

Is this it? Dissatisfied

Phil 4:10-23 (Thematic emphasis)

Cornerstone 6.30pm Sunday 30th June 2019

Usual Welcome

INTRO SERIES

As Hugh said, we're spending a short time responding to questions and concerns and anxieties that are sometimes know as the 'Quarter Life Crisis'

In other words, that sense, which is the title of Rachel Jones' book, of "Is this it?" The book quotes one person in their twenties saying, "I guess the emotion of my mid-twenties is longing. Longing for what I thought I'd have."

And we're tonight looking at the idea of dissatisfaction, longing and desire.

And whatever age you are, we all have questions about these ideas of satisfaction, longing and desire.

Are my desires good?

If you're a Christian - is it right to want good things for myself?

If I'm unsatisfied does that mean something's wrong, or is this normal?

So tonight, I want to go through four things that the whole Bible tells us on this topic of longing and Satisfaction, and the final point is going to land on the passage from Philippians we read, and as we explore the antidote to dissatisfaction, we're going to just see what that looked like for Paul to see what we can learn.

So here they are, the four things:

Firstly, scripture tells us that:

1. OUR CAPACITY FOR SATISFACTION IS LIMITLESS

By that I mean, it takes a lot to make us feel truly happy.

The meaning of "satisfied" means, "enough."

What does it take for the human heart, the human soul, to say, "I have enough. I have all the happiness I want?"

Answer: A huge amount.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

11 [God] has ... put eternity into [our hearts]

Isaiah 43:7 - we have been created for God's **Glory**.

To know infinite excellence, brilliance, intelligence, beauty. Eternally.

In other words, scripture tells us that God has made us with large hole in our souls which only he can fill.

PERHAPS ONLY DISCOVER IN OUR 20s?

And perhaps our 20s, when we have stopped developing psychologically, is where we really start to become aware of this.

Our anxieties become harder to quell as we develop from birth psychologically

My 3-year-old was very anxious about starting school, it was change, it was scary. Then school sent him a biscuit and now he can't wait to go to school 'cos there's biscuits. He's satisfied by biscuit and the promise of more biscuits to come.

You can do that when you're 20: "I'm worried about my life's purpose and meaning, my job is going nowhere, I'm worried I'll be lonely,"; "Have a biscuit."

Our anxieties become increasingly difficult to quell. And then you reach your 20s, and you realise that you're a grown up, and that the world is no longer looking to invest in you, but it's your turn to invest. And more than biscuit and tickles are going to quell them.

And yet we still have longings. And perhaps those longings have become deeper and more complex than they have ever been, and harder and harder to meet.

The Bible tells us: God has set eternity in our hearts. We were made for infinite excellence in the Glory of God. There really is a very large hole to fill.

So firstly, our capacity for satisfaction is limitless.
That is good news, because joy can be ours,
As long as we find the right thing to fill it.

But secondly,

2. OUR COMPASS FOR SATISFACTION IS BROKEN

Scripture's testimony is that we are created with an infinite capacity for satisfaction, for delight, for joy. Of such magnitude that only God can fill.

And so, if we have God, that's fine, if we don't, that's a huge problem.

And the story of humanity, according to Scripture, is this, that because humanity has turned its back on God.

Because there has been a fracture between God and humanity, a fracture as old as humanity itself, several things have happened to us as people, to the human machine.

i) We are blind to the God who promises satisfaction.

I was at a meeting last month with some 6th form students discussing this, and one (atheist) student said this: “is there something wrong with me that I just don’t feel the need for God?”

And the Biblical answer is, “Yes” I nearly said that, but didn’t want to be quite as blunt.

But that is the truth

Scripture is replete with this diagnosis of spiritual blindness in the story of humanity.

New Testament: John 1, “God came to that which was his own, but his own did not recognise him.”

2 Corinthians 4: The God of this age has blinded people’s minds.

And we feel that, because when I say, “God is the source of human satisfaction, that can alone fill our infinite capacity for enjoyment, excellence, glory, goodness,” it feels implausible to us. Even if you are a sold-out Christian who knows the answers already. We don’t see it. Even people who have been Christians for decades, we feel like we need more.

ii) Not only are we blind, but our eyes and hearts are naturally drawn towards craving those things which we think will bring us satisfaction

Rachel Jones in her book uses this analogy, it’s like we’re looking at the world through binoculars. And we look at the lesser and temporal things with the binoculars the right way around, so they look bigger to us, and lure us.

