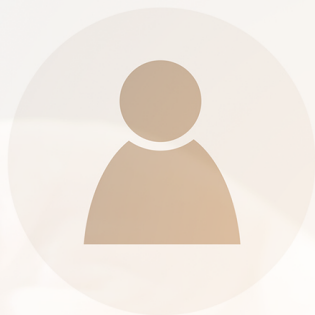
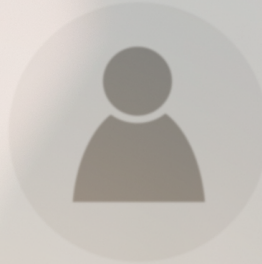


JANUARY



IT WAS VERY GOOD

BY RUTH McDONALD

Before I order almost anything online, I check the customer ratings. If I see five stars, I click “add to cart” with confidence, knowing other customers were well-satisfied with their purchase. Low ratings are a red flag, and when I see “often returned item,” I am reluctant to proceed.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

When God made this beautiful world of ours, He looked it over and gave it a five-star rating. “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good!” (Genesis 1:31 ESV). Adam and Eve experienced “100% satisfaction guaranteed” as they observed the master craftsmanship, high quality, and perfection of all God had crafted for them in the garden. They found He had thought of everything—the food was delicious, the environment perfect, the weather sublime, and the scenery breathtaking. Even their relationship was fully satisfying in every aspect. Nothing they could have desired was lack-

ing in the perfect paradise of Eden.

Every evening, at the end of another perfect day, Adam and Eve walked with God and enjoyed delightful conversations and fellowship with Him. It was literally “just another day in Paradise.” I would love to have eavesdropped on some of those evening walks, wouldn’t you? God’s loving heart for human beings had created a world in which their every need, desire, and longing was satisfied by and in Him.

Heartbreakingly, though, we read just a couple of chapters later Adam and Eve lost their sense of satisfaction and desired something beyond what God had provided for them. Listening to the serpent’s sales pitch, Eve saw that the fruit of the one tree that was off-limits looked irresistibly delicious. Even though her belly was sated with the variety of beautiful and nutritious foods God did allow... even though the water that

flowed through the garden was pure and crystal clear... even though the weather was ideal, and she was married to her soulmate... she was not satisfied. She just had to have that forbidden fruit.

A Forbidden Feast

She “took... and ate” (Genesis 3:6) and the rest, as we say, is history. Adam ate it, too, and every human thereafter has experienced the judgment that resulted from feasting on something God did not allow. In Genesis 3:19 God judged the earth saying, “by sweat... you shall eat bread.” Our present environment is far from paradise, and our living conditions include hard work, sweat, and dissatisfaction in the results of our labor.

The cycle repeats itself throughout Scripture and into our current times. In Genesis 27, we read about two brothers who had a pretty good life.

God had provided for both of them, and they each found a vocation that suited their God-given personalities. But the older brother, Esau, got hangry and craved a bowl of meaty soup Jacob had cooked. His hunger and lack of patience led him to make a foolish and costly trade: he gave up the rights of being the first-born in exchange for a bowl of stew. He traded in the truly valuable blessings of God for the fleeting satisfaction of a full stomach. And so, it continues to this day.

God’s Plan to Satisfy

God’s intention is still for us to be fully satisfied in Him. Consider these promises from the Bible:

Psalm 63:5 “My soul will be satisfied [in the Lord] as with fat and rich food.”

Psalm 65:4 “We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your



house, the holiness of your temple!”

Psalms 107:9 “He satisfies the longing soul.”

Matthew 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

Before we go any further, we need to understand the meaning of the word “satisfied” as it appears in the Bible. The Hebrew (or Old Testament) word for “satisfy” is *saba*, a verb that means to be satisfied or provided with abundance or saturated. It is a feeling of being fulfilled, fully content... like the feeling you get after a satisfying meal. The Greek word used in the New Testament is translated, “to fill, saturate or fatten.”¹

As a woman, I find it interesting that Scripture compares God to a nursing mother, and His people are pictured as breastfed infants whose every need, both nutritional and emotional, is met in Him. In Isaiah 49:15 (ESV) we read, “Can a woman forget her

nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.” Isaiah follows up with a beautiful passage in chapter 66, verse 13, that includes, “As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you.”

While I am certainly not in favor of changing biblical pronouns for God, it seems God’s character is most fully described when comparing Him to Father and Mother. Isaiah 66:10-13 uses the language applied to Zion/Jerusalem interchangeably with that used for God:

“...that you may nurse and be satisfied from her [Jerusalem’s] consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance... and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I [God] will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”

While many healthy humans,

including me, were not breast-fed, nutritionists maintain breastfeeding is the best option for most babies. Many reasons are cited for this opinion, including the closeness and intimacy built through nursing. In addition to the perfect nutritional blend of a mother's milk, the infant enjoys the satisfaction of being held close, comforted, and nurtured emotionally. In ideal situations, proximity to his mother promotes a feeling of safety, knowing that when he is hungry or thirsty again, she will be right there to meet his needs.

