

It is an interesting commercial [[click here to see it](#)]. It suggests a magical solution to all of your problems. Use it and you will have *uncontrollable giggles and relentless optimism*. Who wouldn't want that? *Ask your doctor if it is right for you; it probably is*. Really?



Please note: I am *not* advocating the use of this product. Sure, you can now legally use it in Canada, but as many people have pointed out, just because something is legal doesn't mean that it is right. However, in these trying times, we need to relax, right? *Sometimes life can be overwhelming . . .* after a busy hectic staggering crushing day when you just can't take it any more . . . what would be better than a little cannabis? Well . . . I can think of a few things!

This really isn't an anti-cannabis/anti-alcohol message [although I find it interesting that Quebec is going to set 21 as the minimum age for legal cannabis use]. We know the effects of drugs and alcohol on the human brain – that alcohol is a depressant and that cannabis is an hallucinogenic. We know that you might escape the pressures of your world for a few minutes or a few hours when you use them, but that you always come back to life and the same struggles.

I know that we take a lot of things into our bodies that are not good for us. Trans-fats, for example – though they are now banned. Sugar. Sugar sugar sugar. According to the American Heart Association, men should consume no more than 150 calories per day of sugar (37.5 grams or 9 teaspoons), and women should limit sugar to 100 calories per day (25 grams or 6 teaspoons).



There are 39 grams – 10 teaspoons – of sugar in a can of Coca-Cola. Even the company acknowledges that is a lot of sugar. So it suggests cutting back. Have a smaller can [or two] instead of a larger can. And I'm embarrassed to admit that I used to drink 7-11 Super Big Gulps. And if you aren't sure what it is, a Super Big Gulp is 40 ounces of pop. Forty. Four-zero. 130 grams of sugar.



In my shaky defence, we didn't know – or wouldn't admit in 1985 – that so much sugar was bad for you! So yes, if I am going to mention that certain substances will do our bodies damage I will mention other substances that will do our bodies damage as well.

Why am I bringing up this topic and talking about cannabis, you ask? Because if he were living today someone might ask Zacharias – even jokingly – what was in the incense he was burning [as we talked about a couple of weeks ago]. Someone might ask Mary – even jokingly – what she had been drinking. Both of them had "visits" from angels. Mary's visit is recorded in Luke 1:26-38

Luke 1:26-38



<sup>26</sup> Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

<sup>29</sup> But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. <sup>30</sup> Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. <sup>33</sup> And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

<sup>34</sup> Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

<sup>35</sup> And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For with God nothing will be impossible."

<sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

We don't usually think that the visit resulted in a discussion, in a tête-à-tête. We usually read this as the angel appearing and telling Mary what to do: Gabriel appears and speaks, Mary nods in agreement, and that's the end of it. But as you read you see it happened a little differently.

*in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"*

THE MESSAGE translates this a little more freely. It has the angel saying *Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty, beautiful inside and out! God be with you.*

If you want to get on someone's good side, start with something like that! *Good morning, you wonderful person you!* Get the person relaxed so that the news to come isn't so shocking. No surprise announcement. None of this show up to work to find the doors locked, as happened at the call centre in Sydney Nova Scotia the other week. No, butter that person up a little bit, in a good state of mind, on your side. *Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!*

We aren't told how the angel came into contact with Mary. Gabriel just appeared to Zacharias when he was in the temple [Luke 1:11]. Kind of . . . *flash-boom!* and there he was.

It may be that Gabriel knocked on Mary's door and asked to come in [and what did she think in the middle of a harried day - maybe . . . *I don't need whatever it is that you're selling?*]. It doesn't seem like a sudden appearance as happened to Zacharias or even a slow unveiling of his presence like a genie coming out of a lamp that's being rubbed. We just see the discussion started.

Unfortunately we don't all get angelic visits, though God still wants to speak with and to us. So the question this brings up is this: have you heard God speak lately? Have you taken time from your busyness to listen? Will you like Elijah wait for God to speak, and hear His still small voice in the rumblings of life? Or is it going to take a Saul incident to get your attention - he had to be knocked from his horse to the ground before he heard God's voice.

The angel came to Mary, and *when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.* Her response: *What?* She was perplexed. Why a visit, and what was this angel saying? She was troubled. What is going on here, anyway? She didn't have time for this. Her normal routines were being interrupted.

