

Brian comes from a good evangelical home. He went to an evangelical college. I met him at Princeton Seminary where we became good friends. After graduation he was ordained and served well as a chaplain at a prestigious eastern college. I've heard that Brian has now left the ministry. He went out to California to the Esalen Institute, apparently, to find himself. The Esalen Institute offers experimental workshops to help free its patrons of their hang-ups. A main objective is to break down people's inhibitions and replace them with joy.

Rick's father owned the largest department store in the town and was quite wealthy. Rick stood in line to take over the business eventually after he finished his college work. Midway through the second year of school Rick dropped out, not only out of college, but out of society. He disowned the upper middle class privileges and values of his parents and struck off on his own. He said he wanted to get in touch with himself and discover who he really was; a person separate from his mother or father.

Linda was the wife of a friend of mine. I had married them. I used to visit them in their apartment in Pittsburgh before I was married. Everything seemed happy between them. One time I went there and Linda wasn't there. Her husband

said she was visiting friends. The next time I visited Linda again was not there. This time I asked if everything was going well in their marriage. Then the story unfolded. Linda had left to "find herself." She felt she had married too young and too soon, and before she had discovered who she was and what her needs were.

All three of these people have one thing in common. They are looking for self-fulfilment. They are trying to find themselves. They are trying to discover who they are. They represent millions who are searching for happiness and self-fulfilment. This search for self-fulfilment characterises much of life in the US. [I have been reading a book called, The Culture of Narcissism. Narcissus is a figure from Greek mythology. He was a beautiful youth who pined away for love of his own reflection in a pond. ^{Our generation is a lot like Narcissus. We are called the "Me" generation.} The author of the book writes that] "People today hunger not for personal salvation, ... but for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being..."

Malcolm Nygren, writing in an article in A.D. magazine, ^{all sorts of quakery are spawned by} tells us that ^{the} search for self-fulfilment and happiness, ~~spawns all sorts of quakery.~~ "Therapies of questionable credentials have spawned like maggots. Cults from the Far East compete with those invented at home... Even churches join in

the game. In the attempt to give people what they want some have become spiritual massage parlors, offering religion as relaxation or stimulation."

But what's wrong with self-fulfillment? What's wrong with getting in touch with our feelings? What's wrong with discovering who we are? Why shouldn't we try to find ourselves? After all, as Christians we believe that Jesus came to give us life and life abundant. God created us to enjoy life as well as himself. ^{It was when the Prodigal Son came to himself that he was created...} ~~Countless Christians can testify that when they found Christ, they found themselves as well.~~ Christianity and Jesus Christ himself seem to legitimate this search for self-fulfillment.

There is nothing wrong with trying to find ourselves and there's nothing wrong with being self-fulfilled but so many of us are going about it in the wrong way. We are going about it in such a way that we are going to bring upon ourselves untold misery and heartache and a tremendous burden of guilt in the long run. For one thing, so often the way we go about seeking self-fulfillment is childishly unrealistic in its expectations. I remember as a child how I thought that certain things would really make me happy. ^{I thought as a child} ~~I wanted a bicycle that I had a right to whatever I wanted. Sometimes, my sister and mother told me, I would throw temper tantrums if I didn't get its appeal and I thought, "That's not what I really wanted."~~ ^{what I wanted. I felt a basic right was being violated. I see the same thing in my own children.}

A child comes to believe that he or she has a right to happiness. A child believes it has a right to whatever he or she wants. And so many adults believe they have a right to happiness just as we have a right to a fair trial, or a right to vote, or go to church. But, as C.S. Lewis has pointed out "we depend for avvery great deal of our happiness on circumstances outside all human control. A right to happiness doesn't make much more sense than a right to be six feet tall, or to have a millionaire for your father, or to get good weather whenever you want to have a picnic."

I think of ~~another~~^{my} friend, Gene. The last time I saw Gene it was about ten years ago. He stopped by the manse with his girl friend to spend the night. I had known him fairly well a couple years before. I asked him what he was up to. He said that he and his girl were on their way to India to find a guru. They wanted to find themselves. The two of them reminded me of little children playing some game of imagination in which they were going off to kill a dragon or discover buried treasure. So often our search for self-fulfilment is childish in its approach.

