

The Middle Way

As I have matured in my theological understanding, I have become a strong believer in the power of positive thinking. We are by nature spiritual beings with the potential built into us of accomplishing seemingly impossible goals by means of visualization and positive affirmation. At the same time, I have come to realize that this power can be used for both good and evil. I am reminded of the words of Jesus in Mark 8:36, *“For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?”*

So how does one go about achieving the desires of the heart (see Psalm 37:4), without losing one’s soul in the process? We do this by affirming the fact that God wants us to be happy and successful in life and, at the same time, loving and generous towards others. When we overemphasize the pursuit of material goods, our desire for even more tends to be enhanced and we are never satisfied. On the other hand, overemphasizing self-denial and service to others can also cause unhappiness, especially if we are motivated by a sense of guilt or obligation.

A better path to success and happiness might be what Buddha called the “Middle Path.” Financial success and generosity don’t have to be mutually exclusive. When properly balanced, they can actually complement one another. When our gifts to others are motivated by love, rather than by guilt or obligation, what is given can be multiplied by God and returned to the giver in greater measure than what was given. (See Luke 6:38) Praying to God for help with our financial goals, even ambitious goals, can actually be spiritually uplifting and helpful, if we at the same time are tending to the needs of the poor.