And she talks us through Psalm 73, where the Psalmist is looking at every that non-believers have, and saying, “why aren’t I that wealthy or flourishing or healthy?”

And social media of course, expands this process 10x. People mostly only put things on social media that they want people to like. I only put things on social media I want things to like. It doesn’t really make sense to log on and post, “Hey all, today I made a disappointing omelette.” Who cares?!

But social media multiplies massively our search for things that are put forward that we believe will make us happy. We have the binoculars on it, whereas, when we look at the things of God, we turn the binoculars round, and Christianity and God feels thin or insignificantly, certainly not the sort of thing that we can rest our lives on.

That’s the result of our fallen nature - even what we can see is distorted.

But not only, worse news what has happened to humanity is this

iii) Our capacity for satisfaction has become broken, so even when we seek God, our brokenness can prevent us from enjoying Him.

Jeremiah 2:13 characterises humanity condition as a broken cistern - it says, not only do we look for satisfaction at things that will harm us - dirty water rather than clean water - but, we have become like broken vessels, so that even if we did find God, we would struggle to receive what He has to offer us.

Counsellors will attest that often children who have had traumatic childhoods, particularly young women who had Fathers who were absent or abusive or detached, will themselves struggle to maintain a romantic relationship because they are unable to receive love. If they find a husband, that husband can be as doting and as loving, and as committed as they can possibly be, but she won't hear it, she won't carry it, that love will not nourish her. Because she is broken.

I've known a couple of relationships that are like that.

And Scripture seems to be saying that, all in our different ways, humanity is like that. That even when we do turn to find God and find our satisfaction in Him then we tend to not feel it. But that's a problem with us, that's our brokenness.

So in all of these different ways, our compass and our capacity for satisfaction is broken, in other words, we are looking the wrong direction for that which will ultimately satisfy us.

Our problem is not only with trying to find satisfaction in things

- not only harmful things
- good things out of proportion (because we are broken).

TWENTIES IN TWO AREAS

But the universal brokenness of our humanity is amplified in the 20s generation in two specific areas.

i) Around the area of life expectations & work

The post-war generation, my parents generation, on the whole, were just happy to have a job that paid the bills. They were just happy there wasn't a war.

And not only that, but work wasn't seen as a means of self-actualization, or self-fulfilment. I was really struck a couple of years ago, when I was having a cup of tea with a lady in this congregation in her 80s, who said, "I was lucky enough to have a husband who could provide for me, so I didn't have to work, and I could just focus on bringing up our four children."

This isn't a comment on women and work and family, but just highlighting how much more now, we find our identities in our jobs, and the 20s generation have this extra demand on their role that it brings significant and frequent personal satisfaction. They 'make' us who we are.

It has a 'God-like' status in identity forming and life fulfilment

But your work is not weighty enough to fill that hole.

But expectations generally in life are amplified by technology.

Rachel Jones points out that when we like something that our friends post, we don't really like it - we resent it. Everyone else's lives seem better than ours.

So there's an expectations issue with this generation - not their fault, it's out pouring of a culture that's been created.

But secondly:

2. Technology & relationships

The relationships of this generation have been decimated by technology.

In late 2016 Entrepreneur Simon Sinek talked about this in a much-shared online interview, you may well have seen this already, let's hear a little bit:

<Simon Sinek video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hER0Qp6QJNU&t=627s> [3.14-7.26]>

Now, every generation has its things it turns to that they think will bring satisfaction. But there's something about the addictiveness of tech and its impact on relationships for this generation that we've been slow to see.

1. Our **capacity** for satisfaction is **limitless**
2. Our **compass** for satisfaction is **broken**

We don't get happiness where we think we will find happiness.

3. OUR LONGING FOR SATISFACTION IS LEGITIMATE

What is the solution in the gospel?

If our compass for satisfaction is broken, we need to reset the compass.

But our problem is not that we seek satisfaction.

The problem is not that we need to decrease our desire.

The issue is that we need to seek desire in God.

And in the reading we heard tonight, Paul starts by saying, "I rejoiced in the Lord..."

And this leads us to Paul and Philipians, and the passage we read starts like this: "I rejoiced in the Lord." And Joy and rejoicing comes up in Philipians a lot. Back in verse 4 Paul command rejoicing: Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.

And in order to seek our joy and fulfil our longings in God, that will almost certainly involve making sacrifices, particularly sacrificing those things that we put before God.

