

The King of Cool ... and the King of Kings

Separation

BY W. S. MERWIN

Your absence has gone through me

Like thread through a needle.

Everything I do is stitched with its color.

In other words, my life is marked by your absence, rather than your presence... We live our lives with incomplete understanding of the world... of ourselves... but we have a sense of God... of eternity... of the transcendent power of love...

I believe that God is threaded through our lives... we are marked by his presence... and his absence... There is no escape the nature of our creation... we are the canvas upon which God paints...

I believe that this true whether or not we admit it. In fact, I believe that you could deny this, reject this, turn away and return to your life ... and the life you then lived would speak this truth back to you.

Let me tell you about the time that the King of Cool met the King of Kings...
riff on "Your parents used to be cool"

Steve McQueen was a sixties actor nicknamed the "King of Cool." McQueen was famous for such films as Bullitt, The Great Escape, and Papillon. He had a painful childhood, with a string of abusive stepfathers who beat him, locked him in cupboards, and generally made his life hell. Unsurprisingly, he ran away from home with a deep-seated anger, and a broken spirit. When he became successful, he used alcohol, and a string of relationships to fill the dark void that his childhood had left.

In his early years, he had no time for religion, but in his later years, he was intrigued by the man who was teaching him to fly. There was something about him. Eventually he asked this man why he was different. He seemed to have peace. The man explained that he was a follower of Jesus. McQueen was hooked. One Sunday morning he told his wife to put on her best clothes--they were going to church. They started going to their local Baptist church, and eventually Steve became a Christian.

Steve then contracted cancer and needed reassurance in his faith so he contacted Billy Graham to ask to meet with him. Billy came and spent time with him, prayed for him and shared some scriptures to encourage him. In the clinic Steve sought to tell as many people as he could about Jesus. One day the nurse walked into his room and found he had passed away from a massive heart attack. On his chest, lay the Bible that Billy Graham had gifted to him, open at John 3:16. In his final days he wanted to tell everyone about his faith in Jesus.

Source:

Greg Laurie, "Steve McQueen – The Salvation of An American Icon" YouTube (8-28-16)

If the King of Cool needed the King of Kings ... how much more do the rest of us?

Here is a true thing: We almost never know what would make us happy. I'm going to list 5 things that motivate... Fame, wealth, beauty, genius, and power...

1. Fame

This is brand new to humanity; for thousands of years, material goods and security dominated. Now, fame is at the top. Obviously part of the reason is the perception that anybody can get famous these days--reality TV and YouTube have proven that you can become a celebrity for doing not a single thing. But there's another, less obvious factor. And it explains why so many famous people are miserable.

Experts say ... kids who desperately want to be famous, usually have a history of neglect at home.

Parents were either absent completely or, at best, emotionally distant. It turns out the whole surge in aspirations for fame came right along with the explosion of single parents and "broken" homes. Only half of today's children live with their original two parents.

You can see how this sad mechanism works in the attention-starved mind. The kid is desires to be loved but the parent doesn't return the love. Fame lets them turn the tables on that arrangement. When you're famous, millions love you, but you don't even know their names. It's purely one-sided. They wait for hours in the cold for your autograph, you barely glance at them on the way to your limo. You get to take their love and give next to nothing back, the same as you think your parents did to you.

But it turns out that kind of massive, paper-thin adoration is a poor substitute. Famous people are four times as likely to commit suicide as the rest of us

2. Wealth

Nigerians are happiest people in the world according to researchers. Are 16th... Average income \$300 a year in Nigeria.

Why doesn't money make you happy?

Here's a couple of reasons for it. First, your brain adjusts feelings of happiness downward after you've reached some goal or other.

It regulates the good feelings, presumably so that you have motivation to reach the next goal instead of just lounging by the pool for the rest of your days.

The second reason is that as social creatures, we compare ourselves to our neighbors. This is why executives can cry about the \$500,000 salary cap that comes with taking government bailout money. Well, their friends are making \$3 million a year, so they feel poor.

We can laugh at their complaints, but of course then you're giving the Nigerian permission to laugh at yours. That guy made 100 times more than you, you make 100 times more than the Nigerian.

But what about sudden wealth, like if you won the lottery, or sold your novel for \$10 million? That'd be cool, right, because you'd still remember your former life and appreciate your new riches! Well, just ask William "Bud" Post, who wound up broken and bankrupt after he won \$16 million in the lottery. It turns out that while he knew how to handle the stress of being poor thanks to a lifetime of experience, he had no concept of how to handle the new and alien stresses of wealth.

Wait, it Gets Worse...

With your newfound riches, suddenly "friends" pop up from all over. Cousins who you've never met, forgotten classmates from school, women who'd never even look your way before, all suddenly in your orbit, complimenting you, doing you favors. Then they casually slip it into conversation that they're going to have to default on their mortgage unless somebody helps out.

Suddenly every relationship is in doubt. Do they actually care about you? Or do they just want a seat on the Bling Train? Would they sell you out to get to your cash?

That lottery winner we mentioned above . . . somebody hired a hitman to take him out, to get to his money. That somebody was his own brother.

3. Beauty

We know all about this one first-hand. It's true.

Yes, being physically attractive has concrete advantages. Attractive people earn more, get better grades, have better jobs and find more successful partners than average or ugly people. Strangers are more likely to help them in a crisis. They have wider social circles.

