that we still seek spiritual fulfillment outside of God? What God offers us is so much more than He asks from us. He wants from us what we are most willing to give to all those things we spend our money on, things that cost us but do not satisfy or make us happy or fulfilled.

He wants our hearts, utterly and completely and forever. Now, that's not to say our capacity to give of ourselves doesn't grow over the years, so we are called to give more, but we never come up empty as long as we allow God to reciprocate in the give and take relationship. We need to let go of the junk, the empty practices, and the almost-but-not-quite attempts at finding the truth.

There are reasons to do this and there are ways of doing it. We listen diligently to God. The wisdom we need to seek Him comes through Him, so maybe that's where we get hung up. Proverbs 3:5 is still the best advice I can think of for those challenging times. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”*

We eat what is good, in other words, we take in only those truths and those teachings that are of God. Anything less is toxic and harmful. God has invited us to a banquet, a feast, not a one-time dinner, but one that lasts forever, and the best of everything is included.

Perhaps most crucially, we let our souls delight in abundance. Even if we listen to God and then take in the best spiritual nourishment from Him, we can still ruin our appetite by sitting down with an unprepared heart or an unrepentant attitude. This spoils our time in His presence and leaves our souls unfulfilled. Abundance is only one step away from overindulgence if we don't approach it with a willing heart.

By now you may have guessed that unless we are truly looking for God it will be difficult if not impossible to listen to Him. The Bible has much to say about that. Repeated in Scripture is the command to find God. Deuteronomy 4:29 tells us, *“You will seek the Lord your God from there, and you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your being.”* Jeremiah 29:13 says, *“When you search for me, yes, search for me with all your heart, you will find me.”*

Searching for God may seem an impossible task. If He's not already apparent to us, how do we look for Him? Paul answered that in Acts 17:27, *“God made the nations so they would seek him, perhaps even reach out to him and find him. In fact, God isn't far away from any of us.”*

Close enough for us to hear Him, certainly. God says, *“Listen, and come to me; listen, and you will live.”* Here’s a real pinch point. How many of us can say we truly listen with diligence to the voice of God, to the word of God, more than anything else? For some it’s a passing conversation, for others it’s total silence. For still more there is no recognition of God’s voice. They can’t recognize His voice. They may not even realize He is there.

If they could listen to God they would know what could really be theirs; good food for the soul, fulfillment of the soul, satisfaction of the heart. If we can hear and we do hear our souls can live in an everlasting covenant. It’s important to listen, to incline ourselves in God’s direction. When we move toward Him, He moves toward us with His gift of eternal life. We become part of that covenant promise that allows us to reap the benefits of what Christ has done.

But we have to act. There is a time limit. There is an action required of us. *“Seek the Lord when he can still be found; call him while he is yet near.”* We can’t afford to second guess Him or His ways. We are not equals. He is God and we are not. Our ways and His ways do not match up. Our thoughts and His thoughts are not even in the same category.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, *“God is something completely different from so-called eternal truth. For that is still the eternity that we conceive and wish for... Thus nothing remains except the decision whether or not we want to trust the word of the Bible, whether we want to let ourselves be held by it, as by no other word in life and in death. And I believe we will not be able to find true happiness and peace until we have made this decision.”*

So we need some prep work to be able to come to God. *“Let the wicked abandon their ways and the sinful their schemes. Let them return to the Lord so that he may have mercy on them, to our God, because he is generous with forgiveness.”* Repentance means to turn away from whatever you are doing that separates you from God and putting it behind you, away from you, changing your path. God even calls on us to forsake our thoughts, to change our way of thinking to be in line with Him.

Let’s talk about the power of God’s word. Like a seed watered by the rain, His word multiplies and grows, but it also needs to be carried along like pollen on the wind so it can spread and increase. We are part of that process. It’s not just people like me who write about and speak about God’s word as a calling. We read Paul’s testimony to His churches that we all have an opportunity and obligation to avail ourselves of and immerse ourselves in God’s word. It is a living word, more than a theology that invites debate and speculation. It is a record of God’s love for us; a tribute to how much He loves us and what that love caused Him to do and why we are forever in His debt.

And yet, we don’t owe God a thing. He has given us the opportunity and the ability to partake of everything He has to offer. So why don’t we? Why this hesitation? We are attracted by the shiny things in life, the temporary flash of excitement brought to us by Madison Avenue. Instead of giving ourselves to God we give ourselves, our money and our time to those things that do not last.

God's word will never fail, God's reign will never end. How about God's church, Christ's body? Scripture says not even the gates of hell will prevail against it, so why is it being invaded, being shortchanged and left to fade by so many whose idea of religion is less than organized and whose faith is seldom used?

God is here for us, but more than here, He is everywhere for us. If we are hesitant to take Him at His word, to take Him up on His generous offer, then we have missed so much. God doesn't want our worship by habit, or our love by routine. He wants us to experience Him, all of Him! He wants us to go with what we can know and trust, not to settle for what's behind door number three.

He offers us so much fulfillment through His word. It never comes back empty. Sometimes that thought puts pressure on pastors and preachers. We are responsible for sending God's word out and we worry if it will hit the mark. But God is responsible for the effectiveness. We are just the messengers, you are the recipients, yet we must both handle it with care.

It has a great deal more power than we realize. God compared it to rain or snow which creates nourishment for the earth. His word also waters and nourishes us, feeds us, sustains us. We need food. We need God. It's that simple. He feeds us so that we can feed others.

God's word is like food. We can hoard it and never want to share, or we can trust that even the smallest morsel we share with others will make an impact. God's word will never fail. It won't fail Him, it won't fail you. *"So is my word that comes from my mouth; it does not return to me empty. Instead, it does what I want, and accomplishes what I intend."*

Jesus is the Word of God sent to the world to accomplish the salvation of God's people. This is what we call grace. What does it look like? What does it taste like? How many times can we go back to the table? What do we experience when we feast on God's word and consume His mercy and love?

His offer still stands. If you want to accept His invitation, there's no better time. As I lead us in prayer, whether you already own that peace and joy from salvation or if you are drawing near to Him for the first time, use these words to put your heart in the right position for God to fill you. Let us pray:

**Heavenly Father, I know that I have sinned against you and that my sins separate me from you. I am truly sorry. I now want to turn away from my sinfulness and turn to you for forgiveness. Please forgive me, and help me avoid sinning again. I believe that your Son, Jesus Christ, died for my sins, that He was raised from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer. I invite Jesus to become my Savior and the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me obey and to convict me when I sin. I pledge to grow in grace and knowledge of you. My greatest purpose in life is to follow your example and do your will for the rest of my life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.**