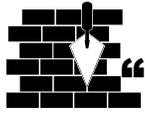


THE BLESSED ONE - “Happiness — The Elusive Fruit”

**“Building Blocks”**

1. **(Intro Scriptures - Ecc 12)** This is an important verse for this entire chapter. We tend to limit the meaning of “duty” to a vague notion of strict obligation to a set of rules or an ideology. Even though this is certainly true, it is not the *full* truth. If we understand “duty” as someone living “as they ought,” we are closer to the full meaning of this verse. “Ought” can refer to rules, but it can just as easily refer to design. In a sense, a bird has a “duty” to fly, for that is what it was designed to do. In the same way, we “ought” to “fear God and keep his commandments,” because that is what we are designed to do. In the context of this chapter, happiness comes from fulfillment, and fulfillment comes when something follows its design.
2. **(Q1)** The word, “blessed” in our Old Testaments is really more accurately translated, “blessedness” or “blessednesses.” It is a noun, *not* an adjective. It describes a state or condition more than a person. In the *New Testament* it *does* appear as an adjective. This is important because our misunderstandings of what this means typically takes us the very short journey from the “blessed” person to the *things* that we believe show or cause the “blessing.” Then, it degenerates into a pursuit of those things rather than God Himself, all supposedly under the facade of *His* “blessing.”
3. **(Q2 - Ps 32)** There should always be a degree of happiness that I can lay hold of, simply musing on the fact of my justification. My standing before God on Christ’s behalf is true no matter what else I may struggle to believe at the moment.
4. **(Q2 - Prov 3)** There is a very vital connection between this verse and the previous one. Wisdom—the ability to see life as it *really is* (as God understands it)—is not fully possible apart from God’s own words. So, a “blessed” person is truly one who begins to connect the Word of God with life itself. The “lights” have come on, and that produces “blessedness.”
5. **(Q2 - 1 Pet 4)** (verse 14, *not* 13) The Spirit’s presence in my life is evidenced by insults! Apparently there’s “enough” of the Spirit visible in me to warrant someone associating me with Jesus. That in itself should elicit something of a joyful response in anyone who cares about the name of God (e.g. me!).
6. **(Q3b)** Jesus’ use of “hunger and thirst” must be understood to extend beyond the obvious notion of “needs.” Hunger and thirst are also instinctual drives that clamor for satisfaction, unceasingly. Jesus is talking about a type of *person*, not merely a category of behaviors. Also, both of these words are present participles (e.g. “...ing”) in Greek. Jesus is referring to someone who’s practice/lifestyle is one of “hungering and thirsting” for righteousness, their salvation.
7. **(Q9)** It is true that happiness is the by-product of “running after” God’s kingdom and His righteousness. That is certainly the primary thing here. But, there is also a sense in which “his righteousness” itself is also a fruit of the actual pursuit itself, not simply something we are running towards.

**“Stumbling Stones”**

1. **(Intro)** In light of the discussion in Building Blocks #1 above, it is important to distinguish between satisfaction and fulfillment. Fulfillment comes from following design. Satisfaction comes from completed longings. And satisfaction *does not* (cannot!) validate a longing’s appropriateness or rightness. A “successful” rapist and a new car buyer may both be equally satisfied because their longings were met.

2. **(Q2 - Ps 41)** The word “considers” in this verse implies a careful study characterized by intense attention. But, the Jewish emphasis on social justice built into the Covenant does not allow us to think this verse is applauding those who are “sensitive” to the needs of the poor. “Consider” in this context *assumes* involvement. The “happy” person is one who is involved in *alleviating* the suffering of the helpless.
3. **(Q2 - Jn 13)** We need to be extremely careful here that we *do not* conclude that Jesus is teaching that “blessedness” comes from serving. That may indeed happen, but the more foundational point of this passage is what it teaches about the need to embrace a radically different view of the self. Jesus promises blessedness, not as a reward for service, but as the inevitable by-product of service that emanates from a heart that honestly sees itself as a servant.
4. **(Q2 - Jms 1)** James *is not* suggesting that pain and suffering produce blessedness. He is speaking here of the *outcome* of endurance, not the endurance itself.
5. **(Q5b)** Don’t let the metaphor of a cistern make this verse seem irrelevant. God’s point here is that he had been replaced (or attempted to be). This hasn’t changed. We are still trying to create a god that will be manipulated (at best) or negotiate (at least). The gods of Canaan all “negotiated,” or so they believed. Yahweh didn’t.

Anything or anyone that we think is more necessary to us than God, is. Unfortunately, God reminds His people that all their “cisterns” leak. This is an excellent example of the temporary nature of satisfaction. A swimming pool that leaks will still provide tons of fun for an afternoon, but will be empty by breakfast the next day.



“Going Deeper”

1. **(Q2 - Ps 41)** Do you think someone becomes “blessed” through this ministry or is their ministry the *result* of their “blessedness”?
1. **(Q4 b-c)** What does this have to say about Christians trying to compete with the unbelieving world to “prove” to them that they’re “blessed”?