For another thing, so often ⁱⁿ our search for self-fulfilment we feel we are justified in doing all that God has forbidden. So often I have heard Christians who are consciously breaking

God's laws justify it all by saying, "I have such a good feeling about what I am doing." "I really feel at peace with myself." When I hear that I feel like banging their heads against the wall.

This feeling that we have a right to happiness justifies cowardice, infidelity, greed, selfishness, and all that God has forbidden. The person who feels he^{or} she has a right to personal happiness will break sacred marriage promises to pursue personal happiness. He or she will act the coward on the moral battle-field, turn and run and endanger the life of friends and fellow soldiers, all to gain personal happiness. The person who feels he or she has right to personal happiness will not give a damn about anybody but himself and in the long run he doesn't even give a damn about himself.

For another thing, this search for self-fulfilment if gone about in the wrong way can be cruel to the person in pursuit of happiness. Chuck Swindoll, in his little book, *Hand Me Another Brick*, asks, "Do you want to know how to be miserable? Be like the late Howard Hughes; live only for yourself. Use I, me, and my as often as possible. Turn all your love inward. Think only about your own needs, your desires, your wants, your pleasures. Refuse to love and be loved."

But let's turn now to the positive. I believe that God wants us to be fulfilled. He wants us to be happy. He wants us to discover ourselves, discover our gifts, get in touch with our feelings, find out who we are. And he has shown us in Christ how to do that. ^{First} Happiness is not found in looking for it. Happiness is found in forgetting about your own happiness in your desire to make others happy. Happiness and self-fulfilment is a by-product of doing those things which ^{make somebody else happy. I feel self-fulfilled when I am able to} boost the self-esteem of others. As long as I don't think about it I'm quite happy. But let somebody ask me, "Are you happy" and all of a sudden my thoughts are turned inward toward myself. If I am really happy my answer is, "Well, I haven't really thought about it that much. Let me see, am I happy. Well, ^{don't know. Maybe I'm not.} ~~I guess so.~~" The person who is happy doesn't think about it, doesn't make it his or her ultimate goal.

Jesus said that whosoever makes the attainment of personal happiness and self-fulfilment his or her ultimate goal will never attain it. ^{Second + essential} The only way to enjoy self-fulfilment and personal happiness is to lose or put aside or discipline or ^{to Him &} redirect yourself to others. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

The abundant life of which Jesus spoke was not a life

immediately

directed towards achieving ones own happiness and satisfying ones own immediate desires. He called his followers to take his yoke on their shoulders. He called his followers to take up a cross and follow him. ^{Self-fulfillment} As Malcolm Nygren points out, "the abundant life Jesus promises takes place in this world, in the midst of the frustrations and imperfections of life. It has been found by people who work at unexciting jobs, who don't give up on marriages that have grown stale, and by people who struggle with mental illness."

much

This fulfilment that Christ offers comes "from outside ourselves. It is here that the gospel cuts straight across the modern quest for fulfillment. This modern search for fulfillment is an inward quest. The numberless kinds of therapy have one idea behind them all: that we will find the answers to life inside ourselves. The young are trying to 'find themselves.' The test of our marriage is in our own feelings. Mental health is 'finding our true selves,' breaking loose from the inhibitions that enchain our natural goodness." So say so many people today.

But I believe this voyage inward is so often a voyage into emptiness. It discovers the void inside, but not what is missing. What is missing is our fellowship with God, with Christ, and we will not find him by peering at our own feelings. Jesus

Jesus said that whoever wants to find his life must lose it. Anyone trying to find himself by an inward voyage must be willing to give up what he finds. The self that is discovered there is empty, a shell, severed from God. Fulfillment is not a goal to pursue. It is a by-product of our completeness and that completeness, that wholeness, that fulfillment, comes from outside ourselves, from Jesus Christ, reconciling the world to God and making us complete.

AMEN