

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU?

No, this isn't a survey questionnaire! At least, not in the conventional sense.

During my time in the NICS, the demand from management for monitoring the views of customers and colleagues did not abate; indeed, I would say it intensified. Consequently, at various stages of my career as a statistician, I was involved with customer and staff satisfaction surveys. A common question asked survey recipients: "How satisfied are you with...?" Respondents could answer using a five-point scale, ranging from Very Dissatisfied to Very Satisfied.

Now I'm well aware that while some staff and customers enjoyed completing the questionnaires, others only did so under duress, if at all. But whichever category you're in, I want you to take the time to consider a few satisfaction questions.

Maybe you're reading this, but have little thought of God. For you, the question is:

How satisfied are you with life without God?

Perhaps your reply is "Very Satisfied". Your life may be full of many interests; you may be pursuing pleasure, or ambition, or be devoting yourself to a cause you strongly believe in. Each of these things may indeed provide satisfaction – up to a point, and for a time. Yet eventually, they must fail to do so – when you die, if not far sooner than that. Jesus told of a farmer who had been very successful, and clearly was enjoying life. It's in Luke 12: 16-21. His self-satisfied lifestyle ended abruptly when God told him he was going to die that night... Later in Luke's gospel (Chapter 16), the Lord Jesus told of another rich man, who lived self-indulgently. He also died, and in Jesus' own words, was "in hell". The warning that Christ is conveying in these two passages is plain.

Isaiah asks "Why spend ...your labour on what does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2). He goes on to write (vv 6-7): "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

Each reader of 'Ministry' should answer the following question:

How satisfied are you with the material blessings God has bestowed on you?

In this part of the world – in contrast to some other regions of the planet – we are blessed with abundance of food and water, and enjoy a standard of living that greatly exceeds that of previous generations. In all of this, God is witnessing to people of His goodness (see Acts 14: 15-17). He expects a response! With unbelievers, there can be unthankfulness (Romans 1:21). For the Christian, this should never be so: “be ye thankful” (Colossians 3:15). The tendency of the human heart is to want more; the teaching of the word of God is “be content with such things as ye have” (Hebrews 13:5). It’s worth taking the time to read 1 Timothy 6: 6-10.

The remaining questions apply to readers who know Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and Lord.

How satisfied are you with how life is treating you?

“Very satisfied”? Then sing your praise to the Lord (James 5:13)! “Not satisfied”? Everyone finds themselves in this position at least some of the time. James also has succinct advice for you, in the very same verse: pray. The Psalms are full of cries for help (e.g. Psalm 4:1), and questions addressed to God (e.g. Psalm 10:1). There are several reasons why the Christian shouldn’t expect plain sailing. One reason is that we are part of a fallen creation, so inevitably must experience the suffering that is an integral part of that (Romans 8: 22-23). Another key factor is that the world is implacably opposed to Christ and those who belong to Him (see, for example, John 15:18-20). Likewise, the Devil is our adversary (e.g. 1 Peter 5: 8, Ephesians 6:11-16). A further reason is that God disciplines his children (Hebrews 12: 6-11). Despite knowing all of this, we – I include myself – seem to think that encountering difficulties is unusual. Perhaps that’s why Peter had to tell his readers (1 Peter 4:12): “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you”. The next verse continues, “But rejoice...” If you look up the passage, you’ll find out why.

I’ll refer to James 5 again, this time v. 11. “Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy”.

How satisfied are you with your spiritual blessings in Christ?

The expression ‘spiritual blessings’ occurs in Ephesians 1, where Paul tells “the faithful in Christ Jesus” that they (we!) have been blessed “with all spiritual blessings...in Christ”. As enumerated in that chapter, these include “adoption as sons”, “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins”, and “an inheritance”. In the following chapter we read of having been “quickenened” (i.e. made alive), “raised up” and “made sit...in heavenly places”.

How much we appreciate and enjoy these tremendous blessings – all of which are totally undeserved, and are ours only through the “exceeding riches of [God’s] grace” – depends on knowing what they are. I think it’s significant that in Ephesians 1:18-19 Paul prays “that ye may know” :

- (i) the hope of his calling
- (ii) the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints and
- (iii) the exceeding greatness of his power toward us.

Still on the subject of the sufficiency of our spiritual resources, Peter tells us (2 Peter 1:3) that God’s “divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness”.

How satisfied are you with your progress in the Christian life?

“Very satisfied”? Don’t be complacent. The great apostle Paul wrote “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect” (Philippians 3:12). In Joshua 13:1, the LORD told an elderly Joshua “there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed”.

“Not satisfied”? Don’t despair. Lack of progress to date does not prevent future progress. In the same Philippians passage, Paul also wrote, “forgetting those things which are behind...I press toward the mark (goal)”. Jonah, Peter and John Mark are biblical examples of where failure was followed by faithful service.

The writer to the Hebrews exhorts, “let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus...” , Who is the supreme example of endurance, motivated by a future joy (Hebrews 12:1-2). Thinking of future joy, David could say to God “I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psalm 17:15).