

Where Is God When I'm Discontented?

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Where Is God When Life Is Hard Series

Philippians 4:10-13

I've been doing a series titled "Where is God When Life is Hard?" and today I want to talk about the subject of contentment. We live in a culture that breeds discontent, don't we? What is one of the major secrets of contemporary marketing except to rub a sense of discontent with what you own, where you've gone, what you look like, and the service you're entitled to.

Think of the absolute obsession that our culture has with a person's abs. Just look at the magazine titles screaming at you as you go through the supermarket check out line. Here you are, you have your Hostess Ho-Ho's, and you are purchasing your chips and dip, your Hershey's Syrup and Bosco. These are the magazine headlines you read (and these are actual article titles from this month!):

- Banish Buddha Belly: Six Moves in Fifteen Minutes
- Tone Your Abs, Butt and Legs: The Easiest Workout to Get Leaner, Stronger and Faster
- Shrink Your Waistline Now!
- A Firmer Belly Now: In One Move
- Flat Abs: Fast
- Melt Away Tummy Fat: Five Moves for a Flat Tummy

Do you think your grandmother spent even five seconds worrying about her abs? My grandmother wore a big grandma dress and you couldn't see her abs anyway because she always wore an apron over her dress.

You even can't pick up Readers' Digest any more without being exhorted to firm up your abs. We live in a culture that breeds discontent.

What do you think about that commercial for a moisturizer or some type of cream, but it has a very attractive woman who looks sincerely into the camera and says: I'm 36, but you'd never know it. Now, you know that the implicit message is that if you are over 30, you are over the hill. And if you don't buy this moisturizer, then the only alternative for you is to stay in your house in the dark with a bag over your head because you'd be too horrible to look at in public. Remember that old commercial that advertised some type of cream to remove "horrid age spots?" Are any of you old enough to remember that?

My wife, Marlene, told me that a survey has been done saying that within something like five minutes of flipping through a women's magazine, women

become measurably depressed. Here you are, you are not just competing with a woman on your street, or in your neighborhood, you are competing with some of the most beautiful women in the world. And you aren't even competing with women as they are in reality; you are competing with an airbrushed, computer-enhanced, cosmetic surgery version of the most beautiful women in the world.

I read an article by a magazine reporter who followed a professional model for a week. She discovered that for a photo shoot on a hair-coloring product this woman had four days of treatment by professional colorists for her hair to have that healthy shine. Of course, women are supposed to get the same look by pouring that product on their hair for 20 minutes in the shower. For this model's cover shot, they took 360 photographs for just one picture. And this is a professional model who really knows how to make her looks work for her. An entire day, from 4 a.m. to 6 p.m., is spent on her looks. Several professionals take an hour and a half to style her hair and paint her face. She has a personal trainer. Her entire diet is focused on her body. She had breast surgery. She's photographed through frosted filters.

Do you think, women, that as you flip through fashion magazines that you are going to become a bit discontented with your looks? Or that you can compare yourself with that?

The culture of discontentment for women starts when you are a little girl. Think about the whole Barbie industry and the dolls we buy for our daughters. Before 1959 little girls played with baby dolls. But Barbie has become the ideal of what should appear on the cover of Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issues. You know Barbie's stats, don't you? If Barbie was a real woman, she would be 6'2", weigh 108 pounds; her measurements would be 36-18-33. That's certainly a standard that a lot of women can live up to!

Look at shows like Extreme Makeover, or the The Swan. Again, what are they communicating other than a person ought to be radically discontented unless we totally alter their appearance.

Let me ask you a few questions today as we consider the subject of contentment. What do you do that breeds discontent in your life? Does your reading breed a sense of discontent in you? Does flipping through fashion magazines make you discontented with your wardrobe, your body, your face, or skin? Does reading romance novels make you discontented with your love life? Does watching home decorating shows make you discontented with your house? Does reading books on finance or investments, going to seminars, make you discontented with your possessions? Does test driving cars, or walking through a mall make you discontented? What is it that you do that breeds discontentment?

I've called today's talk, "Where is God When I'm Discontented?" Let's pray.

