

PROBING THE REALITY OF UNFULFILLMENT IN AN IMAGE-DRIVEN SOCIETY ©

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In this digital age our young people are surrounded by imagery unlike any previous generation. But sadly, much of the imagery does not correspond to how things actually are. Thus, in an effort to embrace an identity that is provocative and popular, but consumer-centered and imaginary, many people strive to become what is impossible in order to find fulfillment, meaning, and purpose. But because these efforts are in vain, the emptiness within them remains. Combining both the bombardment of “*distortedly perfected*” images that affect us and the incompleteness we feel within, this assessment is designed to examine our identity, our emptiness, and longing to belong, to have purpose, meaning, and a destiny worthwhile.

Please take this assessment prayerfully, answering the questions honestly. Be sure to avoid excessive self-criticism & self-congratulation. To be sure, the following indicators are “*road-signs*” & not necessarily absolute statements. While some of the questions are similar, they are all designed to help you take a deep look at issues of identity, fulfillment, and the plight of emptiness within so many of us. After the assessment, please carefully read what follows.

Key:

1 = never/no

2 = seldom/rarely

3 = occasionally/some times

4 = usually/typically

5 = consistently; constantly; yes

1. Do you find struggle with contentment regardless of the changes that occur in your situation (e.g., new job; new relationship; new location; new hobby; new home)? 1 2 3 4 5
2. Do you honestly believe you have intrinsic significance and intrinsic worth? 1 2 3 4 5
3. Do you find yourself attempting to be someone else than who you are, especially when you are trying to impress someone? 1 2 3 4 5
4. Do you regularly wish you were someone else? 1 2 3 4 5
5. Have you ever experienced contentment? 1 2 3 4 5
6. Do you find yourself attempting to *absorb* the identity of others? 1 2 3 4 5
7. Do you find yourself regularly asking, “*Is there really any hope for me?*” 1 2 3 4 5
8. Do you look for ways to find contentment, peace, and satisfaction within? 1 2 3 4 5
9. Are you on a search for wholeness? Do you feel incomplete as if there is something missing from your life? 1 2 3 4 5
10. Do you long for redemption from past mistakes, propensities, and appetites? 1 2 3 4 5
11. Do you think your appetites and habits are robbing the best parts of you? 1 2 3 4 5
12. Are you unhappy with your identity/person? 1 2 3 4 5
13. Are you unhappy about what you have become? 1 2 3 4 5
14. Do you find yourself asking, “*Is there any real chance that I can find what I’m looking for?*” 1 2 3 4 5
15. Do you ever find yourself asking, “*Will I ever be happy?*” 1 2 3 4 5
16. Do you long to be loved by others? 1 2 3 4 5
17. Have you come to the conclusion that if you look like the images that our prized in society, then people will finally come to cherish, love, and respect you? 1 2 3 4 5
18. Do you really believe that looking like the images prized by society will really satisfy your deepest longings to be loved? 1 2 3 4 5
19. Do you hunger for a love that always has your best interest at heart? 1 2 3 4 5
20. Do you find yourself asking, “*Will somebody ever love me for who I am and not what I have or look like?*” 1 2 3 4 5
21. Do you seek to become the images you see in order to show others that you can look like *that* or even better? 1 2 3 4 5
22. Are you exhausted from trying to become what is celebrated in your society? 1 2 3 4 5

