

A still life photograph of a dining table set. In the foreground, a white plate sits on a purple napkin with white polka dots. On the plate, a white cloth napkin is rolled up and tied with a purple ribbon. A silver fork and knife are tucked under the napkin. In the background, two wine glasses with faceted stems stand on a white lace doily. Behind the glasses is a large bouquet of purple flowers. The overall color palette is purple, white, and silver.

Craving God

*Wanting God alone
to satisfy your heart*



Taste
and *see*
that the
Lord

Psalm 34:8 NLT

is good.

Are you hungry for God?

I stood looking in the window at the sweet shop and gained several pounds just eyeing the delicacies inside.

Puff pastries filled with freshly whipped cream and decorated with colorful cherries and peaches caught my eyes first. Next, a gleaming glass case lined with rows of handcrafted chocolates in various shapes and sizes lured me their direction. Spiced nuts in cone-shaped containers and brightly wrapped candies vied with gooey sweet rolls and crusty breads for my attention.

My mouth watered in anticipation.

I didn't want to choose just one treat. I wanted a bite of everything. Maybe more than a bite! One minute I wanted to savor the flavors and make them last and the next I just wanted to cram a little of everything in all at once and blend the flavors all together.

My mouth, my stomach, my eyes, my brain CRAVED everything I saw in that window.

That's how I want to feel about Jesus—all the time.

I do love Him with all my heart, but I want more than that. I want Him to be a part of each minute of my day. I want to long more for His company and the sound of His voice. I want His guidance constantly. As the old chorus says, "I want more of Jesus than I've ever had before."

Right now I'm seeing Jesus through a window, as it were, but I long to see Him face to face, to hear His voice, to know Him completely. I want more of Him than seeing Him at a distance.

I want to TASTE and see that the Lord is good!

--Jeanne Hartwell



In my anguish
I cried to the
Lord

and

He answered by
setting me **free.**

Psalm 118:5

A still life composition featuring a blue plate with a white inner plate, silverware, a blue napkin, and red berries. The scene is set against a white background. The blue plate is the central focus, with a white inner plate and silverware (a fork and a knife) resting on it. A blue napkin is tucked under the white plate, and a silver cuff bracelet is visible on the left. Red berries and leaves are scattered around the plate, adding a festive touch.

Do not fear, for I am with you;
Do not anxiously look about you,
for I am your God.

I will strengthen you, surely I will help you,
Surely I will uphold you
with My righteous right hand.

Isaiah 41:10
NASB

It was 4:30 on Sunday morning and I was sobbing next to the fireplace at Laurel Lake Camp Lodge, cradling the round bottle of anointing oil in my cupped hands. The night before, the women attending the autumn retreat had stayed up late, laughing and playing games. I had gone to my room, longing for the fellowship yet being held back by echoes of old ghosts from my early years. "You don't belong." "You don't fit in." "You might do something stupid and they will all laugh at you."

I had considered asking for anointing on Sabbath afternoon when it was available, but the old messages held me back from that as well. So the closest I could come to asking for a special blessing, alone in the pre-dawn stillness, was to hold the little glass bottle and whisper through my tears, "God, I am so broken. I don't want to be like this. I want to be healed."

I had been on a journey towards healing from childhood sexual abuse and a variety of mental, emotional and spiritual traumas for 20 years and had made a lot of progress. But recently I had found myself stuck and wanting more. Especially at this retreat. Being around other women reminded me how different I was from them, and even though I hid it well, I was crying inside.

In the middle of my prayer, the entry door opened. I quietly hunched lower in the darkness, hoping that whoever it was would get what they came for and leave without seeing me. But their quest brought them over to my side of the room, where the faintly glowing exit lights revealed my hiding place. It was Nancy, a friend who could understand my past better than anyone else there, and she quickly realized I was in pain.

The God thing was that Nancy was an elder in her church, and she offered to pray for me in my own private anointing service, just her and me and God, right there on the floor. I left that retreat knowing beyond the shadow of a doubt that God knew the desires of my heart and that He cared. And over the next few weeks, He sent me several tools that got me off my plateau and headed on my healing journey again.

God doesn't always answer my prayers exactly the way I want Him to. Or when I want Him to. But every time I have gone to him in pain and brokenness, asking for help, He has been there.

--Linda McCabe



In all your ways
acknowledge Him,
and He shall direct your paths.

Proverbs 3:6

What's on God's bucket list?

