

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • AUGUST 30, 2020

“IT’S ALL ABOUT SOUL”

Song of Focus

“Satisfaction (Ecclesiastes)”

Words and Music by Ed Varnum

1. The king surveyed his vineyards, his gardens, and his orchards,
the beauty that he planted, possessions that he owned,
his buildings with their servants, the fields with sheep and shepherds,
the power that he wielded, his wealth of silver, gold.

He realized in anguish, these gave no satisfaction,
within his soul eternity was placed by God above.

He yearned for something deeper than possessions, power, and pleasure;
he longed for satisfaction embraced by the God of love.

2. The king, in all his wisdom, pondered each thing in its season,
a time to brace against the cold, a time the sun will shine,
a time to weep a time to laugh, to talk and to stay silent.
He noticed everything on earth has beauty in its time.

But as each season cycled back around, he felt no satisfaction
within his soul eternity was placed by God above.

He yearned for something deeper than possessions, power, and pleasure;
he longed for satisfaction embraced by the God of love.

3. Listen with me to the king as he pondered in great wisdom,
seeking in his riches for some meaning, for some rhyme,
telling us in gratitude the good of God’s creation,
and for every earthly thing there is beauty in its time.

But don’t expect that on this earth you’ll find true satisfaction,
for in your soul, eternity was placed by God above.

You will feel the longing there for what only God can give you,
that lasting satisfaction embraced by the God of love.

Tag:

So, don’t expect from earthly things to find true satisfaction,
for in your soul eternity was placed by God above.

Can you feel the longing there for what only God can give you,
that lasting satisfaction embraced by the God of love?

The Scripture 3 John 1-8

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.

I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth. Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you; they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; for they began their journey for the sake of Christ, accepting no support from non-believers. Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth.

The Message ***It's All About Soul: Satisfaction*** Mark Briley

Synopsis: The Rolling Stones wrote the anthem to the lives of many – *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*. We search the corners of the earth but come up empty in our quest for satisfaction. The soul is incapable of satisfying itself, but it also spins with endless angst until it is satisfied. Soul satisfaction is only made complete in God as we walk with each other in the truth. Is your soul satisfied?

“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.” (3 John 2)



I can be a nostalgic person. There are things that I see or experience that take me back to another time... often a simpler time or a time when peace was the prevailing feeling. Sometimes it's a place, an actual location. When you drive by it, you're whisked away to another day, a previous season of life that you now mark as a pivotal moment of change, even transformation.

I remember the hotels we stayed in when visiting Indianapolis and Tulsa for the first time... cities we were in town to consider a Calling in our lives that would require a move. Months, years even decades pass, and I drive by those hotels remembering

who I was at that time, what life was like, what I wondered about the future. If Carrie and the kids are with me, I'll say it aloud. "*There's the hotel we stayed in when we were thinking about moving to Tulsa.*" It was close enough to our house that we drove by it often after moving there, so someone in the car often beat me to the punch before I could even say the words. "*That's the hotel we stayed at... we know dad.*"

It became sort of a thing, and so I mostly started saying it to get a rise out of the family. But... there's something satisfying to thinking back about those moments in our lives where everything changed, or that we made a decision that altered our lives in a major way, or a time when so and so was still with us.

You've got a past; some course that set you off in the world to do what you did or to be who you've since become. On our ZOOM @ NOON call last Monday... a time we've held every Monday for months now that anyone can pop into for 45 minutes, chat about the world, pray, connect, we got a little nostalgic. I asked those on the call if they would think back to that first calling in their life... a first passion... that thing that they wanted to be when they grew up. It was fun to hear stories from these friends who remembered back... "*I just drove by, went in and was hired on the spot. Changed everything,*" one said. There were stories about leadership awards in middle school and photographic memories. There were stories of friends who said, "*Let's go do this!*" and they did and it changed everything for decades to come. It was good for my soul to hear them speak of the satisfaction their souls experienced in those moments.

