

You Could Have It All

You Could Have It All

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Reformation Heritage Books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

You Could Have It All
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Reformation Heritage Books
2965 Leonard St. NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
616-977-0889
orders@heritagebooks.org
www.heritagebooks.org

Printed in the United States of America
20 21 22 23 24 25/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Thomas, Geoff, 1938- author.

Title: You could have it all / Geoffrey Thomas.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Reformation Heritage Books, 2020.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020013414 (print) | LCCN 2020013415 (ebook) | ISBN 9781601787927 (paperback) | ISBN 9781601787934 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Christianity—Essence, genius, nature. | Trust in God—Christianity.

Classification: LCC BT60 .T46 2020 (print) | LCC BT60 (ebook) | DDC 234/.2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020013414>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020013415>

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These things did these three mighty men.

—2 SAMUEL 23:17



Gary Brady, Glyn Ellis, Ian Alsop

a pastor, an elder, and a deacon

They loved the Lord Jesus Christ.

They loved the grace of God.

They loved and served the church of Jesus Christ.

They loved and married my three daughters.

They nurtured and cared for my nine grandchildren.

*They have become my most esteemed friends
and eternal brothers.*

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You Could Have It All!

What am I talking about? Knowing the purpose and meaning of life and maintaining that vision day by day; experiencing lasting joy and peace; having that precious knowledge of oneself; finding fulfillment; experiencing lasting, rich relationships; having hope in death; receiving knowledge of the God who is the Creator of the cosmos: you really could have all that.

“Ah, I see. This is about religion, isn't it?” Please! Pause a moment before you simply dismiss this, before you refuse to consider even another word, let alone a sentence. Don't slip immediately into your automatic rejection of religion. Don't allow such prejudice to control you. Perhaps you've thought about religion in the past. You may have tried religion when you were younger, or maybe you've been let down by religions or religious people. That's not unlikely. Millions of people have. I am not very interested in religions myself. Some of them are mankind's greatest crimes. I'll be absolutely

truthful with you: I am more interested in a certain remarkable person—Jesus Christ.

Don't switch off, please, even if it's unusual for you to be reading a religious book. Shouldn't there be a set time or two in every rational and inquiring person's life when he or she spares a thought for the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount, the one whom every Christian claims to be more powerful than death? I acknowledge that these pages are about Him. I believe that divine providence has put this little book into your hands in some strange way.

Having it all—getting the very best anyone can get in life—is, in my conviction, being gripped by the most remarkable person in the history of the world. Have you ever considered Him? He is extraordinary. Think of it: Jesus had meekness without weakness, tenderness without feebleness, firmness without belligerence, straight speaking without coarseness, love without sentimentality, righteousness without being sanctimonious, truth without error, zeal without fanaticism, passion without prejudice, heavenly-mindedness without unreality, service without servility, convictions without egotism, evaluation without prejudice, love for Himself while loving His neighbors as Himself, beauty without vanity, joy without any depression. How extraordinary that such a man has made Himself open to inspection in our cynical world! Such a character and personality that anyone with any sense would admire is found in this man. We are persuaded that He is God's great definition of a proper man, the archetypal man, the altogether

strong and lovely man. He is the one who is offering men and women everything they need for a blessed life now and lasting joy and peace forevermore.

Now you might be tempted to think another reluctant thought: “OK, well, maybe I’ll give religion a try.” No! I don’t want you to consider that as an option, as if you can get a sample of everything you need in life by briefly putting your toe in the water and then taking it out and deciding it’s not for you. It can’t be like that in order to have it all. Having it all, I say, isn’t based on some temporary hunch, like “I’ll give religion a shot.” Why not? Because if it is as easy as that, then whenever the going gets tough—and there are hard decisions to be made—you’d leave this religion phase immediately with a measure of relief, looking very serious and saying quietly with all the conviction you could muster, “Yes, I have tried religion. Been there, done that. It’s OK for some, but not for me.”

You can have it all only by the grace of Jesus Christ: only because of the tender, loving-kindness of the Son of God homing in on you, capturing your interest, answering your inner objections. You are still reading these words because God has been working with you and in you, maybe over many years. He is the One who has been enriching your life.

I am convinced that nothing has ever happened to you or me because of mere luck, chance, or fate. The best things we’ve enjoyed in life—loving parents, a dear wife or husband, precious children, health and long life, employment and prosperity—have all been

the gifts of God. And the worst things in this groaning and fallen world did not occur because God was looking away. God is always in control of our lives, even when the news is the worst. The fact that somehow you got hold of this piece of literature and are still reading these words is significant. I believe this mild curiosity has been planted in your mind by God, not by my fascinating turn of phrase, or by the heavy heart you have from some wretched business deal or personal loss over the past weeks, or by a breakdown in what had been a precious relationship. It is not just a time of vulnerability that is making you go against your long-held conviction that you're not a religious person. You may now be stumbling across ultimate reality, confronting the truth that the God of love lives and that He acts and is in charge of your life at this very moment. You may have a growing realization that this God has not given up on you, even though you may have neglected Him for decades.

This is actually the set time for you to know that a life of emptiness and shattering disappointments is in fact an utterly unnatural life. It should not be like this, and it need not go on in this way. It can and must be changed. You could have all that is in the power of the loving-kindness of your Creator to give to you, not because you have earned it but simply because God loves you. Remember, He is the One who lies behind this unexpected event, that you, who have gone on for years without good thoughts of Jesus Christ, should

continue to read these sentences and reconsider what it tells you of how you could have it all.

