

CONTENTMENT AND FULFILLMENT, 2 pgs

THE BEST THING

It occurred to me that the writer of **Ecclesiastes** missed an entire area in his quest for meaning, purpose, and significance in a fallen world. If the author was Solomon, he certainly started well.

Solomon loved the Lord (1 Ki.3:3). He asked God for an understanding mind that he might properly govern the nation of (v.9), to understand and discern what is right (v.11). So, because he had not asked this from a merely selfish motive (v.11), God gave him a wise and discerning mind (v.12).

The writer of **Ecclesiastes** made a basic mistake by seeking self-fulfillment directly by pursuing happiness selfishly. He searched exhaustively in the area of **self-aggrandizement**, but it never occurred to him, it seems, to explore the area of **altruism** or **brotherly love**. In other words, he failed to explore the whole realm of possibilities this life affords in **philanthropy** or **helping others to succeed**. This is the area of **benevolence** and **beneficence** that focuses upon coming alongside others as a brother to heal their sorrows, dress their wounds, to help them get back on their feet, and achieve their dreams. It is the paradox Jesus spoke of, that **it is only in considering the welfare of others above our own (Phil.2:4) that we can find contentment**. It is an **indirect** approach - in losing our life, that we find it.¹ Jesus laid down His life for the sheep (**Jn.10:15**) and illustrated what it meant to love one's neighbor with the story of the Good Samaritan.

It is precisely at this point that **everyone who has received an expression of gratitude for helping someone along knows what it feels like**. I have found it to be so for even the very small instances that I have gone out of my way to lend a hand. Imagine a whole life dedicated to feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, helping the downcast back on their feet, caring for the sick, getting justice for the wronged, starting orphanages and hospitals, bringing hope to the downtrodden. Thankfully, **many** have experienced the joy of such service and would say to the Preacher, **You are wrong**, there is something **better** than work, and wisdom, and every other attempt at self-fulfillment ... even here, in this life *under the sun [between the horizons of birth and death]*. Without any consideration of an afterlife or reward than the satisfaction for our efforts here and now - no better personal fulfillment than to work for the benefit of others. However, even though we may find something better than self-indulgence, we must admit that the preacher is right in his overall assessment. **In the final analysis, without continuity of life and relationship with the infinite God who is personal, all is vanity.**

1 This is stated as a principle in **1 Cor.10:24** and **Lk.17:33** and applied to serving the Lord which largely involves denying ourselves in applying ourselves toward the sake of others. **Phil.2:20-21, Mk.8:35, Lk.9:24, Mt.10:39, 16:24-25, Jn.12:25, 1Cor.9:19-23, 10:33, 13:5, Rom.15:1-2**

WHAT IT TAKES

Let's expand on the above thoughts by asking the question, Discounting physical needs, what would it take to complete one - to fulfill one? In other words, **assuming that our individual personalities go into heaven² where there are no physical needs or longings, what is it [about heaven] that completes and fulfills us?** The **first answer** is in the area of **relationship** - love, acceptance, belonging;

company, and companionship; to be at peace and at home; to enter into the joy of God in His own perfection. Maybe this **is** the whole answer, but it's not the way I feel about it here and now. The **second answer** [if there is one] lies in the area of **occupying oneself ... intellectual needs** – learning, exploring, discovering; activities, and accomplishments. Once we are safe and at home with those we love and who love us, we are free to unleash our energies in meaningful endeavors and valuable projects; **creative effort and work**.

In these two areas, **relationship and work**, one finds what he is looking for to fill out his existence now. Relationship alone is not enough [at least in this life]. All of the pain and discontent inherent in a fallen abnormal world will be ended. We will be without the need or desire for pleasure, entertainment, diversion, or recreation; without weakness, sickness, insecurity, loneliness, discouragement, bore-dom, tiredness, dissatisfaction; with no unsettled feelings, discomfort, uneasiness; plagued by feelings of being lost, afraid, or outside; unhampered by physical limitations, incompetence, ignorance, or feelings of inadequacy; no longer plagued and disturbed by our sorrows, regrets and failures; without the specter of aging and death looming on the horizon. We will be freed from the strain of having to address and deal with problems and things we'd rather not, yet the absence of such troubles will not be enough for eternity. Perhaps rejoicing in our activities and finding fulfillment in applying ourselves to our endeavors before God will be. After all, isn't that the way it was in Eden?

2 I will still be me, but made like Christ ... righteous, good, etc.