In a time when The Rolling Stones still hold the anthem for the lives of many – (*I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* – it made me think about the conclusion of today's summer of soul series at Broadway. Is your soul satisfied? Is it only satisfied in hindsight? Can it only be satisfied at some later date? Can we live in the present moment with a satisfied soul? These questions came to mind.

We turn to Third John to close out this soul series today. Depending on how you count, it's often in the running for shortest book in the Bible. Just 219 Greek words. It's just a letter from a friend to another friend. Totally informal and a bit of a wonder sometimes that the group gathered around at the meeting, eating Chex Mix and wondering what letters, stories, accounts would get voted into what became the Bible – why did this letter make the cut?.

Perhaps it humanizes John a bit. Endearing that he would send this postcard to his buddy Gaius. "*I love you, man!*" John starts. It's as if they were riding together down the main drag of their college town, pointing to each little place that held some memory from their past. "*I hope you're well, my friend. I hope good fortune is keeping you going and most of all... I hope that your soul is satisfied.*"

The soul does stir, doesn't it? You can't quite pinpoint it like you can your stomach when it growls and a burrito fixes the ache. The soul is that thing that stirs until it rests in what it knows is fully right. It's why the injustices of the world stretch the soul... it aches knowing it's just not there yet. And we try. "*If I just think the right things,*" my soul will be satisfied. "*If I believe the right things my soul will be whole.*" But soul satisfaction does not come with right belief but in right relationship.

I wonder if this is why Paul, when talking about taking communion says, "*If you've got a problem with somebody else, get out of the communion line at church, go seek that person out, and get your relationship right first. Then take communion.*" How many of us would ever take communion if we honored this advice to the letter of the law? But we know that churning, right? When things just aren't right with the soul?

Eugene Peterson, who translated the Bible into what is called *The Message*, names this well when it comes to John's letters and why he writes them. Introducing John's letters, he says, "*The two most difficult things to get straight in life are love and God. More often than not, the mess people make of their lives can be traced to failure or stupidity or meanness in one or both of these areas.*"

Is that true for you? He goes on: "*The basic and biblical Christian conviction is that the two subjects are intricately related. If we want to deal with God the right way, we have to learn to love the right way. If we want to love the right way, we have to deal with God the right way. God and love can't be separated.*"¹

Until we can operate first out of a loving soul, our soul won't be satisfied. When our primary motivator is greed or anger or revenge or pride, we're just going to keep churning along, unsatisfied, and bitter.

John does his best in these letters to show us Jesus, who offers the mature working-out of love in his own life. It's a hard road. We watch political conventions and get all fired up. We get caught up in our silos and bubbles, and we make those things our God... which comes with its own style of love. It ultimately becomes a distraction from the love that Jesus demonstrates for us.

I don't want to hear that any more than you do. I like to think my silo or my bubble has all the right answers, and I've stretched my soul as far as it needs. But when I think I've reached the point of having it all figured out... that I'm the keeper of all the right answers... I've eliminated my chance to grow. When we're in such a place, our ability to be self-aware is lost, and we become a caricature of this bubble of belief instead of a dynamic, relational, loving soul.

¹ From the introduction to the epistles of John as found in *The Message*. Eugene Peterson. NavPress. Colorado Springs. 2002.

Jenni Cantron, a leadership expert, goes as far as to say this: *“Self-awareness is the greatest predictor of success.”* I might shift it to add, *“Self-awareness is the greatest predictor of soul satisfaction.”* If you’re not aware of who you are, your shadow sides, your balance of confidence and humility, you’re likely shooting for some status that will only leave you longing. You’ll spend much of your days writing other people off because you think in so doing, you’ll satisfy your own soul.

And John, writing to his old buddy says, *“You make your faith visible when you make space for others... even when they’re strangers.”* This is not just a seat at the Table, though that is important... it is making space for right relationship. We’re not checking boxes about if you and I believe all the same right things. We’re saying, *“Tell me where you’ve been, what you’ve been through, what makes you who you are... what you’re passionate about becoming yet.”*

I asked this question of our ZOOM @ NOON friends, too. We reminisced about first passions, first callings, hotels that we stayed in that one time when we were thinking about making a life change... but then I proposed a thought from French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who said, *“Beyond rational and critical thinking, we need to be called again!”*² And I thought, *“Yes. That’s it.”* Soul satisfaction comes in the fulfillment of calling.