But it has to be **both those things**:

- Sacrificing the things which get between us and God AND:
- Training ourselves to find joy in God.

There is a tendency, particularly in conservative churches, to rightly preach the message of “pick up your cross,” “offer yourself as living sacrifices,” “Be a servant of all,” without balancing the why. Why do we do those things? To bring Glory to God. How do we bring glory to God? By finding our delight in him.

C.S. LEWIS

C.S. Lewis famously wrote about this in an essay called, “The Weight of Glory”. Students especially, if you have time over the holiday for reading, you can just google this and download it for free, “The Weight of Glory” by C.S. Lewis. And he starts by explain that the call to self-sacrifice is never the end point of the Christian hope, the Christian journey. Instead he says this:

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

Your longing for satisfaction, to see your longings fulfilled, is legitimate.

DEUTERONOMY 16

This is why when you read about God’s people in the Old Testament, God prescribes joy!

Read Deuteronomy 16, it talks about worship in terms of feasts:

The Feast of Weeks

...You shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the Lord your God blesses you. 11 And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, to make his name dwell there. 12

The Feast of Booths

13 “You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress. 14 You shall rejoice in your feast... For seven days you shall keep the feast to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.

Now, I know that some of you who have office Christmas parties will be sceptical of compulsory fun... but here’s the message: God commands joy. He wants you to be joyful. For your good! He wants worship to be joyful and enjoyable. Because that’s how we glorify him.

20s - BURNT OUT

Now, why do I make this point?

At my last church, I led a connect group. And in that connect group were three couples in their late twenties: two married, and one dating couple. And of those couples, every single one of the men in those couples was either on the edge of losing their faith, or was profoundly disillusioned by the Christian walk, but still holding on.

Now their stories all had nuances, of course, but when you looked at it there were basic reasons for this. For one of them, they had been promises Christianity that was candy-floss and rainbows. That if you're really obedient nothing will go wrong. And things had gone drastically wrong, and he had to basically reconstruct his faith from the bottom

The other two, had grown up in churches that had leant on them hard for service, and preached to them sacrifice, it seems, for the sake of sacrifice. On a vain promise of something more, that just hadn't delivered. And it sucked. And that church dynamic is most dangerous for 20 somethings, because they are often leant on the hardest. By the time you're married with kids your life is kind of full up anyway, and you're just in survival mode. The disillusionment hits harder when you've given everything and not got anything back.

The American pastor Tim Keller, who has ministered a lot to this generation has commented on this, that we too easily see churches full of a congregation caught in the gap of having made the sacrifices but not really knowing how to find fulfilment in Christ in a real way.

And it's dangerous. "The Joy of the Lord is your strength." (Neh 8:10b) If you have no joy you have no strength.

We need to learn what Paul learnt - what it is to find Joy in God, and then Paul goes on to say, "do not be anxious about anything (v6)" And in verse 12, where we read, he says, "I have learned the secret of contentment."

What is that secret?

1. Our **capacity** for satisfaction is **limitless**
2. Our **compass** for satisfaction is **broken**
3. Our **longing** for satisfaction is **legitimate**

My last point:

4. OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS SATISFACTION IS LEARNED (v12)

Verse 12 - the secret is a learned secret.

Because if we are broken vessels, struggling to hold the love God pours on us.
If our eyesight is limited.
If we are looking in the wrong direction.

Then we can bet that Paul's secret is a secret because it is counter-intuitive, and will play against our instincts.

We not only need healing, we need help, and a different vision for our lives.

For Paul, this contentment looks like, being under house arrest in Rome.
Being in prison, chained to a prison guard.

What is the secret that he has learned?

1. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (v13)

Your relationship with Christ is the most important thing; because through Christ you had a strength that can transcend circumstance.

Living as a Christian needs supernatural help. And if we try and do Christianity without supernatural help we'll be in trouble. AN illustration:

SAINSBURY'S ILLUSTRATION

Last Christmas, my parents-in-law took the whole family as treat to a show at the O2 arena. After the show we wanted just to get a quick, cheap bite to eat before we embarked on our journeys home. And we found a Sainsbury's nearby on an industrial estate - it was a huge warehouse, just one floor, except for the café, which was up on a mezzanine level, where you could sit and eat your meal, gazing out at the glory of Sainsbury's and their produce.

