

Cultivating Contentment
Philippians 4:10-14
October 23, 2011

Introduction

In recent years our nation has witnessed a number of devastating natural disasters, including hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, ice storms, drought and wildfires. With all of the loss and destruction people experience from natural disasters, we are reminded that everything in this world is temporary. Jesus, in Luke 12:15, teaches that “life does not consist in the abundance of possessions”. Society, on the other hand tells us that our possessions make life more fulfilling, that we would be missing out on many great

aspects of life without our possessions. We wrestle in our hearts between the pull our possessions have on us and our striving for freedom from being dependent upon our possessions. Despite the fact that we say we believe Jesus' words, we still find ourselves devoting a great deal of our time, talents, and resources to the acquisition of more stuff. We say that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions, but we live as if they do.

I. Restless Heart Syndrome – Struggling With Discontent

Perhaps you've heard of restless leg syndrome (RLS), a condition in which one has twitches and contractions in the legs. Restless Heart Syndrome (RHS) works in a similar way, but in the heart—or soul. Its primary symptom is discontent. We find that we are never satisfied with anything. The moment we acquire something, we scarcely take time to enjoy it before we

want something else. We are in a constant state of discontent.

A. When Discontentment Is a Virtue

There are times when discontentment is a virtue.

God wired our hearts so that they would be discontent with certain things, causing us to seek the only One who can fully satisfy us. We are meant to yearn to know God more, to cultivate a deeper prayer life, to pursue justice and holiness with increasing fervor, to love others more, and to grow in grace and character and wisdom with each passing day.

B. When Discontentment Destroys

The problem is that those things we should be content with are the very things we find ourselves hopelessly discontented with. For example, we find ourselves discontented with our stuff, our jobs, our churches, our children, and our spouses. God must look down on us and feel the way we feel when we give someone a special gift and he or she asks for the gift receipt. It's as if we're saying to God, "I don't like what you have given me, God; and I want to trade it in and get something better than what you gave me." Too often we are content with the

current condition of our spiritual lives, our reluctance to sacrifice our comfort for the cause of Christ, the limits we place on demonstrating our love for others. We get mixed up and become content in those areas of our lives we should be discontented with and discontented in the areas we should have contentment.

C.Four Keys to Cultivating Contentment

The Apostle Paul is an excellent example of contentment. In verses 11-12 of this morning's scripture text he wrote of the "secret" to his contentment (Phil 4:11-

12). He said, “I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation. I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength. Paul’s secret to contentment in all situations was his reliance on God. Like Paul, we can learn to be content in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves. Here are Four keys which can help us cultivate contentment in our lives as Paul did.

1. Four Words to Repeat: “It Could Be Worse”

First, John Ortberg, pastor at Menlo Park

Presbyterian Church in California, says there are four

words we should say whenever we find ourselves

discontented with something or someone: “It could be

worse.” This is essentially the practice of looking on the

bright side or finding the silver lining. It is recognizing that

no matter what we may not like about a thing or person or

circumstance, we can always find something good to

focus on if only we will choose to do so.

2. One Question to Ask: “For How Long Will This Make Me Happy?”

Second, we should ask ourselves the question “For how long will this make me happy?” So often we buy something, thinking it will make us happy, only to find that the happiness lasts about as long as it takes to open the box. We see a certain item in the store and think that we just have to have it. If we get it, we will be so happy and fulfilled. There is a moment of satisfaction when we make the purchase, but the item does not continue to bring satisfaction over a period of time. Many of the things we

buy are simply not worth the expense. This is why it may be a good idea to see if you can try the product out before you buy it.

3. Developing a Grateful Heart

Third, we need to work at developing a grateful heart. Gratitude is essential if we are to be content. The Apostle Paul said that we are to “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thes. 5:18). A grateful heart recognizes that all of life is a gift. Contentment comes when we spend more time giving thanks for what we have than thinking about what’s missing or wrong in our lives.

4. Where Does Your Soul Find True Satisfaction?

Fourth, ask yourself, “Where does my soul find true satisfaction?” The world answers this question by telling us that we find satisfaction in ease and luxury and comfort and money. The Bible, however, answers the question very differently. It tells us that we find our satisfaction in God alone.