We’re stumbling through this pandemic and thinking if we just wait it out, or tread water or hang on... it will all work out. And we know there’s some truth to that. We can’t do *“all the things,”* as my friend would say. But a pandemic can’t squelch a passionate soul.

No matter your age or stage in life, Ricoeur says, *“Find that soul passion now... in a new way.”* It might, and likely will be, different from that first calling, but your soul will feel it the same. *“We need to be called again.”* He says, *“This calling can lead to the discovery of a “second naiveté,” which is a return to the joy of our first naiveté, but now totally new, inclusive, and with mature thinking.”*

Don’t push down the passion because you *“know better”* now. Ricoeur is saying, *“No... use what you’ve learned, your wisdom, your experience... don’t let it make you jaded or bitter or a pompous spirit... but turn it loose on the calling... the soul’s passion... and you can sing of the satisfaction of your soul.”*

This is living with purpose, on purpose. What do you care about these days? What is Love’s response to that passion? How can you employ that passion into righting relationships in the world? What if you woke up each day thinking about that? How can I live out of my passion today? It’s a different approach than wondering simply how

² The quote from Ricoeur and later quote from McLaren both come from Richard Rohr’s daily meditations shared via Email. They are put out by the Center for Action and Contemplation.

to make it through the day... waiting to watch the COVID counts and 24/7 political news coverage about who you're supposed to hate today.

One friend who's been a bit down... a bit bored during this isolating time said, "*My favorite game right now is trying to take something out of the refrigerator without moving the other items in front of it. I call it Refrigerator Jenga, and when you lose you clean up marinara for 40 minutes.*"

We all do some of these things. There are parts of the day, much of the time, when we're nostalgic for a previous time, or we long for a future when we're not living in measurements of six feet apart. But remember your passion. Remember your first calling and find a new one.

I love a Broadway friend who's doing this very thing. Her mother just recently passed ... a saint of a woman who inspired many... and there is grief, of course. But having called her mom on a number of Sundays, who had a phone but didn't have the ability to watch worship from her church online, she would pipe the sound through her phone so her mom could hear and they could worship together. She realized there are likely members of our church who could use this same kind of connection, so she started making phone calls, and she's setting up this gift for others... passion... soul satisfaction.

Another pair of friends from Broadway, as they engaged in the five visioning questions put forth for congregational consideration by our Vision Team, thought, "*We need to grow a prayer team to undergird all that's happening in our church, in our city, in the world.*" So, they're going for it and inviting others to join them. Passion. Soul satisfaction. Focus on right relationship over right belief.

What could wake you up in a new way during this season? I'm believing it for our church, friends. We're pressing forward as best we can so we might be the kind of church during a pandemic and post-pandemic that connects with the new need, the new hope, the new hunger of the souls entrusted to our care around the world.

Based on your prayers and feedback, we're claiming an identity through this vision process, and the verbs will follow in 2021... our action strategy to live out of our calling as a congregation. There is undoubtedly a spiritual migration taking place right now, and it starts with you and me.

Peter Drucker said, "*Every few hundred years in Western history, there occurs a sharp transformation. Within a few short decades, society – its worldview, its basic values, its*

*social and political structures, its art, its key institutions – rearranges itself. We are currently living through such a time.*³

Brian McLaren says there's a way each of us can be part of this transformation: *"If you want to see the future of Christianity as a great spiritual migration, don't look at a church building. Go look in the mirror and look at your neighbor. God's message of love is sent into the world in human envelopes. If you want to see a great spiritual migration begin, then let it start right in your body. Let your life be a foothold of liberation."*

John is writing to his buddy, Gaius, with this same passion. *"I want your soul to be satisfied"*... and know it will come if you're living out of your passionate calling. It reminds me of a word that has been seared into my own calling by a man who said the words without possibly knowing the weight it would hold with me. He said these words after sticking in there with a group of people for a number of years. He said, *"I saw people grow past their stuck places."* This seldom happens overnight. It sometimes takes years... but if you're loving people, striving for right relationship, planting seeds, those messages come right on time... if even decades later.