That's what God's presence in your life will do. It may not be not spectacular like what happened to Mary, but God calls us from, to. From looking inside to looking outside. From caring only about ourselves to caring about others as well. Can I say . . . from turmoil to calmness? If He has control of our lives and if we make decisions based on God being in charge rather than us being in charge, we will find peace. We may have made a mess of things and it might take some time to get things under control [with God's help] but if we stop what *we* are doing to let God do what *He* wants to do . . . well, I truly believe things will be better. So stop and smell the poinsettias and while you're at it, take some time to listen to God.

So . . . Mary was troubled. Not because she was visited, mind you, but because of what was said. *Rejoice . . . God is with you . . . you are highly favoured!* She wondered *what's with that? Who am I to be important to God?*

*Come to youth group with us on Friday night,* my friends Roy and Charles said. So I did. Then they said *come to Sunday School.* That I questioned . . . *Sunday School?* They answered *yup.* Sunday School took place at 9:45 Sunday mornings, *classes for everyone* said the church sign, from children to seniors. We – our teen class – were given handouts – booklets with stories and posters – each week.



Years before Al Franken's skit *Daily Affirmations with Stuart Smalley* played on Saturday Night Live with his *I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and dog-gone it, people like me* saying, I pulled a poster out of a Sunday School handout . . . one that said something that I'd never heard or thought of before:



*I'm me; I'm worthwhile; 'Cause God don't make no junk.* If I'd heard it then I might have laughed with Franken, but that poster spoke to me. When I started to attend that church I wondered *who am I to be important to God* – and discovered that I was just because I was! Mary may have wondered that same thing. *Who am I to be important to God?*

The angel explained: *“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”*

First, she doesn't appear to be afraid. Not like Zacharias, anyway. And not like the shepherds would be. She seems pretty calm about it all. Though she is puzzled. Why would an angel visit her? She was about to find out. Though the message was cryptic.

*You have found favor with God.* That's always a good thing – better to be on God's good side than not!

*You will conceive.* That's when she started wondering *what in the world?*

*You will have a son.* Joseph would be happy. Sons are good [remember the era].

*He will be great . . . the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David . . . He will reign.* That was unexpected.

So . . . a pause. A thought. Some reflection perhaps. A bit of introspection and deliberation and rumination . . . and then she responds – with a pretty good question, really.: *“How can this be, since I do not know a man?”*

It's an honest question. She didn't say *as if!* She didn't say *you're putting me on!* She didn't say *find someone else.* She *did* say *really?* It was time for a reality check. As far as she knew there was only one way to get pregnant [there was no in vitro fertilization in those days].

*“How can this be, since I do not know a man?”* She was young. And while she hadn't taken a purity pledge, sex before marriage – any sex outside of marriage – was a sin. It wasn't just risk of pregnancy that kept her pure. It was her desire to honour God.

But she had to wonder about this. Not only *How can this be,* but *why? Why me? Why would God want to do this to me?*

Honest questions. Her life was about to be interrupted, big time! She had plans and dreams and goals. Why would God interfere with her life? Why would God interfere *like this* in her life? How could she face the people of Nazareth? What would people think? What would her parents think? What would her neighbours think? What would – gasp – what would Joseph think? [We know from the gospel of Matthew what Joseph thought!].

And then . . . *how? How can that happen . . . explain it to me.* Gabriel was about to. There was a plan.

Plans. General Motors had a plan at one time. Do you know the history of the company?



GM was founded in 1908 by William Durant, who was a flamboyant salesman. He built Buicks. To start. Then he bought out 30 other car-makers in 18 months, including Oldsmobile, Pontiac, and Cadillac. Of course, this acquisition spree saddled the company with debt it couldn't repay [imagine that], so in 1912 GM's bankers gave Durant the boot. He was eventually replaced by Alfred Sloan. While Henry Ford revolutionized the way cars were manufactured [on an assembly line] Sloan revolutionized the way they were marketed and sold: he segmented the market and then trying to appeal to every segment.