Have you ever thought about your "bucket list?" A bucket list is a list of things that you would like to do at some point in time. There are many ways to look at this idea of a bucket list. Let's look at three different ways to approach this idea:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Spiritual

What would your physical bucket list include? Do you want to change something about your body? Do you want to eat a healthier diet? Do you want to exercise more? Do you want to rest more? Do you want to (you finish the question)?

What does your emotional bucket list look like? Are there wounds you need to forgive and let go? Are there people you need to reconcile with? Do you choose happiness, peace, joy, and contentment? Do you spend time with people who lift you up or tear you (or others) down? Do you spread joy? Is your cup half full or half empty? Do you (you finish the question)?

Now on to your spiritual bucket list. How is your relationship with God? Do you see Him as a loving Savior? Do you spend time with Him? Do you listen or just talk? Do you spend time contemplating His love for you? Do you feel special to Him? Are you sure He loves you? Do you (you finish the question)?

Now, what about God's bucket list? YOU are His bucket list. He sent His Son to save you...just you! He loves you with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3) that we cannot even comprehend. Just imagine--YOU are that special to the King of the universe...His princess...His daughter. Never doubt it. He has promised and He never breaks His promises. Rest in His loving arms.

At this particular season of my life I was desperate for God. I wanted Him so badly I could hardly think of anything else. I needed assurance and answers. I needed to snuggle in His arms. I craved His presence. I craved His peace.

I agreed to be the cook for a four day "leadership" camping trip with a group of teenagers. This was to be the first time I would ever camp without my husband, Glenn. I tend to be quite claustrophobic and he always helped me through any panic attacks I would have during the night. Sleeping alone in a tent would be a huge adjustment and challenge. Throughout the event, I felt God with me as I slept and never felt any panic at all. I was filled with praise to Him for allowing me to feel His presence! This experience continued every night, until the threat of "Hurricane Irene." The leadership staff spent a long time discussing the safety of the students before deciding to stay the last night. To prepare for the winds and rain that would come throughout the night, we put everyone's luggage in the busses and secured every tent with additional stakes. Because we were on the edge of the storm we felt sure we would be fine.

I had set up several tents, securing them with stakes, however I chose not to stake my own tent because typically the weight of the things inside holds it just fine. Unfortunately, I forgot that I had taken everything extra out of my tent and put it on the bus. I fell to sleep peacefully.

I woke to a wind gust that felt like a hand slapping the side of my tent. It hit so hard that my air mattress slid to the side of the tent as the tent collapsed on top of me. Instead of screaming and panicking, I found my flashlight – laughed out loud and used the handle of my umbrella to poke the sides of my tent back into place. Then I slid my mattress away from the side to avoid water seeping in all the while hearing God saying, "Do you trust Me?" I responded, "I trust You completely!"

With the rest of the camp silent, I realized that my tent was not staked and that only I was experiencing this collapsing situation! The winds were strong but I had absolutely no fear. I had craved the presence of God and now I felt it! I felt like nothing could hurt me because God had me in His arms! I prayed for the safety of our camp and trusted God to protect all of us. Then I snuggled back under the covers and drifted off to sleep again. "Do you trust Me?" I heard loud and clear as another wind gust slid my air mattress across the tent which, once again collapsed on top of me.

"I trust you completely God!" I said laughing. The camp was still quiet, so I lay down again. I considered going out to stake the tent, but had absolutely no idea where the hammer was.

God spoke to me all night. Each time I heard Him clearly say, "Do you trust Me?" I responded, "I completely trust You!" By morning my courage was stronger than ever. I felt complete peace in Him. What could have been the most terrifying night of my life became the sweetest and greatest experience I will ever know!

When I got up to prepare breakfast for the group I discovered everything was quiet. Then I realized that the students slept on the busses and the tents were mostly empty. I felt a giggle in my heart as I knew that God intended to spend the evening with me! This experience just solidified my trust in God and I am ready for whatever He has in mind for me.

--Kathleen Sutton

But each day
the Lord pours
His unfailing love upon me,
and through each night
I sing His songs,
praying to God who gives me life.

Psalm 42:8 NLT

A top-down view of a table setting on a pink background. It features a white plate with a silver rim, a smaller white plate with a purple butterfly, a white napkin with a silver ring, silverware, and several glasses. There are also white and pink eggs and clusters of white and purple flowers scattered around the setting.