So What's the Problem?

Remember, we're talking about happiness here, not success. For one, attractive people have the same self-esteem problems the ugly people do. Like money, attractiveness is relative and if you're hotter than your friends, at that stage you start comparing yourself to people in the media. You know, like the magazine covers we mentioned before, the ones that that have been photoshopped.

In other words, they've adjusted to the experience of being attractive the same as our high income earners have adjusted to having money; they just pick other flaws to worry about.

Sure, if you used the magical artifact up there to become Angelina Jolie tomorrow, you'd notice the difference over how you're treated now. But if you were born Angelina Jolie, you'd have no way of grasping it, the same as right now you don't realize what it's like to live life with some kind of horrible deformity (if you do have a horrible deformity, then you don't know what it's like to live with a worse one. Work with us here).

Wait, it Gets Worse...

Attractive people live in a world where most feedback they get is manipulative. The compliments mean nothing--they've learned that's just the sound people make when they walk by.

That's why studies show they tend to dismiss the genuine compliments they get in other areas (their work, personality, sense of humor, creativity) because it gets lumped in with the same counterfeit flattery they've been getting their whole lives.

2 Genius

If ignorance is bliss, does a high IQ equal misery? Popular opinion would have it so. We tend to think of geniuses as being plagued by existential angst, frustration, and loneliness. Think of Virginia Woolf, Alan Turing, or Lisa Simpson – lone stars, isolated even as they burn their brightest. As Ernest Hemingway wrote: "Happiness in intelligent people is the rarest thing I know."

We're using the broader definition of the word "genius" here, meaning anyone with an extraordinary talent or skill.

Genius is valued. Allowances are made for genius. Genius--whether it involves writing ground-breaking computer code, picking stocks or writing the dopest rhymes--means one thing above all else: You are forever granted an exception to society's rules.

The fictional archetype for this these days is the character Dr House from the TV show House M.D, whose being a genius means he gets a free pass to do drugs on the job, break hospital policy, insult his superiors and treat patients like a jerk.

But don't blame the writers, the real world examples are just as extreme, from Hemingway to Kanye West. Being a genius means you get to do great things, and get away with being a jerk.

Who could turn that down?

So What's the Problem?

If you were really a genius... genuine connections will be very rare...

Even if you're not the Einstein kind of genius, any situation where you're 10 levels above your coworkers is going to be daily frustration. If you're a genius at spreading concrete, that feeling only occurs to you in the form of everyone else being sloppy and helpless. No wonder they wind up treating people like dirt.

Not that you'd have time for friends anyway. Genius takes practice. Lots of it. Shows like House don't tell you that to become as good at your job as Dr. House, you've got to devote an enormous amount of time to working, studying and practicing your craft. Behind the genius is hundreds of weekends spent pouring over texts while everyone else was at the party, playing Twister.

All of this is a great recipe for the stereotypical depressed, moody genius who dies alone and bitter.

Wait, it Gets Worse...

If your genius lies in some kind of creative field, then there's a good chance you have actual mental illness to deal with. While only one percent of the population suffers from bipolar disorder, it is claimed that 50 percent of poets, 38 percent of musicians and 20 percent of painters have it. It's just part of the package.

Compare the number of great musical innovators who have died of suicide or drug overdose versus, say, the number of plumbers who have died the same way.

1 Power

You never hear little kids say they want to be "powerful" when they grow up. Parents don't encourage that sort of thing, since it's kind of terrifying coming from a toddler.

Yet, power is what everything else on this list is about. Fame is about having power in the relationship with the fans. Beauty is about gaining power through others' sexual desire and jealousy. Genius means society needs your skills more than you need its approval. Money . . . well, money and power are conjoined twins.

So it's pretty safe to say that while not many of you reading this specifically aspire to go into any kind of political office, a great many of you do aspire to some kind of power. Maybe you're eying the kind of job where you'll be the boss, or maybe you want to go into law enforcement. Or maybe you're just driven by that bitter, unspoken urge almost all of us feel at least once in our youth: "I'll show them! I'll show them all."

So What's the Problem?

You find it everywhere, from the supervisor to the bitter gym coach. Small people driven to mindless, unethical behavior, drunk on just a few drops of power. They often can't make friends, their marriages end badly, they self destruct. The world is full of these miniature, sad dictators destined for a proverbial downfall.

Wait, it gets worse...

The thing is, it's the lust for power itself that's poisonous. You find that need for power most in the type of person who hates having to obey all of society's social contracts, particularly the ones that require them to not act like jerks all day. These are the people who are only nice guys because of fear of retribution if they do otherwise, so their main goal is to become strong enough that no retribution is possible (this is why sociopaths tend to seek positions of power, by the way).

So it's not just that power will destroy you. It's that the urge itself is bad news. That desire for power is a vicious, ravenous animal and feeding it only makes it strong enough to tear its way out of your belly and go on a bloody rampage.

"So what will make me happy? What's left?"

Experts have figured out that the brain has no ability to actually predict your emotional reaction to life changes that haven't happened yet. In other words, you physically do not know what you want.

What we need is transformation, not possessions...

Titus 3:5

5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

But are you ready for a surprise? Here are three things that research shows makes people happy:

Studies show that friendships, altruism and religious practices bring happiness.

It is almost like God knows you better than you do...

Research credits: Greg Laurie, David Wong, W.S.Merwin,