God certainly designed a beautiful system for mothers and babies, and just as a baby finds all his needs met in his mother, God's design is for us to find our full satisfaction in Him.

Think About It

So... how would you rate your satisfaction in Him today? Are you experiencing a five-star contentment as you walk with Him? Spend some time in hon-

est reflection and circle the star that best describes your level of satisfaction at present.

Take a few moments to re-read the Scriptures listed above that promise satisfaction in Him. Compare them to Jesus' statement in John 4:14 (ESV), "whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." If we're not experiencing five-star satisfaction, the problem is not with the product but with the consumer.

How to Experience Satisfaction: Stay Connected to the Source

The way an infant feels safe and satiated is by staying in close connection with his mother. If we are not experiencing satisfaction in our walk with God, perhaps we are not living in a consistently intimate relationship with Him.

When we come to Christ, we take our first drink of Living Water, and He fills our hearts

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and souls with so many wonderful things—forgiveness of sins, joy, peace, and so much more. But, to stay hydrated, we must keep drinking. Experts tell us we are already mildly dehydrated when we sense physical thirst. Thirst is our signal we have not been drinking enough. Likewise, if our souls are thirsty, it is likely we are not taking regular and significant sips of Living Water.

Almost 400 years ago, a monastery cook named Brother Lawrence recommended that the key to satisfaction in Christ was to “practice the presence of God.” He suggested “that we should establish ourselves in a sense of GOD’s Presence, by continually conversing with Him.... That we should feed and nourish our souls with high notions of GOD, which would yield us great joy in being devoted to Him.”²

Think About It

How can we take regular and significant sips of spiritual water throughout a typical day? Are there ways we can “practice the presence of God” and become more aware of our connection to Him? List ways to train your heart and mind to focus on God’s presence and provision as you go about your daily routines.

Don’t Turn to Substitutes

As much as we love to indulge in chocolate and soft drinks, when we are truly hungry, we want real food. When we are truly thirsty, we want pure water. Physical hunger and thirst are designed to turn us toward the things that will meet our needs, not empty substitutes.

Why, then, do we so often turn to useless things in an effort to quench our thirst and satisfy our desires? As we saw in Genesis, God anticipated our every need when He designed a beautiful environment for the first humans. Why did they decide that they had needs He could not meet? Why do we?

Jeremiah 2:13 (ESV) says, “for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

A cistern is a large holding tank, usually carved of rock, designed to hold a large volume of water adequate for all our needs. A broken cistern—one that has a crack and has sprung a leak—will not hold water no matter how often it is filled. It is like a sieve instead of a canteen. Jeremiah indicates there are only two options: God (the fountain of living waters) and broken cisterns. Nothing and no one can supply us with living water except God Himself.

This word picture resonates with me, as I think of many “broken cisterns” I’ve tried throughout my life. The list includes things

like relationships, the good opinions of people, material possessions, overindulgence in food, success, and pleasure. Like the original forbidden fruit and Esau's bowl of stew, they satisfy for a while. But true to the nature of a broken cistern, the satisfaction soon leaks out like water and leaves me empty and thirsty again.

As anyone who's ever been even mildly addicted to substances or behaviors can attest, the craving for more never ends. As quickly as we fill the cistern from the top, the sense of satisfaction leaks out the crack in the vessel and leaves us needing more. Author Lysa TerKeurst says in her book *Made to Crave*, "We must realize God created us to crave more of Him. Many of us have misplaced that craving by overindulging in physical pleasures instead of lasting spiritual satisfaction."³

I have been privileged to hear author and speaker Jill Briscoe several times and even once shared a meal with her. She is famously quoted as saying, "Years ago, I stopped looking to anyone but God to satisfy me. There was no man who could love me enough... no child who could need me enough... no job that could pay me enough... no experience that could satisfy me enough..." Only Jesus!

In John 7:37-38 (ESV) Jesus Himself "stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

Only Jesus can stop the leak, fill you up, and cause you to overflow. He is a five-star God, and His way is still "very good." He satisfies the longing soul.

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About the Writer:

Ruth McDonald has served as the Director of FWB Women's Ministries since November 2022. She served with her husband Donnie as a missionary with IM, Inc. in Japan. Born to church planters in the Pacific Northwest, Ruth has also lived in Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Arizona, South Carolina and Japan. Ruth actively participated in church planting, music, children's ministry, evangelism, and discipleship. Ruth's passion is for encouraging women in their faith through writing, speaking, and counseling. Donnie and Ruth have four young adult children and four grandchildren. Her family describes her as "crazy, fun-loving, talkative, and passionate."