But we got to the café, and it was quite late, and we order the kids meals first, and they didn't have chicken nuggets left, so the kids had fish-fingers. And then we started to order our meals, and basically the conversation went like this:

"Can I have a burger?" Oh, we're run out of burgers.

"How about a jacket potato and chilli?" Oh, we're out of chilli.

"Jacket potato and beans?" Oh, wait, we don't have jacket potatoes either.

"Ok, how about an omelette?" Oh, no eggs.

At which point my brother in law turned round and said, "Can't they just, go to Sainsbury's?" We're in this shop, full of more food it would take us to eat in a lifetime, and there telling us there's nothing!

APPLICATION

And there are too many Christians, particularly in their 20s, who, through no fault of their own, end up doing ministry like that. They're the servers at the Sainsbury's café, being sacrificial servants, trying to serve people, without any of the resource to do it, and yet having all this resource promised to them, but unable to find it.

And maybe too many churches have been geared simply to turn our 20-somethings into ministry workers and nothing more.

We need to learn to pull on our resource of joy in Christ and strength in Him.

2. Partnership with the Church (v14-15)

Paul has learned contentment - but it's his partnership with this church gives him Joy (1:4-5). Paul talks about the church.

- "Sharing in trouble"
- "Providing for needs"
- "Giving and receiving"

Friends, so much of the voices in today's culture are saying that you will find happiness in independence. It's not true. We find happiness when we have to rely on one another.

DAVID BROOKS - PARADOX OF PRIVILEGE

A Canadian commentator called David Brooks released a book this year, where he commented on a 2007 Gallup poll that asked people around the world whether they felt they were leading meaningful lives. It turns out that Liberia was the country where the most people felt a sense of meaning and purpose, while the Netherlands was the place where the lowest percentage of people did.

This is not because life was necessarily sweeter in Liberia. On the contrary. But Liberians possessed ... “existential urgency.” In the turmoil of their lives, they were compelled to make fierce commitments to one another merely to survive. They were willing to risk their lives for one another. And these fierce commitments gave their lives a sense of meaning.

That’s the paradox of privilege. When we are well-off we chase the temporary pleasures that actually draw us apart. We use our wealth to buy big house with big yards that separate us and make us lonely. But in crisis we are compelled to hold closely to one another in ways that actually meet our deeper needs.

- David Brooks, The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life

We see in Philippians a picture of a Church fiercely committed to each other in so much more important ways than turning up to set meetings.

It’s lives intertwining as we suffer and serve in the gospel. And in a few weeks Jonny will be spending a whole sermon talking about antidotes to loneliness. But here’s a summary:

The Gospel says: In Jesus, God has entered into our trouble and has shared infinitely of himself.

The secret is found in this: that Christ enters into our world to enter into our mess: “For the joy set before him.”

3. Gratitude (v18)

18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

When Paul talks about ‘receiving full payment,’ he is saying this: Christ has paid it all.

The wages of my actions, my selfishness, rebellion - would have been death. But Jesus has died for me. And instead of death I have been paid life in him.

And because I have everything in Jesus Christ, and I am learning to enjoy him and revel in that... all of my actions now are an outpouring of gratitude. And, he says, I recognise this same motivation among the church in Philippi - that’s why he says, “this sacrifice is acceptable to God.” He recognises that in helping Paul they are not paying God taxes, so that they can have the rest of their lives back. They are giving to him as an outpouring of gratitude to God.

Paul's key to contentment and joy then, seem to be these three:

1. Knowing God.
2. Sharing life with others meaningfully.
3. Knowing Gratitude that has come from the Grace of God.

HAVARD ARTICLE

Just this week one of our congregation members posted online an article where a Harvard Professor of medicine compiled various studies to come up with four things that make people happy. Three of these four things are in this passage, and the other one is definitely a Christian idea. Those four things are:

1. Friends and Family
2. Forgiveness
3. Giving
4. Gratitude.

My friends, we only have the power to be reconciled to one another because Jesus first reconciled us to God.

We only have the power of forgiveness because God has first forgiven us in Jesus.

We only have the power to give because Jesus has first given us all of himself.

We only have the motivation for gratitude because God has been infinitely generous.

KNOW JESUS

God in Jesus Christ has gone to the cross for you.
Because he gave up everything that the soul longs for.
Dignity, comfort, health, life.

Because he shouts, "I thirst" from the cross.
We can drink from the Spirit of life, God himself in us.

We can find in him our soul's satisfaction.