

PERFECT

I wonder if those who eat green fruit realize what they are missing! Green olives? Green bananas? Green persimmons!

I realize that opinions vary but I think that fruit is best when it is ripe. Not sour and crunchy, but sweet and smooth!

Few fruits match up to the perfect peach. Its ripening process is delicate but wonderful. The parent tree soaks up glorious sunshine and refreshing rain and transforms them into swelling sweet fruit. As maturity approaches, an abscission layer begins to form at the stem of the fruit. This begins to cut off the flow of these vital ingredients, but the ripening process still continues. Enzymes and hormones within the fruit convert starches into sugars and cell walls break down, softening the textures and allowing the sweet sugary syrup to run freely.

I hope you catch the peach soon after the abscission layer has begun to form but before the birds and insects have been attracted by the sweet scents. Take that perfect peach to your kitchen counter and allow its ripening process to continue within the safe walls of your home. Then, once the fragrance is strong and the flesh is just so soft, it's time!

The joy of a perfectly ripened peach is hard to compare. Is it sweeter than sugar? No. Is it juicier than water? No. But sugar water offers nothing compared to the perfectly ripened peach. Something about its perfectly balanced flavors and textures and aromas deliver an exquisite experience that really can't be described.

But enough of peaches. They will only provide you with joy for ten minutes. Then what?

Perhaps you are like the salesman that God brought into our office the other day. He has centered his life on retiring early. "My wife and I have two children, and we might have one more child but no more. I'm focused on retiring early and I don't want to be in the middle of child rearing when I retire. Maybe this is selfish."

I'm glad the salesman has found something to live for, but I don't think it's enough. An early retirement won't give him the perfect life. Its reward will doubtless be exquisite, but it can't sustain the burden of his entire life.

What then? What is the purpose of a person's life? What reward has the required depth to be worth staking his entire life on? We know the purpose of a peach. We know the circumstances and ingredients required for it to reach maturity. But do we know what it takes for a person to achieve the purpose that he was created for?

I told the salesman that I had a different view on retirement. I don't really plan to retire. I realize that my physical and mental capabilities will deteriorate as I get older. I hope I am self-aware enough to let go of the responsibilities that I am no longer able to administrate. If God gives my wife and I children in our old age, I aim to embrace that. I may not die with much money, but I hope to die surrounded by grateful children.

I watched my grandparents grow old and die. I don't really remember that they retired. They certainly had to let go of many of their responsibilities, but they contributed until their deathbed.

I remember reading the book of 1 John to my grandfather about a month before he died. After I finished reading, he said that he couldn't hear what I read. I wonder if he asked me to read the book of 1 John with more than his benefit in mind. I think that Grandfather intentionally contributed to my spiritual growth while lying on his deathbed.

So, what is a perfect life? What goal can provide sufficient dividends that when we lie on our deathbed we will be satisfied that our life was worthwhile? Is it unselfishness? Is it a house full of children? Refusing to retire?

These could all be part of the answer, but it is certainly more than that. After all, raising children is not the only worthwhile goal. What if we broaden our answer to *responsibility*?

There is deep satisfaction when a man takes up his responsibility and lives it out till the end of his days. Men know this intuitively. Imagine, men, if all responsibilities were lifted from your shoulders, no one looked to you for an answer to their question or respected your strength or skill. You know how it feels now when another man takes your place or "shows you up." Or, worse, how about the emptiness at week's end when you realize that you accomplished nothing? These are not the experiences that lead to a fulfilled life. So, taking up our responsibility is certainly key to finding our purpose.

Is responsibility the complete answer though? No! Not all responsibilities are worthwhile. For example, counting grains of sand could be your responsibility but it doesn't hold enough meaning to be the purpose of your life. A life spent counting grains of sand would be like a peach that never ripens. We need a more precise answer.

Here's a short answer that might hold up to our scrutiny. **The perfect life for men and women is living out the responsibility for which God created us.**

That's about as good of an answer as I can provide, but there are probably a few of you that are still wondering how to find God's specific responsibility for your life. I'm not God, so I'm unable to answer that question for you. However, I might be able to provide a few good leads for you. First, read God's Book (the Bible) honestly, and, secondly, join a community of believers. Then spend time in prayer asking God, "What do you want from me?" There's much that needs to be done. Men and women with God's vision are in short supply.

Remember how the peach ripened? It needed so much input: sunshine, rain, and nutrients from the soil. But then the tree cuts it off with the abscission layer. That's when the peach truly ripens into all its glory.

God created you. He gave you all the inputs you need (His divine revelation, community, etc). As you grow, you will see "abscission layers" or hard times that force you to ripen in ways that you never thought possible. But as you fulfill His purposes, you will realize His reward. Fulfilling the responsibilities given by your Creator satisfies the purpose of your life and that is perfect.

-Caleb Martin