

## WHY CANNOT I FIND FULFILLMENT? THE SEARCH FOR LASTING COMPLETENESS ©

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5 March 2012

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### Why cannot I find fulfillment?

One of the most elusive aspects of living life is finding lasting satisfaction. So many of us are unfulfilled people! We long for something better. Sure, we experience punctuated moments of meaning when we encounter a beautiful sunset, see new sights, hear the laugh of children, experience new delicacies, and reach our long-term goals. When we encounter the extraordinary in the ordinary or become the recipients of specific acts of love we taste delight, feel value, and experience significance.

But why are not these pleasures and acts of love enough for us? Why are we left unfulfilled even with these numerous and substantive meaningful experiences? We routinely and perhaps secretly ask ourselves, "Is there something more to life than what I have right now?"

As a result, some of us come to a point in our lives whereby we drop all our connections and move to a new context, a new paradigm, and a new home, hoping we will find "sweeter fields" where lasting contentment will be found, where completion will take place, and on-going satisfaction will abound. Fortunately, for some of us, we discover what we are looking for-sometimes in the most surprising ways. But this is not common for many of us. Why? Well, consider the following:

***Always searching but never finding.*** Some of us come to the sad realization that even after we made the move, changed our context, and made new inquiries, contentment, completion, and satisfaction evaded us; the lack of internal fulfillment remains. What do we do? We move from place to place, person to person, home to home, job to job, hobby to hobby, and activity to activity. Never finding what we are looking for, we continue to walk through this life always searching and always hoping that lasting fulfillment might be around the next bend. The search continues...

***Sacrificing our happiness for the sake of others.*** Instead of searching for fulfillment, many of us continue to remain where we have always been. Because of pressures at home, families, and other responsibilities or duties, we are in a rut and we know it. There might have been a time when we could have made a change, but we have too many responsibilities to leave now. We resign ourselves to the notion that our longings for satisfaction will never be realized in our own lives; the dye has been cast. Out of duty to others we sacrifice our happiness so others may find

fulfillment. Thus, we attempt to find solace in the happiness of others-even though we continue to cry within.

***Immobilized by the unknown.*** Others of us remain unfulfilled because we are immobilized by the unknown. Familiarity generates security and the unknown generates too much tension, whether emotionally, spiritually, and physically. We long for fulfillment but we just cannot seem to cross the threshold of familiarity into the seeming sea of uncertainty. Even when we take a risk and move beyond what we have come to know, the anxieties and fears become too much for us to take more than a few more steps. So, we retreat back into what is familiar; we settle with what we have always known. It is not that we love our state of incompleteness. Instead, we do not have the disposition or the resolve to face what might happen in order to intimately know and experience lasting contentment, completeness, and satisfaction. In other words, potential problems always outweigh the possibilities. We hate change. There are many who cherish what they have always known; they like their routine and would rather remain unfulfilled than embrace something new. They hate change. Thus, they remain unfulfilled for change is too much to bear. See, the need for security trumps one's longings for completeness. In fact, if you try to force them to change, they may turn against you.

***We are dominated by bad habits and destructive appetites.*** Sadly, I have met people who hunger for fulfillment, but have allowed vices, that is, bad habits and destructive appetites, to occupy, dominate, and capture their desires, feelings, thoughts, and actions. They know these vices are wrong, but they cannot help themselves. They hate and love these false pleasures. As a result, they cannot get past their vices to discover authentic satisfaction. So, they continue where they are, allowing the marring and scarring of sinful desires and actions to wreak havoc upon, within, and through their lives. Like Oscar Wilde's character, Dorian Gray, people with character deficiencies may find themselves spiraling downward as their appetites for sin become more and more insatiable. Sadly, unless intentional changes are made, these vices will eventually dominate their destiny while inflicting pain upon those who love them best. While they refuse to change, their appetite for sin is changing them.

