

Vital Supplement for Spiritual Vitality LONGING FOR PLEASURES TO SATISFY

Ecclesiastes 3:11-13

(Part 4a)

www.prshockley.org

Do you ever long for something to be more than it is? I'm not asking if you want something to be perfect. Rather, do you ever find yourself yearning for things to be something more? Have you found yourself longing for things to satisfy?¹ For example, you commit yourself to living out a dream you have...perhaps a new job, a new direction, a new opportunity, a new relationship, hoping that it will live up your expectations. But then, all of a sudden or perhaps even gradually, your expectations are broken, if not shattered. As a result, you feel disappointment and perhaps even anger and resentment swell up inside of you and remain for some time. You say to yourself, "Is this all there is?"

You yearn for things to be something more: your spouse, your friendships, your church, your job, and your home. Perhaps it is holiday gatherings, vacations, or particular opportunities. What do you do when that happens? Do you say, well, there's got to be something better... so you try, and try again, only to eventually find yourself in the same situation all over again? Does the repetition of those disappointments ever crush your spirit? Things have not turned out like you dreamed and feel fractured, hurt... like damaged goods on Misfit Island. Perhaps melancholy sets in. Melancholy grows into bitterness. You come to the harsh realization that your dreams are only an illusion.

But then for some of us the repetition of crushed expectations and dreams can be so traumatic that you find yourself becoming cynical. When you are reminded of those dreams or when you hear some one say those dreams can be achieved, you can't help but make some pessimistic remark. For example, I often see this among young married couples. A couple gets married and they soon find out they didn't know each other like they thought they did. The romance turned to disappointment and they become cynical of love altogether. They look at each other and say, "Now what?!" Because we realized that our expectations are unrealistic or because of the pain we've faced, some of us have made the decision that we will scale back our expectations. "If only I could let everything be only what it is."

¹ I've adapted this question from J. Budziszewski, *Ask Me Anything 2: More Provocative Answers for College Students* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 149.

Then I wouldn't have any more of these immature disappointments. So, you scale back your expectations and perhaps resolve yourself into saying, "I refuse to expect more from things than they can give."

Interestingly, this type of mindset of scaling back one's expectations has led some of us down the road to actually claim that "nothing truly satisfies." Disappointments like these have led some to seriously consider the merits of Buddhism. Buddhism teaches that suffering comes from desire. They claim that "the ultimate goal is to have no desire at all-no longings, no yearnings, no aspirations. When that happens, then you will no longer suffer disappointment because they won't be. The illusion of individual existence will have been annihilated."² See, what they are attempting to do is kill their expectations in order to be satisfied.

One common denominator for many of our dreams or expectations is that they are tied to pleasures. Why? We yearn for happiness, joy, and satisfaction? Don't you hunger for a feeling of happiness or satisfaction?; Gratification of the senses?; Recreation, relaxation, amusement?; Some source of happiness, joy, or satisfaction? Just as our decision-making is often governed by our pursuit of pleasure, our expectations or dreams are often tied to notions of pleasures. When these expectations or dreams lead to disappointment, do you believe that you need to lower your expectations, perhaps even eliminate them? Do you ever think you should come to the conclusion that nothing satisfies? Well, I personally I reject that idea. We should not lower our expectations! Rather, we should raise them? Raise them up even higher! Now, you may be thinking, "You've got to be kidding." I'm not.

Here's the bottom line: Nothing but God Himself fully satisfies. That statement should make us yearn for God even more! But if nothing except God fully satisfies, then what about all those other things such as relationships, family, church, vocation, studies, jobs, dreams, etc are they worthless? No, they are not necessarily worthless if they are good, honorable, and noble to God and before others (vv. 12-13). Nevertheless, they are not designed to fulfill our deepest longings. But what they do is point us to, if not sharpen our focus on one specific truth: ultimate satisfaction is only found in the God of the Bible (vv. 10-11).

www.prshockley.org

No. 37

² Ibid., 134.