

Too Good to be True

God's astounding offer to us sounds that way, but check it out:

When I was first began to think seriously about God I pictured him to be like me, only bigger, a sort of grandfatherly boss of a super welfare system in the sky, but with strings attached and conditions to be met.

As I learned more about God, usually as a result of misinformation, he became someone who was not on my "favourite persons" list. He seemed to demand things I couldn't do in exchange for a rather vague reward promised for the distant future, described in words that were not in my everyday vocabulary. And he never gave any proof that any of it was true. It all seemed to be out of reach and more trouble than it was worth, so I moved on and spent little time thinking about it.

But the time came when I found myself "treading water" so to speak. I suddenly realized that life was happening to me by accident. I may have thought I was in charge, but looked at in the cold light of reality it was clear that events outside of my control were steering my life. And in spite of my efforts to live a really worthwhile life, an awkward circumstance or a pesky person would intervene and my life would veer off on another unplanned diversion. No matter how hard I tried, the things that really mattered, like peace of mind, real love, an understanding of life and a secure confidence in the future, seemed to be out of reach. It was all so frustrating!

Then someone re-introduced me to my all but forgotten least favourite Person and explained that he was not anything like I'd imagined him to be. Despite my low opinion of him, I discovered I was not his "least favourite person." In fact, he had miraculously made it possible for me to have all those things that I thought were out of reach. And, remarkably, there were no conditions, either!

It seemed too good to be true! So, like most budding Christians, I imposed my own conditions. Surely I had to do something to deserve such desirable things, and my pride told me so, too. So I tried once again to be worthy of what God had to offer, and soon found myself back where I'd started! Except that now it was me, and not my least favourite Person, who was demanding of me things I couldn't do.

Have you ever felt like that? Frustrating, isn't it? You decide, at last, you really do want the things that matter but find they're still beyond your reach. No matter how hard we try we can't get them. The only way we can get them is to have them brought to us and given to us, and that's exactly what I discovered my fast becoming more favourite Person had done for us. He determined to place these spectacular gifts - the things we want most but can never have by ourselves - into our empty and outstretched hands. There's a thought - empty and outstretched! Nothing to offer, no conditions, no bargaining chips, just reach out to receive.

But that's so humbling! You mean, just accept without having to earn, deserve or do something in return? Well, human pride nearly always stands in the way at this point. But the One who is certainly my most favourite Person now has taken care of that as well. He's not going to pay a huge price for a gift and have us turn it down because we're too proud to accept it!

So he put in a personal appearance on the Earth and explained what was on offer. But instead of jumping at what he was offering, the people around at the time wanted him dead. He allowed himself, however, to be treated as our worst enemy, and be rejected by those he had come to help and save. He then used that rejection as the very means by which he

rescued all of us from our pride, redeemed us from our pointless lives and gave us access to the peace, love and understanding which had always been out of our reach. Who else but my now absolutely most favourite Person would have thought like that?!

If you're having trouble, as I did, in accepting this, look at it this way: Imagine that some benefactor put a stack of diamonds into a Swiss bank account in your name without telling you. Unaware of this you continue struggling along with your present income, unable to have the things you desire most.

Then the benefactor tells you what he has done. It's amazing news, all your troubles are over, but it sounds too good to be true! So you decide, to begin with, that you don't believe it's true and you continue living on your present income.

But suppose, one day, you decide to check it out to see if it really is true after all, and yes, it's all there in the bank account waiting for you to use and enjoy, opening the way to everything you wanted most. Now what would you do? Would you turn it down because you were too proud to accept it? Or would you impose your own set of conditions before accepting it?

Christians do exactly that, though. To make God's gifts acceptable, they decide they must be good and righteous first. But God knows how frustrating that is, because we'll never match up to our own self-imposed conditions. We will fail, and when we do, we find ourselves feeling guilty and thoroughly discouraged.

Take heart, the Gospel is clear - Jesus Christ lived a human life like ours and did on our behalf what we cannot do for ourselves. Because of his love for us the way is open to all that God has to offer, without conditions, without fear of failure, and without guilt.

Check it out. Stretch out your hand and take a look at the bank statement. It's in the Bible, **Romans 8:32**. There it is, sitting on the page ready for you to believe and make your own. And don't stop there just looking at it, spend it! A stack of diamonds is a lot to get through, so do a bit of "outstretching" and spend your millions!

For starters, try a handful of **Ephesians 1:7-12**. And take note too, that the diamonds being offered in those verses aren't just a gift, they're ours as an inheritance. They were willed to us before any of us were even born!

And what about the apostle Paul's dilemma in **Romans 7:14-25**? He encountered the same problem we all do trying to "do the right thing" and realized the solution was not with himself but with his most favourite Person. Then there's **Romans 5:6-8** where Paul reassures us that we don't have to be "good" before God acts on our behalf. In fact, it is the *not* so good that God set up with the bank account! And we all know the scripture "seek and you will find" in **Matthew 7:11**.

These are astounding scriptures, but that's what God's Word says. That's why it's called the gospel, it's great news - so great, though, it can seem too good to be true. But why not just accept it as good and true and let ourselves be amazed by the life it opens up to us?