***We are undeserving of satisfaction.*** Interestingly, there are those who believe they are undeserving of satisfaction. Though the longings for satisfaction are so intense whereby they feel, see, and hear the emptiness everywhere, they have developed the mindset that they are undeserving of it because of past mistakes and failures. They fail to understand the nature of God's grace (undeserved favor); they ignore the testimonies of those like "Saul the Christian persecutor" who became the "apostle Paul" or people like the former slave trader John Newton who wrote the famous hymn of freedom, "Amazing Grace." People like Saul who became Paul and John Newton made terrible mistakes but found redemption, peace, and hope in Jesus Christ when they placed their trust in Him for eternal life. Jesus Christ, as prophesied in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, who is the God-man, paid our debt of sin so that we could be free to love to Him, to experience God's very best both in the "now" and

in the future where we will one day be free from sin (Revelation 21-22). It is a terrible mistake to come to the conclusion that God's grace is not able to redeem people of their past. There is always hope while one has the air to breathe. Even with believers-instead of confessing their sin to God (1 John 1:9), turning away from their behavior in repentance (Revelation 2:5; 3:2; 19), mortifying those sinful appetites (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5), and trusting God as the One who is the sum-total of one's perfections, I have met Christians who demand to be their own judge, jury, and executor. So, they deny themselves of the possibility of contentment, completion, and satisfaction in their daily living as a form of self-punishment. Instead of taking their past and laying it down at the feet of Jesus Christ, acknowledging their mistakes and counting on His divine provision in 1 John 1:9, they hold onto their mistakes and beat themselves (usually psychologically) for their wrongdoing. For some reason, they have come to the false conclusion that God's grace is not able to redeem them of their past. So, they become their own worst enemies, denying themselves of God's very best because they want to handle their mistakes on their terms and not God's terms-even though God's way of dealing with our sin is the best way.

***We cannot get beyond our past.*** Some of us are not able to discover fulfillment because we cannot seem to get beyond our past. The pain we have experienced in this life is too great to pursue fulfillment. The traumatic blows we have encountered, whether physical or emotional, are too traumatic to pursue completeness. We are wounded; we are hurting; we are royally messed up. No matter how hard we might try, we are too broken to move forward. In fact, we may even contend that recovery from our past is not even possible. So, we allow our pain to immobilize us from experiencing the possibility of contentment, completion, and fulfillment.

"Living" in the past will "exist" in the present. The memories from our past are too powerful for us to search for fulfillment in the present. Thus, we dwell in the past. We may even contend that the moments of meaning we once experienced will never resurface again because our present circumstances are so different. Our past accomplishments, our past recognitions, or the memories of the ones who have loved us, are too powerful, and perhaps too addictive to let go. We may even believe that we are betraying those who loved us if we press forward with possibility of searching for completeness. We may even turn to our past victories and past moments of meaning as a way to avoid the future, the seeming uncertainties of life. In fact, some of us have become so fearful of potential failure because of our past accomplishments that we romanticize the past in an effort to cover up our fears of this unknown future. Interestingly, some look to the past for fulfillment even though the past is the past. So, we remain, and remain unfulfilled.

***Fulfillment in this life is not even possible.*** Lastly, I have encountered some who do not believe that fulfillment is even possible. Because they have come to the conclusion that existence itself is absurd, an accident which emerged from random configurations of chance, energy, and matter, the idea of satisfaction is a human longing that will never be satisfied; it is all wishful thinking. We are merely accidents with no purpose- no formal and final *telos* at all. In fact, to not exist is the

same as to exist. Related, others have come to the conclusion that since there is “no infinite and personal God” who can fulfill these longings because we are accidents in an accidental universe, these longings we possess need to be stripped from us. So, they attempt to mortify these longings through various means. But the irony is that that they long to no longer have these longings in an effort to find fulfillment.

### **How can I obtain fulfillment?**

In all of these above cases the search for completeness is rooted in misperceptions of completeness and the disposition of the will. However, this is not the case for everyone. From the ashes of difficult circumstances, others have discovered contentment, completeness, and satisfaction. As a result, they have experienced more than they ever possibly imagined. Yes, people, like you and me, that is, ordinary people have experienced extraordinary completeness in the here and now. How did this come about?

**First, those who have discovered completeness, did not merely examine their incompleteness, they also followed it along.**

I have discovered that even among those who are celebrated in our culture as successful people, existential emptiness is wreaking havoc within. The evidence is everywhere. Popularity, wealth, and power did not generate fulfillment. As a result of this, disillusionment, addictions, pain, destruction, and tragedies have found pertinent expression. They long for completeness but are now weighed down by addictions, conflict, and broken relationships. They cry out for help, but the people around them are so enamored by their "celebrity success," that very few are ever really listening to their pleas.