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Philippians 4:10-13

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Let me give you a definition of contentment that we can draw out of this text. Paul is saying, "I've learned to be independent of my external circumstances."

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Verse 11: I've learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

I've learned to be not determined by my external circumstances. Maybe I'm wealthy. Maybe I'm poor.

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Verse 12: I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry whether living in plenty or in want.

In any and every situation, not only the easy situations, but also the hard situations, situations of suffering, of pain, of disappointment – whatever situation, I have learned to not to be determined by my circumstance. What's his secret?

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Verse 13: I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

I've learned to be independent, not determined by my external circumstances, because I've discovered resources in the Lord that are more than adequate for any and every circumstance.

Let me quickly tell you, so that you aren't confused today, what Christian contentment is not. Christian contentment does not mean to just be a doormat for everyone to wipe his or her feet on. Christian contentment is not, here I am suffering under an unjust government, I should never protest. I should never try to organize. I should just simply live my life with this terrible situation. Christian contentment is not if you are a wife and your husband is slapping you around, you just need to learn how to be content.

The message of Christianity has never been if you are in poverty; just continue to live in poverty. If you are being abused, just continue to be abused. In fact, Christianity has always had an incredible ability to lift people up and give people

a new sense of dignity. There is a sociological law, in fact, called redemption and lift. And what sociologists have done is that within one generation of Christianity thoroughly permeating a society, the society will become more prosperous. People will be more productive. Houses will be cleaner. Educational levels will rise. Alcoholism rates will lower. There will be fewer children born out of wedlock. Whenever Christianity and the gospel thoroughly permeates a society the society is going to be lifted.

Christians have always said to people: If you have the power to change your circumstances for the better, while remaining obedient to God, do so. If you can better yourself and your situation by getting an education so that you can make more money and provide better for your family, do so. If you can take another job where you aren't being abused, get another job. If you can improve your marriage so that it is more pleasant, so that you relate more kindly and lovingly to each other, then improve your marriage.

But Christians also recognize that there is much of life that we cannot change. It may be that we don't have the power to change our circumstances. Or it may be that if we chose to change our circumstances, we would become disobedient to God. For example, we may not have the power to get ourselves out of a traffic jam, how can I be contented when I'm stuck in traffic? Or I may be disobedient to God by breaking my marriage vows and getting out of my unpleasant marriage. How can I be content by remaining in a marriage that is way less than perfect? So contentment does not mean that I never try to change my circumstance if I can.

And contentment never means that we become complacent or resigned to our sin or our present level of spirituality.

- Oh, well, that's just the way I am. I'm just a gossip.
- Oh well, this church happens to be my little private addiction. But I just need to become content with it.
- I'm just not a very good servant. I never serve people in the church. I never give myself away to anyone else in the church. I just take church resources.
- I don't give sacrificially, but I just need to learn to be content with who I am.

Contentment does not mean complacency with our sin or our present level of spirituality.

Well, why then, are we so discontented concerning circumstances that we cannot change because we don't have the power to change them, or because to change them would be disobedient to God, as in the case of breaking our marriage vows or being unethical to get more business. Why are our moods so determined by our circumstances? Why are we so discontented in America today?

One major source of discontentment is comparing yourself to other people. In 2 Cor. 10:12 the apostle Paul said:

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We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

It is not wise to engage in comparisons. Why not? Well, the major reason is because discontentment comes from unfavorable comparisons that you make with other people. Friend, look at your life. How much of your internal upset – grumbling, complaining, frustration, depression, discouragement, disappointment comes because you make an unfavorable comparison with another human being? Have you ever noticed that you can be quite happy with what you have until you discover that someone in your situation has more than you? For example, have you ever been happy with your salary or with your raise until you found out that a coworker makes more than you do, or got a bigger raise? Or maybe you are happy with your home until you visit your best friend from college's new home and her home has a 1000 square feet more than your home and her kitchen is your dream kitchen that you can't possibly afford.

Comparing yourself with other people is a major source of discontentment. Parents, how do you feel when your friend's child always succeeds? How do you feel when your friend's child is brilliant and is always on the honor role and your child, who is about the same age, is barely passing? How do you feel when your friend's child stars on every select team in athletics and your child spends the season always warming the bench? Or their child is obedient and is pursuing Christ while your child is forever rebelling, is experimenting with drugs, and is cold toward God. We parents often make comparisons between our children and other children and grow discontented when the comparison is unfavorable.

