

Enjoying the Gifts and the Fun

Christmas is over. Decorations are back in the boxes. Wrapping paper torn away. Gifts opened with delight. Fireworks are spent and ham and black-eyed peas consumed. It is okay to enjoy the gifts we've gotten, to take pleasure in fruits of our labor. It's not a bad thing to enjoy the things of this world, but it is wise to remember that the normal process means these enjoyments pass into our history to eventually be forgotten. Entertainment, the thrill of the new video game, the gadgets, a new car, a new phone will soon no longer be new. We will get used to them. They will become routine and maybe even boring.

"Nobody remembers what happened yesterday. And the things that will happen tomorrow? Nobody'll remember them either. Don't count on being remembered. (Ecclesiastes 1 MSG)

"If we begin to think the gifts themselves will fill us up, complete our lives, we invite grief." (Gather Ministries, WiRE 1-15-24)
Grief is painful. It involves sadness, loss, even anger. It is good to remember that grief and loss lesson when we start deluding ourselves about how rewarding the things of this world are.

Throughout my life I have enjoyed getting new things. Novelty is engaging and exciting – until it's not. I've discovered that I need to focus more on God and the messages he has left for me in the Bible for gratification. When I search out inspiring books and things of that nature, I feel peaceful and full. That's what the word fulfilling means.

I enjoy eating. In fact I enjoy it too much -- to the extent that sometimes I eat too much or unhealthy things. And I might even get satiated and stuffed. But after a while, I will either get hungry again, or my numerous appetites will kick in. Eating, as pleasurable as it might be, does not make me spiritually or emotionally full. It takes a different kind of food to do that.

Humans make the same mistake we have made for eons. The Jews for example, were expecting a messiah who would have social and political power and would lead their nation to dominance and prosperity. Instead, they got a messiah who was drawn to people who were down and out (Matthew 25:40) and in fact, he rebuked the money changers for their abuse of the temple for material rather than spiritual gain. The Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom and Jesus is a spiritual king. (John 3:5)

One other thing. We cannot become the people we want to be by ourselves. Relationships are important because we were made to be social animals. Isolation and withdrawal end up in loneliness, sadness, anger and/or ennui. But even relationships can become dead ends and dysfunctional depending on their bases. Watching a football game together is fun at the time, but after it's over and you have reviewed the great plays and player achievements, what then?

When you've reached a dead end, look up or examine yourself. I read a quote from Dostoevsky a friend sent me about being honest with yourself. It suggests that we examine ourselves and the parts of our lives where we have not been honest with ourselves. Go to God in prayer, service, Word, or meditation. Follow Jesus' example. He frequently went off alone for prayer and reflection. He was human and even he had to stop, be quiet, reflect, and find the Divine in himself. We too need to pursue godliness in ourselves, that is, in our behavior and attitudes. (1 Corinthians 1:2)

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