I have tried to disabuse you of the idea that religion is something you may briefly pick up and then throw aside at a whim. You are not in charge of what is happening. All you are now experiencing has been ordained before there was light. God is motivating you to continue reading. He is in charge of this encounter, and as the God of measureless love He alone can make someone a lover of Himself. The events leading to your taking up this book—whether through the providence of sheer discovery or perhaps through a person you know and admire—are the gifts of a loving God. And your openness to tiptoe into this barely visited territory—to think again about the issues I am raising—is also one of the ways God helps men and women He loves to discover the purpose of their lives and how they can have everything that's needed for a life of joy and peace. Why do we exist? What are we here for? Can man know God? My sentences in this little book seek to be as important as those questions. It is worthwhile considering these things if it will result in your having it all. You have not been so successful in your quest so far, have you?

Of course you have every right to question whether I am some sort of fanatic to be addressing you in this way. Am I another muddled and deluded man who is rubbing your conscience and tormenting you with my foolish words? If so, you have every right to stop reading this right now. But if what you are reading and

will continue to read is true—that it is possible for us to learn what life is all about and to receive from God all we need for a lifetime’s enjoyment and fulfillment—then let me go on to tell you as clearly as I can how you really can have it all. Let’s start.

You Could Know God

The greatest proof for the existence of God is the Lord Jesus Christ. This brave young teacher stirred up the Middle East as He spoke to growing crowds of people while traveling through His little nation. We learn of five thousand men following Him for miles and sitting down to listen to Him, and such large crowds were not unusual for Him. After three years, His life and teaching had been so effective that more than five hundred people had become His disciples. Soon another three thousand began to serve Him, a number that grew to five thousand, all believing that He was who He claimed to be: the Son of God and the only way to God. He drew people to Himself. The picture we find in the gospels is of vast audiences hanging onto His words, which continued for almost three years until He was killed. Before dawn broke, people could be found sitting around the place He was staying, waiting for Him to open the front door and make an appearance, wanting to get help from Him, having failed to get it from anywhere or anyone

else. His teaching was frequently profound and provocative. He never quoted the historic teachers of the previous two hundred years in order to hide His beliefs behind their views. He spoke on His own authority and was prepared to challenge what earlier religious leaders had said, often disdaining and correcting widely held theories about religious practices that destroyed natural affection and the law of God.

Christ frequently quoted from the Old Testament Scriptures, prefacing His remarks by the words "It is written." He never contradicted the Bible—a fact of no small significance. The God who had often spoken in the past by His servants the prophets now appeared in the form of His Son, Jesus. He spoke face-to-face with individuals, mothers, children, fishermen, cynics, soldiers, and tax officials.

With a wonderful cogency, Jesus spoke unforgettable aphorisms such as "The Son of Man came to seek and to save those who are lost.... What will it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?... I came not to be served but to serve and to give my life a ransom for many.... Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but to God the things that are God's.... Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.... Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." No one else ever spoke like this man.

The Lord Jesus Christ also made the most staggering claims. He said that on a future day He would judge the whole world, that all men and women would have to give an account to Him and would receive their

destinies from His lips. We live in a moral universe in which our actions and words count. They are powerful to help or to hurt others, and what we are sowing by the influence of our actions and words is what we are going to reap. There lies before mankind a great day of evaluation that will result in approval and vindication for many, and just and fair condemnation for others. Jesus said He would be the one discriminating and judging us in that day. What a claim to make to people who had known Him and His mother very well. He had helped Mary's husband for years, making posts, window frames, tables, and cupboards, yet now He also claims that He is going to pass judgment on the whole of mankind. Some had seen Him grow up from infancy to boyhood to adolescence to full manhood; now He made these staggering statements, that to Him we will all have to give account in a future day of cosmic evaluation.

But He claims more than that. The criterion by which He will make His judgments will be how we related to Him. Did we serve Him, honor Him, and speak well of Him, or were we rather ashamed of Him? He told His hearers that many would be claiming they'd been serving Him, but He would tell them that He never knew them. That would be the key for entering an eternal life of blessedness with Him: being loved by Him and being recognized as those He knew and had delighted in.

There is nothing ordinary about someone who tells the whole world they are all going to give an account to Him and hear of their destinies from His lips. Is this

man a lunatic? Is He wicked to make such staggering claims? For example, He says that no one can approach God except by the Lord Christ. He is the only Mediator who can reconcile fallen man with a perfectly holy God. Those are some of the claims of Jesus of Galilee. Who can speak like this? Who has the right to make these claims and be taken seriously? Simply a person of majestic righteousness and love, who always spoke the truth.

But more than this, the Lord Jesus Christ claimed preexistence. He once said, "Before Abraham was, I am." The rest of mankind all began at conception. We had no existence before that, but He goes back to before the beginning of time. John's gospel begins with these awesome words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." He is different from any of us.

Jesus Christ also claimed absolute deity. He claimed to be God, saying, "I and my Father are one." When one of His disciples fell before Him and whispered in broken worship, "My Lord and my God" after He had risen from the dead, Jesus didn't shake His head and say, "Tut, tut! We can't have any of that blasphemy. Don't go setting me up on a pedestal. I'm just an ordinary guy." There is nothing ordinary about a man whom the wind and waves obeyed. This world has witnessed a man as pure and holy as God, someone more powerful than death. This world has witnessed someone who practiced what He preached to others. "Love your

enemies.... Pray for them which despitefully use you," He said, and then when they nailed Him to a cross and lifted Him up to die in indescribable torment, He prayed for them, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Those are some of the most godlike words ever spoken.

Jesus Christ is scarcely a crazy man or megalomaniac. He is surely the most sane individual the world has ever seen. He is not an evil man or consummate liar responsible for deceiving countless numbers of both sophisticated and simple people from Galilee to the Silicon Valley of California. If not wicked or insane, then what? He is the incarnate God who spoke through His servants the prophets from Moses until the first century, and now He comes very close, making Himself known to us in His Son, Jesus Christ.