



Spirit of Grace

Herald

THE MINISTRY OF DENNIS
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December, 2017

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Lunch at the Mall

I stopped by a mall the other day to have lunch. Although I hadn't been there much lately, I know the mall very well. When our children were small we used to go there all the time. It was one of their favorite places, and the *Toys R Us* store was always visited, along with a number of other stores.

Usually during the Christmas season my wife and I would do some of our Christmas shopping there, and enjoy lunch at the bustling Food Court. That mall was packed in those days, but somehow I didn't mind the crowds. Picking out Christmas treasures in the midst of large, bustling throngs of people just seemed like a "Christmasy" thing to do, and the truth is, I sort of enjoyed it.

But this time things were different. The mall was, to be painfully honest, dying. A number of the stores were now vacant, with those ugly chain barriers in front of the darkened buildings. And even though we were in mid-December there was just a handful of people walking around. During the old days the Food Court was so busy that you had to look carefully to try and find an empty table. No worries this day. Empty tables stretched out in every direction, and more than half the restaurants were closed. I felt sorry for those who worked there, as it seemed certain that this

mall would close down altogether within a couple of years. The once-thriving, busy, noisy, congested mall had become a sort of ghost-mall, and the stores and restaurants that were still there were gloomy reminders of a once-glorious past.

It made me sad. Even though I haven't shopped there much lately, still I like things to stay the same. The problem is, they never do. Whether it is our lives, our seasons, our relationships, or businesses, or malls, our world is in a constant flux. There is no pause button we can hit, no magic formula to keep anything the way it is today, including our bodies, our looks, our health, or anything about our lives. One of life's guarantees is that whatever exists and is happening now will not stay the same. Sometimes that's a positive thing; other times, not so much.

Of course, this is not earth-shattering news. Everybody knows this, but once in a while we have an experience, like my lunch at



the mall, which makes it stand out in vivid colors. Being of a somewhat philosophical bent, as I thought about this simple reality I decided there are three great insights to gain from this. **First, we should be thankful to God for the pleasures and the blessings of the past seasons of our lives.** No, we can't bring them back; life has no rewind button. But as we meditate on "the good old days" we can recognize that whatever sweetness was in them, it was God who graciously provided that sweetness. Rather than bemoan the fact that those days and those blessings are long gone, we should be thankful that we had them at all. Happy memories are a great treasure, and those who lack them are poor indeed.

Second, it is futile and pathetic to try and hold onto seasons which have served their purposes and are now on the way out. No season of our lives, no matter how pleasant and beautiful, was ever meant to last forever. Seasons come to us with their own built-in expiration date, and when that date arrives, the only reasonable thing to do is let them pass. God has other things for us, and there are treasures and sweet experiences awaiting us that we can never claim until we let our fingers relax from the vice-grip we are using to hold onto a time which is going to pass anyway, with or without our permission.

Lunch at the Mall

Finally, we must remember to be thankful for our current season. Chances are, at some point in the future we will look back at this time and think of it as the good old days. Look around. See what you have and remember John the Baptist's famous declaration: "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven." Best of all, know that Jesus Christ, our great Christmas Gift and good Shepherd, is with us still. He accompanies us from season to season. When we step over life's demarcation lines, He is there leading the way. When we rejoice at unexpected blessings and breakthroughs, He is with us, having orchestrated those blessings. And when we suffer, He is by our side, comforting, guiding, encouraging, and whispering promises of hope into our hearts. He is the constant Factor that never changes, never diminishes, and never fails us. And when we step over that final river which separates earthly life from heavenly glory, He will be there still. "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

This Month: NIGERIA

This Month: *Two Separate Back-to-Back Weeks of Ministry*

A word from Dennis: In a very short time Benedicta and I are scheduled to minister in two different communities in Nigeria during the Christmas season. I am making a special appeal to you, our friends, to help us by serious prayer for these meetings, and by sharing in the financial needs we have associated with this mission. As always, we are dependent upon God to move on your hearts to generously support these evangelistic and teaching outreaches. Will you pray about sending us a generous contribution, either through the mail by check, or by using PayPal or a credit card on our website? Your gifts mean so much to us!

Ministry Activities Planned for Our Nigeria Mission in December:



Preaching the Gospel



Clothes for local orphans



Free Medical Clinic



Bicycles for Pastors