Could it be that one reason why completeness is not experienced by so many is because they have been looking in the wrong places such as accomplishments, education, money, popularity, power, and physical relationships? Stated differently, have we been only looking at and merely treating the symptoms of emptiness and not going to the source? Are we merely looking at and treating the fruit of our emptiness and not the root of our emptiness? Could it be that the reason why completeness is not found in the material world with all of its punctuated moments of joys and sorrows is because lasting completeness is not found in the physical realm but in the spiritual realm?

Like C. S. Lewis once discovered, I submit to you that just as thirst, hunger, and physical intimacy are proofs that we are people from whom water, food, and sex is natural, the longing for completeness is supernaturally met in God because it is an immaterial, spiritual longing. Therefore, when we place our faith in God, believing that Jesus is the Son of God, who died on the cross for our sins and rose bodily from the dead, we receive eternal life. The only condition for salvation is faith and faith alone (cf. John 3:16). This type of eternal life fills the spiritual void within and

secures eternal joy because God takes up residence inside the believer by means of the Holy Spirit-just as Jesus promised in John 14:16-17.

This type of longing for completeness finds its fulfillment in God because we were designed to be spiritually dependent upon Him in intimate fellowship as evidenced in Genesis 1 & 2. But because of sin entering into the human race as stated by Paul in Romans chapter 1 and 5:12, we were born alienated/estranged from God. So, when we receive eternal life from God by means of faith, the alienation we have experienced for so long is removed and is replaced with His loving presence. As a result of intimately knowing God, we experience a "love that surpasses all understanding." This type of reconciliation is open to anyone who is willing to believe-no matter past mistakes, background, gender, race, or sexuality.

**Secondly, we have to maintain this intimacy in order to experience fulfillment in this life as we anticipate the future where intimacy with God will know no temporal hindrances.**

One day we will fully be in His presence in the most dynamic way as exemplified in Zephaniah 3 and Revelation 4-5. He will quiet with us with His love and we will rejoice in worshipping Him who is most beautiful! But when we turn our eyes away from Him to the pursuits of false pleasures, we hinder those experiential moments of fulfillment in moment-by-moment living; we are frail creatures. Because we live in unredeemed bodies in an unredeemed world, we can find ourselves so easily attracted to activities and pursuits that were never designed to fulfill us. Because these false pleasures are able to captivate our hearts and minds and stimulate our senses with the promise of even greater satisfaction in the most intoxicating ways, we find ourselves trapped by trickery like a lure ensnares a fish. In reality what has happened is that we allowed the world to distract us, to divert us from what is best to that which is evil. Cloaked in attractiveness, we find ourselves eating mud, when we could have been dining with the King. Sadly, if we eat mud too often we may even find ourselves developing an appetite for it, even though we know His best is in our best interests. Unfortunately, as we digest the mud, the mud changes us in the most unexpected ways.

But as believers, hope remains because we know Him; we are His sons and daughters. Because we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ, we are now part of the family of God. Like the account of the prodigal's son, God continually extends His hand to us as a loving father to his son, inviting us to return to Him and experience His presence with the confession of sin (1 John 1:9) and a turning away from such appetites.

Thus, continually fix your eyes upon the Lord. Look to Him always! Do not allow yourself become distracted by the enchanting sirens of destruction. Do not heed their call; stay the course! They only offer pain, ruin, and physical death. Seize Christ in the manner He has seized you!

**And third, I contend that our discontentment with this life is rooted in our homeward longings.**

We are not originally made for this physical life of toil but one of intimacy with God for all eternity. As we walk through this land as a pilgrim and heavenly citizen (1 Peter), the calling to our heavenly life becomes more and more inviting because we have seen that all that is physical is temporal, subject to change, corruption, and decay. Nothing in the physical realm truly ever satisfies our spiritual longings. It is a logical category mistake to assume that the reality of spiritual incompleteness can be fulfilled with a physical solution.

In conclusion, completeness comes from intimately knowing and "walking" with God because we were originally created to be in fellowship with Him (Genesis 1-2). Thus, spiritual incompleteness is filled when we turn ourselves to God because incompleteness is a spiritual problem that demands a spiritual remedy. God's abiding presence can fill the emptiness within (John 15).

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