How do you feel when you aren't the most successful person in your company? Or you don't generate the most clients in your firm? Or your small group is not the biggest or the most successful? In fact, it is shrinking, not growing. How do you feel when you go to your high school reunion and all your friends are showing pictures of their children and their babies and you don't have any kids or they are celebrating their 20th anniversaries and you are still single? Or you go to a family reunion and everyone is there with their spouse, except you and you are still single and you don't have pictures of your children?

Oscar Wilde once told a story about the devil, who was walking across the desert. He came upon a spot where a number of minor demons were trying to torment a holy monk who had lived out in the desert in isolation. This holy man easily shook off all their temptations. They tried to tempt him with lust and he batted that away. They tried to tempt him with anger, and he was able to defeat that. The devil watched them failing and stepped forward and said to the little

minor demons: “Let me show you how it is done.” With that he whispered to the holy man: “Your brother has just been made the Bishop of the Church of Alexandria.” Immediately, this holy man’s countenance changed. You saw him move from a look of serenity to a scowl of jealousy and upset. The devil stepped back and he said: “That, my friends, is how you do it.”

Let me ask you a question: With whom are you competing? Do you find yourself, even as an adult, competing with a brother or a sister? Are you competing with a close friend? We tend to compete with people’s whose gifts or circumstances in life are most like our own. I’ve watched Christian musicians struggle with other Christian musicians. Christian pastors compete with other Christian pastors. Mothers compete with other mothers. Leaders of singles groups compete with leaders of other singles groups.

Again, let me ask you a question: with whom are you competing? Maybe no one comes to mind. Maybe you initially say: Rich, I don’t think I’m competing with anyone. Well, let’s drill a little bit deeper here. Here is a way for you to figure out whether you are in competition with someone else. The apostle Paul commands us in Romans 12:15,

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Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

So, it is easy to figure out who you are in competition with. With whom do you find it difficult to fulfill this command to rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn? Whose success do you find it difficult to rejoice over? Who is it that when they are praised, you find yourself wincing? Do you find yourself wincing when your parent praises your brother or sister or an in-law? Do you find yourself wincing when you hear of the success of the present spouse of your ex-spouse? Do you wince at the praise or success that’s being enjoyed by an old friend? Is there anyone about whom you say to yourself: If I hear one more great thing about so-and-so, I am going to scream.

Let’s press this home even more deeply. Paul tells us not only to rejoice to those who rejoice, but to mourn with those who mourn. Is there anyone that you would secretly like to see fail? Or when we hear some bad news about them, when they’re not doing so well, when their life circumstances are less than perfect, when they or a family member have failed and fallen on their face? You are secretly a little happy. You can tell that you are in competition with someone when you not only don’t mourn about their unhappiness, but you actually fantasize that they might be taken down a peg or two.

How are you doing on the test of rejoicing with those who rejoice, and mourning with those who mourn?

Of course, comparisons can be made not only with real people, but with ideal people. You can compare yourself with someone in a magazine. One of the real horrors of pornography is that men will compare their mates to a picture in a magazine. Or perhaps you compare your spouse with an old flame, with a list of ideals that he or she doesn't attain to. Discontentment comes from comparisons.

And let me suggest at this point, one simple way to defeat the dragon of competition. F.B. Meyer, who was a godly, wonderful preacher at the beginning of the 20th century, honestly confessed that he struggled because another pastor, G. Campbell Morgan who drew bigger crowds than he did. Meyer said: "The only way I have ever found to defeat the power of comparisons is to pray for the person. So I've committed myself to daily pray blessing on G. Campbell Morgan."

Friend, do you think you could engage in that discipline, to pray blessing, to pray favor on the person with whom you are competing?