- “O God, you are my God, I seek you, / my soul thirsts for you. . . . / My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, / and my mouth praises you with joyful lips / when I

think of you on my bed, / and meditate on you in the
watches of the night.” (Psalm 63:1, 6)

- “Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from
them; I kept my heart from no pleasure. . . . Then I
considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had
spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing
after wind.” (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11)

- Jesus said the two most important things we must
do are to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and

with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39).

If we keep our focus on these two things, we will find satisfaction for our souls and lasting contentment.

II. Five Steps for Simplifying Our Lives

In addition to cultivating contentment in our lives, it is important that we cultivate simplicity. Contentment and simplicity go hand in hand. Here are 5 steps for simplifying our lives.

1. Set a Goal of Reducing Your Consumption, and Live Below Your Means.

Set a tangible goal to reduce your own personal consumption and the production of waste in your life. For example, use canvas bags when you go grocery shopping. Whenever you are making purchases, consider purchasing generic brands instead of the top-of-the-line product. Drive your car a few more years, rather than trading in every couple of years or buy used rather than new. Reduce your utility bill by setting the thermostat back a couple of degrees when you are away during the

day and asleep at night. If you have trouble doing that, ask Bob Wylie. He'll be glad to help you. Have National Grid, or your utility company come in and do an energy audit for you. Find other ways to reduce your consumption and live below your means. Do some research and share ideas with others.

2. Before Making a Purchase, Ask Yourself, Do I Really Need This? and, Why Do I Want This?

These questions will help you to determine the true motivation of your desired purchase. Is it a need, a self-esteem issue, or something else? You may find yourself

wrestling with your true motive and decide that your reason for purchasing the item is not a good one.

3. Use Something Up Before Buying Something

New.

Take good care of the things you buy and use them until they are empty, broken, or worn out. Buy things that are made to last; and, when buying things that have a short lifespan, spend your money wisely.

4. Plan Low-cost Entertainment That Enriches.

When it comes to choosing entertainment for your family or friends, plan things that are simple and cheap.

You'll be amazed at some of the creative ideas you can come up and how much you can do for little cost.

5. Ask Yourself, Are There Major Changes That Would Allow Me to Simplify My Life?

Ask yourself questions related to your home, possessions, job, and activities to identify some significant changes that will simplify your life. Remember, if you cannot do all the things God is calling you to do and you're unable to find joy in your life, perhaps it's time to simplify in some major ways.

III. The Power of Self-Control

Simplifying your life requires the practice of self-control. Solomon wrote, “Like a city whose walls are broken down / is a [person] who lacks self-control” (Proverbs 25:28, NIV). When a city’s walls are broken through, the enemy can march right in and destroy it. There is no longer any protection. Likewise, self-control is a wall around your heart and life that protects you from yourself, from temptation, and from sins that are deadly and ultimately can destroy you. Self-control comes down

to making a choice between satisfying an impulse to gain instant gratification and choosing not to act upon the opportunity for instant gratification for some higher cause or greater gratification later. Self-control is about forgoing instant gratification by stopping to think about the answers to three questions:

- “What are the long-term consequences of this action?”
- “Is there a higher good or a better outcome if I used this resource of time, money, or energy in another way?”
- “Will this action honor God?”

IV. Conclusion: Which Tent Will You Live In?

Will you live in discon-**tent** or con-**tent**-ment? You and you alone determine which “tent” will be yours. You choose it in large part by deciding what life is about. If you decide that “life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions,” then you are choosing contentment.

Choosing contentment means we look to God as our Source, giving thanks for what we have; we ask God to give us the right perspective on money and possessions and to change our hearts each day; we decide to live

simpler lives, wasting less and conserving more; and we choose to give more generously.

Are there major changes that would allow you to simplify your life? Are you living a lifestyle that you cannot afford? Are you pushing yourself beyond your means? If you are feeling stressed by trying to keep up your lifestyle and it is keeping you from doing the things God is calling you to do, maybe it is time to simplify in some major things.

Benjamin Franklin said “Contentment makes poor men rich, but discontentment makes rich men poor.” What

is really important in your life? I would like to close with this video by Adam Hamilton, pastor and author of the book “Enough” that we are studying.

Video clip: What Would You Take?

(Source: Enough)