Here I am!

I stand at the door and knock.
If anyone hears my voice

***and opens
the door,***

I will come in
and eat with that person,
and they with Me.

Displacing spiritual junk food

A doctor once prescribed a 17-day fast during which all I could eat was a medical food called Vivonex. This powdered, add-water-and-stir mix consisted of predigested proteins which would meet all my nutritional needs during the fasting period. The problem: predigested proteins taste exactly like vomit.

The Proverbs say, “to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet.” (Proverbs 27:7) True in most cases, but Vivonex never tasted anything but awful, though my stomach growled like a lion. I’ve been hungry in my life, but never so hungry as that fast. Ultimately, though, my hunger signaled health. Fast over, I eagerly satisfied it with nutritious food.

Another kind of hunger causes more serious, lasting damage. I’m speaking of the kind of hunger that sneaks in unannounced. Scientists call it nutrient starvation. Junk food displaces nutritious food so that we’re starving and don’t know it. Fortunately, the displacement phenomenon works both ways. We can fight nutrient starvation by displacing junk food with nutritious food. The best way to subdue sugar cravings is to eat bananas, papayas and grapes. God doesn’t grab lollypops away from His babies so much as He dangles mango slices in front of them. God gives something better and we let go of something bad.

We’ve all consumed our share of spiritual junk food. Garbage media, cheap literature, Facebook overkill, even church gossip stimulate our emotions but leave us empty. In Jesus’ love letter to Laodicea, He stands at the door, knocking. He wants to come in and eat with us, He says. He wants to set a table with deeply satisfying things and sit across from us, looking deep into our eyes, past the defenses and pain, into the bottom of our empty hearts that only He can fill.

--Jennifer Jill Schwirzer



For the Lord

will comfort her...

He will

make her

wilderness blossom

like Eden.

Isaiah 51:3



You are *precious*
in My eyes and
honored
and

I love you.

Isaiah 43:4



Delight

yourself in the Lord,
and He shall give you the

desires of your heart.

Psalm 37:4

*Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?*

Wow. Where did that come from?

I had been innocently reading my Bible when God spoke powerfully and bluntly to my heart. I was caught off guard by the way He got right to the point of a problem in my life. My heart was hungry. I was lonely, often discouraged. Looking for something to satisfy the empty ache in my heart, I too often turned to food. Chocolate. Ice cream. Cookies. Anything to soothe the emptiness I felt. Make me feel better. But it only lasted for a moment. It tasted good and felt good, but soon the familiar loneliness, discouragement, and hunger for more came back. It really didn't satisfy. I read on.

*Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance. (Isaiah 55:2)*

Eat what is good. Delight in abundance. I knew God wasn't telling me to only eat healthy food. He was going deeper. This wasn't about food. This was about my heart. He knew my heart longing. He knew what would satisfy those empty places. The loneliness. The longing to be loved and accepted for me. Just the way I am. To feel connected—like I belong. Fit in. To know that I am wanted.

Listen carefully to Me. What was God saying? What does He say about those longings of my heart?

I have loved you with an everlasting love. (Jeremiah 31:3)

I have called you by name; you are Mine. (Isaiah 43:1)

God loves me. I know that. I've known that most of my life. It was His love that drew me to Him in the first place. As a child, learning that God loved me just the way I was caused me to commit my life to Him. But somehow as I grew up, I often lost that deep belief that God loves "me." I know He gave Jesus to die for me, but the love part gets lost when I start thinking about myself and all the parts of me that need to be changed and improved. How could God really love "me" when I don't really love me? And so too often I have gotten caught up in the drive to earn His love instead of just abiding in His love. (John 15:9)

What I really crave isn't chocolate or ice cream or cookies. What I really crave is what God offers. Love. His love. His accepting, powerful, always there, life changing, unconditional love. It alone can satisfy. I need to listen to Him and not the enemy who tells me I am unworthy, nothing, too bad to forgive again, and unwanted. I need to feed my heart on these truths—His Word, music, nature—anything that points me to Him and reminds me of who He is and who I am in Him. I need to be "rooted and grounded in love" and "comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge" so I can "be filled with all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:17-19)

That's when the cravings will stop. When I am filled with the fullness of God which will happen as I delight myself in Him and grasp and dwell on and learn how much He truly loves me.

--Tamyra Horst



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720 Museum Rd, Reading PA 19611
610.374.8331
www.paconference.org