

A Cup Running Over (Dallas Willard)

In my early days of ministry, I spent huge amounts of time absorbed in Scripture and great spiritual writers. The Lord made it possible for me to spend whole days – without any issue of preparing for something or taking an examination – soaking up the Scripture. I literally wore out the books of great spiritual writers. This focus was foundational to my spiritual journey, to finding satisfaction in Christ.

Experiencing God in that way leads me to satisfaction in Christ and to speaking to others out of that satisfaction. There is no substitute for simple satisfaction in the Word of God, in the presence of God. That affects all your actions.

Characteristics of Dissatisfaction

Men and women in ministry who are not finding satisfaction in Christ are likely to demonstrate that with overexertion and overpreparation for speaking and with no peace about what they do after they do it. If we have not come to the place of resting in God, we will go back and think, *Oh, if I'd done this*, or *Oh, I didn't do that*. When you come to the place where you are drinking deeply from God and trusting him to act with you, there is peace about what you have communicated.

One of my great joys came when I got up from a chair to walk to the podium and the Lord said to me, “Now remember, it's what I do with the Word between your lips and their hearts that matters.” That is a tremendous lesson. If you do not trust God to do that, then he will let you do what you're going to do, and it's not going to come to much. But once you turn it loose and recognize we are always inadequate but our inadequacy is not the issue, you are able to lay that burden down. Then the satisfaction you have in Christ spills over into everything you do.

The preacher who does not minister in that satisfaction is on dangerous ground. Those who experience moral failure are those who have failed to live a deeply satisfied life in Christ, almost without exception. I know my temptations come out of situations where I am dissatisfied, not content. I am worried about something or not feeling the sufficiency I know is there. If I have a strong temptation, it will be out of my dissatisfaction.

The moral failures of ministers usually are over one of three things: sex, money, or power. That always comes out of dissatisfaction. Ministers are reaching for something, and they begin to feel, *I deserve something better. I sacrifice so much and get so little. And so I'll do this*. The surest guarantee against failure is to be so at peace and satisfied with God that when wrongdoing presents itself it isn't even interesting. That is how we stay out of temptation.

Characteristics of a Satisfied Soul

We are long on devices and programs. We have too many of them, and they get in the way. What we really need are preachers who can stand in simplicity and manifest and declare the richness of Christ in life. There isn't anything on Earth that begins to compete with that for human benefit and human interest.

When people hear preachers who are satisfied in this way, they sense that much more is coming from them than what they are saying. When I hear preachers like this, I sense something flowing from them. Preachers like that are at peace. They are not struggling to make something happen.

That is one of the biggest issues for ministers today because of the model of success that comes to us. We get the idea we are supposed to make something happen, and so we need our services to go just right. The concluding benediction has hardly ceased before those in charge are saying to one another, "How did it go?" or "It went really well." The truth is we don't know how it went. From God's point of view, it will be eternity before we know how it went. These folks are not at peace if they are trying to manage outcomes in that way.

One mark of preachers who have attained deep satisfaction is they are at peace, and they love what they are doing. Peace comes from them. From such preachers I sense something coming to me that is deeper than the words. Hearers sense the message opening up possibilities for them to live. In the presence of this kind of preacher, people find ways of doing the good that is before their hearts.

That is the living water. Jesus brought people that opening up of possibilities. In John 8, when he said to the woman caught in adultery, "Go now and leave your life of sin," I don't think she felt, *I've got to do that*. She experienced Jesus' words as: *That's really possible. I can do that*. That is one characteristic of preaching that comes from a satisfied life.

Another mark of satisfied preachers is they can listen. They can be silent in the presence of others because they are not always trying to make something happen. Such a person has the capacity to listen to people and come to an awareness of the needs that underlie the felt needs. We should be attentive to the felt needs of people, but we should know that the game is at a much deeper level of the soul.

A large part of what the pastor does in preaching and life is to listen and help people feel their real needs, not just superficial needs. The satisfied preacher speaks from a listening heart. Since people often do not know what they really need, such preaching can help them find out. This requires a spaciousness that only comes if your cup is running over because you are well cared for by God.

Steps Toward Finding Satisfaction in Christ

We can take steps to find this deep satisfaction and to preach from the well within us. I encourage pastors to have substantial times every week when they do nothing but enjoy God. That may mean walking by a stream, looking at a flower, listening to music, or watching your children or grandchildren play without your constantly trying to control them. Experience the fullness of God, think about the good things God has done for you, and realize he has done well by you. If there is a problem doing that, then work through the problem, because we cannot really serve him if we do not genuinely love him.

Henri Nouwen said the main obstacle to love for God is service for God. Service must come out of his strength and life flowing through us into receptive lives. Take an hour, sit in a comfortable place in silence, and do nothing but rest. If you go to sleep, that's okay. We have to stop trying too hard. There may be a few pastors for whom that is not the problem, but for most, it is. We need to do that not only for ourselves but to set an example for those to whom we speak.

There is a place for effort, but it never earns anything and must never take the place of God with us. Our efforts are to make room for him in our lives.