*Under Sloan, GM wanted to supply a car for “every purse and purpose.” Chevrolet was “for the hoi polloi, Pontiac for the poor but proud, Oldsmobile for the comfortable but discreet, Buick for the striving, and Cadillac for the rich.”*

That philosophy worked for years. However, *In the late 1970s, soaring gas prices fed demand for smaller, fuel-efficient cars. While GM continued to churn out oversized gas-guzzlers, Japanese carmakers flooded the U.S. with small, fuel-efficient machines, dragging down GM's share of the U.S. market to about 44 percent. When GM finally got around to offering small cars, they were plagued by quality problems. Styling was an even bigger disaster.*

Then, the different companies within the company started competing with each other, and company policy was that they couldn't share resources. Even though the company was floundering, it wouldn't adapt.

*Finance executive Nancy Rottering, who quit in frustration in 1987, said the attitude at headquarters was, "We're GM. We know everything, we don't need to change."*

GM had a plan, but it failed because it wasn't followed. That wasn't Eatons' problem. Nor Kodak's. They didn't have a plan; they thought what worked would always work. They failed because they wouldn't adapt to changing times. Sears failed because it waited too long to change.

God had a plan. The plan was recorded in the promises of the Old Testament. The plan was fulfilled in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus and recorded in the New Testament. The plan will be completed at the end of time as we enter eternal life.

His was a long term plan. And it was about to come to pass. Just when it needed to. The Apostle Paul wrote that *when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons* [Galatians 4:4-5] – *when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law* [Galatians 4:4-7].

*When the appointed time had come, God sent forth His only begotten son  
Born of a woman, born under the law to deliver from the law all the slaves.*

*"How can this be?" Mary asked. God has a plan, said the angel. The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God . . . with God nothing will be impossible."*

She asked; she received the answer. Our problem is that too often we ask and don't wait for God's answer. Worse is when we ask and hear His answer but ignore it because it isn't what we want to hear.

You've seen this before [I've shown this to you before].



*God, what do you want me to do? Can you come up with something else, something less intense, something less demanding, something easier, something more comfortable? He can . . . but do you want to be comfortable or do you want to be God's? Don't answer that. Yet.*

*Pastor, you might ask, do you really believe that God has a purpose for my life? That God has something special for me to be, for me to do? My answer . . . yes. Yes, I do. And my question is are you looking for it, are you listening to Him so you can discover it?*

*Sometimes we settle in. We become comfortable. It isn't that we take the easy path, it's that we . . . well, it is that we take the easy path. We are ready for a challenge . . . just not too much of one.*

*You know the story already. In 1983, John Scully was the President of Pepsi. He had helped turn it into one of the world's most recognizable brands [I can't believe I'm saying something positive about Pepsi].*



*People noticed, and among them was a founder of a Silicon Valley startup.*

*At the time, this founder was grappling with a dilemma. He was driven, but he was also young and inexperienced. Nobody doubted his intellect, but the board of directors of his company wanted to hire somebody more seasoned to manage the day to day operations alongside him.*

*When they made the decision, the founder set his sights on Scully. He'd been impressed by the work at Pepsi. He wasn't going to take "no" for an answer.*

*Except, that's precisely the answer he got. More than once.*

*From Scully's point of view, it made sense. He was leading a great company. Why put it on the line for a startup that might not be around in five years?*

*He got his response in the form of a final pitch. "Do you want to sell sugar water for the rest of your life, or do you want to come with me and change the world?"*

*Scully left that year. The startup was Apple. His partner was Steve Jobs.*

*The question was this: do you want to be comfortable, or do you want to make a difference. It's the same question that God asks of us. God says I have something special for you to do, something special for you to be. Will you?*

*Come, follow Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men, said Jesus. But we have responsibilities, said Peter. We have boats and nets and equipment that we've invested in, said Andrew. We can't just walk away from the family business, said James. How are we going to make a living, asked John.*

*Two weeks ago I suggested that even though Zacharias didn't realize it, he was part of God's plan. I said that even though you may not realize it, you are part of God's plan as well. You just have to be open and find your part. God calls. We choose how we will respond.*

*Mary, said the angel. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus [that's how THE MESSAGE translates verse 31]. And Mary . . . Mary doesn't reply are you nuts? Doesn't ask *What will my parents think?* Doesn't ask *What will my neighbours think?* Doesn't ask *What will Joseph think?**



She replies *I am available to God. She replies Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.*" [Luke 1:38]

As in *I'll do what God wants me to do. As in I'll say yes to whatever God wants. As in I'll go where He wants me to go, do what He wants me to do, and be what He wants me to be. How do you respond to God?*