

Unwrap This Glorious Gift so You Can Move Into Complete Freedom

What if God said, "I give you a choice. Will it be salvation or sugar?" What would your answer be?

Of course, it's not as simple as that. Or is it?

Throughout the Scriptures, God tells us we have a choice. We can choose the free gift He sent us in Jesus or we can go our own way. When I was 7, I said yes to the free gift of grace, but I didn't really understand what a glorious gift I had.

It feels as though I loved the thought of the gift of grace, but just left that gift, still wrapped, on the coffee table of my life. Maybe I was waiting for the right time to unwrap it completely? Or maybe I just liked the thought of having a gift from God.

Following the Rules

For the next 40 years, I continued following all the church rules I'd been taught since birth. I didn't drink alcohol, have sex before marriage, do drugs, dance, curse or go to wild parties. I didn't even go into movie theaters, wear makeup or shorts as those were things my pastor dad disapproved of.

I was doing things for Jesus. I worked in ministry. I taught Sunday school, went to church every time the doors were open, served on committees and did volunteer work. And I was eating all the desserts, comfort foods and sugary treats I wanted because that seemed to be an acceptable Christian thing to do.

When my extreme weight gain caught up with me, I would go on diets, which are really a set of rules. I would lose weight, but I'd also gain it right back again. That gift of grace

still sat undisturbed on the coffee table of my life. I still had it. I just didn't know what it was all about.

I wasn't following Christ. I was following rules that I thought meant I was following Him. Jesus had shown me back in 1977 that my health issues and weight gain came from eating sugar and bread.

He clearly showed me I needed to stop eating them, but giving them up seemed like just a suggestion from Him. I didn't understand He was showing me the way out of the prison I had made for myself. Following Him meant I had to listen and make good choices. That's harder than following diet rules. Way harder.

Romans 7:19 Thoughts

I always thought I was like Paul in Romans 7:19 where he said, "The good I desire to do, I do not do, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Then a podcast threw a big ringer into my thinking.

For years I've thought Paul was talking about himself as a Christian struggling with following God to do the right thing. I thought he was like me struggling with giving up sugar. Then the speaker said that Paul was talking about his life before meeting Christ.

This presented a big problem in my thinking because I was saved when I was doing what I knew wasn't right. It messed with my theology of salvation. What does salvation really mean? Was I saved back when I was 7 or sometime along the way between then and now? Was it when I really did choose Him over sugar?

Come-to-Jesus Moment

It was about 10 years ago. I was listening to a former alcoholic tell his story. He had been sober for more than 20

years. In the middle of his story, he said, "Alcohol is one molecule away from sugar. Alcohol is liquid sugar."

I have often called this my "Come-to-Jesus moment" because it was such a real feeling. It was a visceral feeling, like a sucker punch to my gut. In that moment I realized I was a sugar addict, if there even was such a thing. Back then, I hadn't heard anyone talking about sugar addiction, and I don't think I was even on social media.

I asked him if there was such a thing as a sugar addict. He said to me, "I don't know about the physical part of it, but I know you can be addicted to anything that controls you." Then, I realized that I had allowed sugar to control me instead of God.

I surrendered processed sugar, and eventually flour and gluten, to God. That day, I made the decision to give up sugar, but I had no idea how to do it.

There is a process to any change we make, and if we really want to make a change, we will follow the process to exchange our unhealthy habits for healthy ones. I've lost over 250 pounds, but it was and still is a process. It's a process of learning, changing and growing deeper in love with that glorious gift of God's grace, now unwrapped and being used completely to change my life.

The Process of Salvation

Remember Paul? He was zealous about following the law, which He had been taught led to God. He had his own come-to-Jesus moment where the way to God that he knew literally collided with the truth of Christ on the road to Damascus, (Acts 9:1-22)

His encounter with Christ led him to write this to the church at Philippi, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For God is the One working in you, both to will and

to do His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12b-13).

Before that glorious grace-moment, he was on a God-journey. He thought he had the truth, but God surprised him so that He could start His journey and be progressively changed into the dynamic apostle he became. When he encountered the reality of Christ, he saw truth, admitted he was wrong and began following the right way.

Paul's story is my story, only I wasn't killing anyone except myself. I had made sugar and comfort foods my god. I had allowed them to become more important than God.

Folks, we are all on a journey. We are saved by God's glorious grace the moment we choose Him. When we unwrap the totality of that gift, we realize it is there to lead us into the truth we cannot possibly understand on our own.

It's there to rescue us and turn us around when we get things wrong. It's there to convince us that following Jesus is the right way. That's what His *Sweet Grace* finally did for me. It helped me discover there is complete freedom only when I follow Him.

Losing Weight and Keeping It Off

Somehow we figure following someone else's diet will be easier for us to lose weight and instantly become healthy, but losing weight isn't the hard part. We've all done that.

The hard part is keeping it off by learning how to exchange unhealthy habits for healthy ones. The hard part is learning how to deal with our emotions instead of trying to eat them away. The hard part is accepting that maybe, just maybe, there are some things we can't eat that others can.

There is an easy part though. The easy part is following God in what you eat, how you move and how you live. The easy part is knowing you are smack-dab in the middle of continuing to

grow in the grace and the knowledge of who Jesus is.

The easy part is understanding that you don't have to be perfect in the way you think of perfection. You only have to be continually "growing into spiritual maturity both in mind and character, actively integrating godly values into your daily life," (Matt. 5:48, AMP).

Just be willing to always be changing and never ever get stuck in thinking you have it all figured out. Let Jesus show you how to live the life that includes growing into who He meant you to be.

What's Your Choice?

So how would you answer God's question? Would you choose salvation or sugar? I really don't think the choice is as simple as that. But if it is, I choose salvation. I choose to explore every nook and cranny of the depths of His glorious grace. {eo}

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