23. Are you truly aware that many of the images that you are competing with do not correspond to reality but have been altered by computer/digital graphic imagery? 1 2 3 4 5
24. Have you ever been truly loved? 1 2 3 4 5
25. Do you find yourself chronically alone? 1 2 3 4 5
26. Do you believe there is something significantly wrong with you? 1 2 3 4 5
27. Do you long to experience joy in spite of your difficulties? 1 2 3 4 5
28. Do you project a “*virtual identity*” of yourself on social utilities like Facebook? 1 2 3 4 5
29. Do you routinely wish you were someone else? 1 2 3 4 5
30. Do you tend to feel that you alone? 1 2 3 4 5
31. Once you stepped into a larger environment, a fast-pace life, has your understanding of who you are began to erode? 1 2 3 4 5
32. After entering into this fast pace life, do you find yourself questioning who you are? 1 2 3 4 5
33. Do you believe you have lost yourself in obscurity when you became a college student or entered into the adult world? 1 2 3 4 5
34. Do you long to be somewhere else than wherever you are? 1 2 3 4 5
35. Do you resent the giftedness of others? 1 2 3 4 5
36. Do you resent others in view of the possessions they have and you do not? 1 2 3 4 5
37. Do you regularly compare yourself to others? 1 2 3 4 5
38. Do you struggle with bitterness? 1 2 3 4 5
39. Do you dislike yourself in view of what others look like? 1 2 3 4 5
40. Do you dislike yourself & circumstances in view of what others possess? 1 2 3 4 5
41. Do you dislike yourself in view of the rich experiences others seem to have? 1 2 3 4 5
42. Do you chronically struggle with jealousy? 1 2 3 4 5
43. Have you found deep and lasting fulfillment in pleasure? 1 2 3 4 5
44. Do you find yourself following others? 1 2 3 4 5
45. Have you ever thought about the relationship between yourself and the images that might be shaping your life? 1 2 3 4 5
46. Have you considered what your surroundings say about you? 1 2 3 4 5
47. Do you find yourself following but never asking? 1 2 3 4 5
48. Does it bother you to see anyone receiving more attention than you? 1 2 3 4 5
49. Do you find yourself projecting an image to others or doing some activity that always puts the attention back on you? 1 2 3 4 5
50. Have you ever considered *why* you feel the need to call attention to yourself? 1 2 3 4 5
51. Do you ever find yourself longing for something that goes beyond yourself? 1 2 3 4 5
52. Do you attempt to gain power over others in order to fill the emptiness within? 1 2 3 4 5
53. Do you desire people to follow after you? 1 2 3 4 5
54. Are you fearful that you will one day be forgotten like a dream? 1 2 3 4 5
55. Do you try to be your own “savior?” 1 2 3 4 5
56. Do you attempt to fill the emptiness within by controlling and manipulating others? 1 2 3 4 5
57. Have you come to the realization that the *gap* between who you are and what is celebrated as being “cool” in our society is too wide for you to cross? 1 2 3 4 5
58. Have you come to the conclusion that your life is utterly meaningless? 1 2 3 4 5
59. Do you think real change where lasting fulfillment is found is even possible? 1 2 3 4 5
60. Do you strive to achieve contentment by improving your physical appearance? 1 2 3 4 5
61. Do you feel the need to show others the improvements you have made to your physical appearance? 1 2 3 4 5
62. Do you find yourself comparing yourself with those who are “*less than what you are?*” 1 2 3 4 5
63. Do you struggle with pride? 1 2 3 4 5
64. Are you aware that pride is often rooted in terrible insecurity? 1 2 3 4 5
65. Are you afraid to let others know who you really are? 1 2 3 4 5
66. Have you attempted to fill this void within with various experiences only to find that the emptiness reemerges? 1 2 3 4 5
67. Have you attempted to fill this void with achievements but discovering afterwards that the emptiness you have experienced has reemerged? 1 2 3 4 5
68. Do you routinely rationalize your actions to avoid responsibility for your behavior? 1 2 3 4 5
69. Do you attempt to excel in non-spiritual areas in order to try to fill the emptiness within? 1 2 3 4 5

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|---------------|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 70. | Have you come to the conclusion that wealth or popularity did not generate the satisfaction you were looking for? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 71. | Do you blame others for the emptiness within? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 72. | Have you ever wondered why your search for completeness was not fulfilled in earthly pleasures? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 73. | Have you ever wondered why more and more education did not fill the void in your soul? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 74. | Have you tried to find significance and value in what others think or say about you? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 75. | If you were circumstances were to never change, would you know lasting contentment? | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Total: | | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

I contend that our marketing-centered images *bombard, aggravate, and inflames* the void, the emptiness, and the longing that we have for lasting completeness, fulfillment, and satisfaction. But rarely do we ever sit back and reflect upon if we have diagnosed our problem accurately and why all of the solutions we have attempted, have failed to generate the peace we are looking for.

But even within this bilateral relationship between us and our environment a choice can be made an alternative can be given, and hope can be rekindled to find that which will bring completion, fulfillment, and satisfaction within the deepest reaches of our person.

Said differently, I would like to invite you to explore your own moments of joy and seriously question the source of your deepest longings.

During the past two hundred years or so we have been told to interpret these longings as nothing more than primitive, tribal emotions or psychological wishes.

But I submit to you that this view lacks explanatory power. Dr. Louis Markos puts this problem this way: "But why and how could unconscious nature produce in us a conscious desire for something that transcends the natural world?"¹

Rather, as St. Augustine discovered many years ago as recorded in his biography, *Confessions*, I contend that God created us to be in intimate fellowship with Him. The void within is a spiritual problem that demands a spiritual answer. This view possesses existential relevance because when we turn to knowing God as the solution, we discover by experience and by His Word a fullness that surpasses but does not contradict our understanding.

C. S. Lewis originally described these longings for God as an argument by desire:²

Just as the fact that we experience thirst, food, and physical intimacy is proof that we are creatures for whom the drinking of water, eating food, and having physical intimacy is natural, so the fact that we desire an object that our natural realm cannot offer implies the existence of a supernatural realm.

¹ Dr. Louis Markos handout, "C. S. LEWIS: APOLOGIST FOR THE 21ST CENTURY." See www.loumarkos.com for this handout and other incredible resources.

