

WHERE TO FIND SATISFACTION

Scriptures: Isaiah 55:1-11; John 6:25-35

There is a song by the band U2 called “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For.”
The words go like this:

I have climbed highest mountains, I have run through the fields
Only to be with you, only to be with you.

I have run, I have crawled,
I have scaled these city walls, these city walls,
Only to be with you.

But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for
But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.

I have kissed honey lips
Felt the healing in her fingertips
It burned like fire, this burning desire.

I have spoke with the tongue of angels
I have held the hand of a devil
It was warm in the night, I was cold as stone.

But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for
But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.

I wonder how many pursuits in life, how many quests, how many relationships have left
you feeling that way: like you still haven’t found what you are looking for.

Listen again to Isaiah 55:

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you that have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
And your labor for that which does not satisfy?

In his book: *The American Paradox*, which I have mentioned several times before, David G. Myers cites a 40-year study, done by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. The study compares people’s self-reported happiness with their household income. Between 1957 and 1998 the average income of American households doubled, even when adjusted for inflation. Even after accounting for the cost of living, people in America can buy twice as much today as they did 40 or 50 years ago. But in that same time period the percentage of people describing themselves as “very happy” actually declined, and the percentage of people

describing themselves as depressed increased by 1000%, ten times what it was in the 1950s (*The American Paradox*, pp. 136-137). We still haven't found what we're looking for.

Here is the surprise in Isaiah 55. You cannot buy what you are looking for. You cannot find it in a new job or a new house or a new spouse or a new fitness regimen. You cannot buy or earn or train your way into happiness. But you can have it for free. Isaiah says, "You that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

How do you buy something without money? You receive it as a gift. And how do you receive this gift of satisfaction from God? By coming and listening. Listen to the verbs that are used in the first three verses of Isaiah 55:

Verse 1: "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; come, buy wine and milk without money"

Verse 2: "Listen carefully to me"

Verse 3: "Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live"

This is terrible let down for people in a "can-do" society. Look at what is popular right now in our culture: self-help books and seminars, diets, exercise programs, financial planning, on-line educational degree programs. Even the most popular religions emphasize doing something to make your life better: meditating, giving, going on mission projects, being purpose driven even when it comes to religion. We are a culture that believes in doing things to make your life better. And these are all good things. Exercising, healthy eating, financial planning, self-improvement—how can anyone be against that? But Isaiah does not mention any of these things as the key to a satisfied life. Instead he uses words like come, listen, incline your ear.

What we are really looking for cannot be earned. It cannot be bought, it cannot be achieved through a degree or even through a mission project. It can only be found in a relationship—a relationship that is given to you free of charge, if you will accept it.

Further on in Isaiah 55, Isaiah uses different verbs. Verses 6-7:

"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near."

"Let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

"Seek, call, return"—these words are the counterpart to the verbs used in verses 1-2: "Come, listen, incline your ear." All of those words are an invitation to a relationship. Your ultimate satisfaction will not be found in what you earn, what you buy, what you accomplish, or in how you look. It will be found in your relationship to God: something that requires coming to God, listening to God, seeking God, calling upon God.

Did you notice the similarity between Isaiah 55 and our first scripture lesson in John 6? A crowd of people come to Jesus wanting to make him king because he has fed 5000 people with five loaves bread. Who wouldn't want a king like that? Someone who can balance the budget, fund social security, increase spending for education, and provide a complete prescription drug

benefit, without raising taxes or cutting back on military spending. He is the ideal candidate for president. But Jesus says to them, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” Son of Man is the way Jesus often refers to himself. It is a relationship with Jesus himself that gives you food for eternal life.

The crowd does not understand this. They are still thinking about self-help seminars and action plans and mission projects. They say to Jesus, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Their very question is based on the idea that satisfaction comes from our works, from what we do.

But Jesus replies, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he sent.” It is not your work that will bring ultimate satisfaction to your life; it is your relationship to God, a relationship that Jesus came to make possible.

Now I don’t mean to put down things like jobs or houses or mission trips or even things like diet and exercise. A few years before I turned fifty I joined 24-hour Fitness. I have no illusions about having a great body; I just hope to keep it upright. But one morning while I was working out, the background music at 24-hour Fitness was interrupted with an advertisement. A voice came on inviting people to join the 24-hour Fitness staff as a trainer. The voice said, “You can change people’s lives forever, and there aren’t many people who can say that about their job.”

After I heard that announcement, I looked around at all the people in the gym, including those strong, fit, muscle-toned trainers. And I thought, “You know, all these people will eventually get arthritis or cancer or heart disease or macular degeneration or Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s or some other terminal malady.” Exercise is not a path to immortality. It’s a rear-guard action we take trying to hold off the enemy while we retreat. No matter how well we eat or exercise, sooner or later our bodies will let us down.

So will many other things to which we might commit your lives: career, possessions, advancement, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a husband or wife, even parents or children. Sooner or later these things, good as they are, will let you down, especially if they become the sole focus of your life.

“Do not work for the food that perishes,” Jesus says, “but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” If you seek other things before God, those other things will eventually disappoint you. But here is the irony: if you seek first God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, you will discover more satisfaction in the other areas of your life than you thought possible. If your job, your family, your possessions, and even in your precious but deteriorating body, are not the ultimate priorities of your life, you will find more joy in them than if they were. For if you seek first the Bread of Life, all other bread in your life will taste that much better and be more fulfilling.

- Ken Onstot
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