

Filling Up

We long for fulfillment. This longing is not something to deny or avoid. It is God-given. However, we must use God-given methods to find satisfaction or we will end up desperate and dissatisfied.

Whether we recognized them as harmful or thought of them as simply coping mechanisms, most of us have chosen bad habits and negative attitudes to help us try to deal with an emptiness, a nameless pain, a desperate longing hidden deep inside. So now, when we stop those bad habits and seek to change the attitudes, what are we using to fill the empty place and deal with the pain they were covering?

Jesus clearly understands the emptiness of the cleaned up but empty heart. In the following picture he demonstrates how the failure to fill the vacancy is what leads to a devastating relapse.

Jesus said, "When a demon is cast out of a person, it goes to the deserts, searching there for rest; but finding none, it returns to the person it left, and finds that its former house is all swept and clean. Then it goes and gets seven other demons more evil than itself, and they all enter the person. And so the poor fellow is seven times worse off than he was before." (Luke 11)

When I say "no" to a negative or destructive thought, what truth am I affirming in its place? When I put away my self-centered and irresponsible life of addictive behaviour what new activities of service and blessing am I entering into? Is my life now being filled with God's power, God's people, God's values, and with the activities God says are good for me?

So be careful how you live, not as fools, but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do. Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you. (From Ephesians 5)

We regularly affirm, "There is a work for me to do today that will bless others and give me deep satisfaction." Living this principle has to start with a new belief. God cares and His heart's deepest longing is that I would experience life fully. The flip side of that truth is that any strategy I employ to find satisfaction outside of God will fail. There's not enough money, power, sex, drugs and rock and roll (as Lorna used to say) to ever fulfill me. I can run after those things all my life but I will always end up empty. The only power the devil has to get us to relapse is our failure to believe those two truths.

Jesus said: The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

Temptation says, "Good sex tonight is all I need." "One hoot will take away my need to feel." For a moment the rush might

divert our attention but the moment quickly passes and we are left with a deeper desperation than we had before. The truth I must inform myself with is: I can only find fulfillment within God's plan. I will always end up dissatisfied if I go after anything else. Deep and ultimate filling of our hearts does not come from outside circumstances or relationships. In fact, the "mother of all addictions" is this: "I will find satisfaction from someone or something outside of me." This is the lie, in it's many habits and obsessions, that we most need to leave behind in order to experience a fulfilled life.

Remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it. (1 Corinthians 10)

So, what is God's plan and God's way and how can I live in the way that blesses others and fills me to deep satisfaction? A filled and satisfying life is the result of living from the inside out. We must give first priority and unending focus to receiving tender care and abiding love from God at the deepest levels of our being. In the protection of that faithful love we then can begin to love others and in that being loved by God and loving others we find, surprising so perhaps, that we are actually more alive inside than we've ever been before. The filled and satisfying life is about giving rather than getting. It is about serving rather than being served. It is about forgiving rather than requiring someone else to own how they wronged us.

Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." (John 7:37-38)

At the same time, we need to make sure that the areas of vulnerability in our lives are being filled in healthy ways. Where we have hidden pain and loss, Jesus now invites us to name that pain, give it over to Him, and receive healing. Where we have lived lonely, Jesus invites us now to take healthy risks to build new networks with caring friends. Where we lack accountability because of gaps in our upbringing, Jesus now invites us to put ourselves under the guidance of a trustworthy person and let them train us and help us to grow. Where we are experiencing frustration and dissatisfaction in life today, God invites us to use these feelings as signals that there is something good we can do to serve Him and others and feed our deepest needs well at the same time.

We need to be shaped after God's plan. We need to be filled with God's healing power. We need to work hard to fill the gaps our addictions used to hide.

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What am I doing to fill empty places of longing and loneliness?
2. Where is God in my longing for fulfillment?
3. Deep inside, what do I believe today about how my deepest needs are met?