My Mom and Dad served a little Disciples church in Freedom, Oklahoma while Dad was in seminary. Freedom was up in the far northwestern corner of the State – a tiny town of a few hundred that rallied around Rattlesnake Round-ups, migrant farmers working their way north to harvest the wheat fields each season and Friday Night Lights. As an early twenty-something, mom and dad nurtured this little church and community as they were figuring out what it meant to live out of a Calling to ministry. Some in the town would joke and say the average age of people in the town was *"deceased."* In reality, there was a great cross section of folks and enough students to supply a high school football team of Oklahoma standards. Mom and Dad were young but engaged in the life of that little town. They got involved at the school and in the community. The school superintendent took a liking to my folks and asked if they might lead a Bible study for a little group of school leaders, he thought could benefit from the time together. Mom and Dad agreed, and so they started meeting with this group that included the superintendent, the principal, the head football coach, and their spouses. They were all coming from different vantage points, but there was some right relationship forming between them. Dad ended up in the press box on Friday nights for games, often praying over the loudspeaker before the games. Dad still has as trophy around their home somewhere from the team for his engagement with the team. Coach Estep's soul was really stirring in those days. He had lots of spiritual questions, and my Dad did the best he could at twenty-three, twenty-four years old to muster some response to the big-gulp questions about life and faith.

³ – Peter Drucker from Peter L Steinke's, *"Uproar: Calm leadership in Anxious Times."*

As often happens in those small-town schools, the team succeeded, the school was doing well, and the superintendent accepted a call to serve a bigger school... and the principal and Coach Estep went with them. It was a sad loss for my folks, but you hope you made an impact on the time you have with people, you know? Hoping you've maybe helped them grow through some stuck places.

Years down the road... a decade at least... my parents had moved to Bethany, Missouri to serve the church there. One Sunday afternoon, Dad gets a phone call from Coach Estep. They hadn't talked in years, so it was a bit of a surprise... but a pleasant one for sure. If you could have a gleam in your voice, Coach had it. He said, "*Bill, guess what I did today?*" "*Whad'ja you do, Coach?*" "*I got baptized!*" He was so excited. "*I invited the whole football team to come be a part of it!*" And they were. And the superintendent and the principal and the whole crew were all there. Coach said, "*I just wanted you to know. You set me on this path.*" And Coach was living out of his passion. His soul satisfied. And it was like he was writing an epistle to his buddy to say, "*That was the hotel we stayed at. That was the field we worked through it. That was the back porch where I was open to learning something new. That was where you helped me grow through that stuck place.*" And... "*I pray your soul is satisfied.*" We don't grow through stuck places... nor do we help others grow through their stuck places... out of a spirit of judgment. We love each other along the way – as open to be changed as to change another.

And your soul? Well. I hope it's on a path toward satisfaction. What's your calling these days? What might bring about that second naiveté... that innate joy that comes when your soul is living in the zone for which it was designed? What stuck place are you currently growing through? It's okay to be nostalgic. It's good to remember and point: "*That was the place where my soul opened up.*" It's even good to imagine the future – post pandemic, post your current struggle, post this uncertain season, praying for the wholeness to come.

But today? Right now? If you've stayed with me this long, maybe you're wondering if your soul could be satisfied now. Resting in the truth that God and love is where it's at... the soul won't be satisfied until it rests in those two gifts. And that... my friends... is my hope for you as we end this series in the same place it began. There are many things we'll get caught up in as we go through this life. But when it comes to our identity, our wholeness, our peace, our restoration, the revolution, and our satisfaction? It's **all** about soul.