² Ibid.

This desire does not guarantee that we will achieve this other realm, but it does claim that we are creatures who are capable of achieving it. In fact, I agree with C. S. Lewis and Dr. Markos that we are designed to spend eternity with God.

The offer to fill this reality of spiritual incompleteness is not rooted in an activity. It is not filled with conditions. No demands need to be made to qualify in order for the void to be permanently filled within. The void is not filled by doing but by knowing the right Person. I submit to you that Person is no other than Jesus Christ, who is God, who died on the cross for your sins and rose bodily from the dead. Scripture presents Him as that Redeemer. It is in His person and His works where significance and value is found. Since He is the Son of God, the image of the invisible God, we do not have to become something in order to be accepted. Jesus accepts us as we are. We do not have to achieve something in order to be fulfilled. Instead, Jesus achieved something for us on the cross and offers it to us freely. Jesus not only accepts us for who we are, but offers us a joy, a peace, and fulfillment that is God-centered, not man centered, not-marketing centered, and not-peer pressure centered. Jesus will not exploit you. Instead Jesus offers you a peace that surpasses understanding and the only condition for such peace is trust and trust alone in Him for salvation by believing that He is God who died on the cross for your sins and rose bodily from the dead. God who knows every mistake you have ever made and will make, fully and accurately aware of every sin you have ever committed, stands to offer you the gift of eternal life. He will free you from yourself. He will liberate you from bondage to this world. He will emancipate you with a love that is so intense that it will surpass anything you have ever experienced in this life. Jesus stands to offer significance and value apart from every frailty, every appetite, and every propensity you have.

One zealot in the New Testament, Saul, who once opposed Christ and all that He stood for as evidenced in his murder of Christian, experienced the joy, the fullness, that peace that flooded His soul. Saul became the Apostle Paul. Out of gratitude for the undeserved favor he received, he concludes in Philippians that to live is Christ; to die is gain. With Him, He will preserve you. With Him you will experience the goodness you have longed to intimately know. God the Father will delight in you!

But this is not something just found in the New Testament in his prayer to the God of the Bible. Listen to the words of David found in Psalm 16:11, a psalm that mirrors the promise of the Messiah who will take the sins of the world upon Himself in Isaiah 52:13-53:12:

You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. ~ Psalm 16:11

Thus, when you place your trust in Christ, you do not have to strive to become something to calm the storms of emptiness within. He fills the void with His presence. It is a joy that conquers all.

Here's the bottom line. Only God Himself fully satisfies our deepest longings. That statement should make us yearn for God even more. The reason why is simple. God originally designed us to be in fellowship with Him (Genesis 1-2). So, no earthly pleasure will ever satisfy you. Rather, earthly pleasures hold you in bondage. Sure, false pleasures may offer you solutions and offer temporary relief and release, but they were never designed to fulfill what you were originally designed to be,

that is, to be in intimate fellowship with the God of the universe. You cannot fill an immaterial, spiritual void with a material object or physical activity.

Even as a believer in Jesus Christ, when you are not in intimate fellowship with God, you will experience conviction, unrest, and dissatisfaction until you return to Him with confession (1 John 1:9) and repentance (Revelation 2-3). Once your intimacy with God is restored, your joy will be full.

If nothing except God fully satisfies, then what about all 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 (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13; Philippians 4:8). But what they do is point us, if not sharpen our focus on one specific truth: ultimate satisfaction is only found in the God of the Bible.

The satisfaction we experience now knowing Christ will only become more rapturous when we are fully in His presence without the capacity to sin. After coming to Christ and experiencing His fullness we develop a new longing. This fresh desire expresses itself with exclamations like "I want more of you, God!" Like being separated from those you love the most, you earnestly desire to be in the presence of our precious God. So, as the years go by both intimately walking with our beloved Savior and experiencing the frailties and troubles of this depraved and dying world, our yearnings for heaven become more and more intense. While we tread on this earth in our unredeemed bodies, the satisfaction we experience now as believers who intimately know Jesus Christ is only a foretaste of what we will experience before Him in His heavenly presence (Revelation 21-22). Only then will our yearnings be complete when we reach our heavenly home and kneel before the One who sits on His glorious throne (Revelation 4-5).

Therefore, while you cannot eliminate the bombardment of unwarranted and harmful imagery you face, you can come to grips with the biblical truth that your completion, fulfillment, and satisfaction is exclusively found in Christ alone by faith alone. God can empower you to give up the desire, which is an exercise in futility, to strive to embrace an identity that is provocative and popular, but altogether consumer-centered and imaginary. In fact, God invites you to experience His best if you will center your attention upon Him who is utterly beautiful and realistically perfect; the God of the Bible has committed Himself to your true good. The only condition to experience His very best in the "now" and for all eternity is to place your trust in Him for salvation.