What's another source of discontentment? The second major source of discontentment is the attitude that what God has given you is never enough. It's the "never enough" syndrome. Like Bob in the movie "What About Bob," nothing is ever enough. I need, I need, I need. I want, I want, I want. Like ungrateful, spoiled, totally self-indulged children at Christmas, who look at a mass of expensive Christmas presents that they've been given and they cry and say: "Is this all you got me? I wanted something else. I wanted a bicycle. I wanted a different shirt. I wanted a new guitar."

A major source of discontentment is we say: "Never enough" concerning God's gifts to us. It is not enough. In fact, the heart of sin is an attitude that we look at God and say: "Sorry, God, what you give me, what you gave me is not good enough." Adam and Eve were given the Garden of Eden. They were living in total paradise, a perfect environment. They had perfect harmony with creation. They enjoyed a perfect unashamed transparent relationship with each other. And Adam and Eve also enjoyed total communion and total access to God.

But it was not enough. Because the most discontented creature in the universe, Satan, for whom his high position in heaven was not enough, decided to spread his discontent to the rest of God's creation. If you want to know what spiritual warfare is often about, it is often about Satan making you more discontented with what you have. And that's what he did with Adam and Eve in the Garden. They were living in a perfect environment. They had perfect circumstances, perfect relationships with each other, a perfect relationship with God. But he sowed the thought of discontentment in their minds and he said: "What you've been given by God is not enough. You have to go beyond the limits God has given you and eat fruit from the one tree God has forbidden you."

For King David in the Old Testament, the never enough of discontentment led him to an adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the killing of Bathsheba's

husband, Uriah. Listen to the prophet Nathan's rebuke of King David after David had an affair, and murdered Uriah. He didn't say: David, you are just being true to yourself, like the New Jersey governor who recently confessed to a homosexual affair, he's just being true to himself. Here's what Nathan the prophet said to David in 2 Samuel 12:7:

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Then Nathan said to David: You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own.

I would have given you even more. I gave you the kingdom. I would have given you even more. And yet, it still wasn't enough. You had to sin.

Do you see this attitude, friend, in your life, in any area? This grabbing, stealing, demanding what God has not given you. This attitude that says: "Even if I need to rebel against God, even if I need to break God's commandments, I'm going to do it because what God has given me is not enough."

"Never enough" could be the title of the history of the Israelites in the Old Testament. If you wanted to sum up Israelite history over the thousand years from the time they were set free from Egyptian captivity to the writing of the last book of the Old Testament, the book of Malachi, you could put over that history the title "Never Enough."

Go back to the beginning of Israel's history. Go back to the book of Exodus, where we find God answering Israel's prayers, sending them a deliverer in the person of Moses, striking the Egyptians with ten plagues, freeing Israel from slavery, leading them through the Red Sea miraculously, drowning their Egyptian pursuers. And immediately after they get on the other side of the Red Sea, they begin to complain: What you've done is not enough, God. Exodus 16:2-3

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In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death!"

We're hungry, so we accuse God's appointed leaders and God himself of holding back on us. God in grace provides bread from heaven for the Israelites. He sends them manna that they didn't have to work for. It just fell from the sky. But

that's not enough. After a period of time that they were sick and tired of eating manna. We read in Numbers 11:4

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The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna."

Doesn't this sound like spoiled children? I don't like what you gave me for dinner. Is this what we're eating? I don't want it. Never enough.

Sometimes the never enough of discontentment concerns the ministry that God has given us. We're discontented with our place in God's kingdom. Why have we been given these gifts and not other gifts? I want to be able to teach. I want to be able to lead worship. I want to be able to counsel. Why have I been given this amount of influence and not great influence? Why this position and not a more important position?

Here is the last example from Israel's history. In Numbers 16 we read about a group of Levites, who have been assigned to assist the priests in the performance of their duties. Well, this group of Levites starts complaining about the role they've been given in God's kingdom. Led by the Levite Korah, they said: We want more. We want to not only be assistants, we want to be the main players. We want to be the stars. We don't want to be co-stars; we want to be the stars. We don't want the Academy Award for best supporting actor; we want the award for best actor. We want to offer the sacrifices and not just be associates. And listen to Moses rebuke of Korah and the Levites in Numbers 16:8-11

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Moses also said to Korah, "Now listen, you Levites! Isn't it enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near himself to do the work at the Lord's tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them? He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near himself, but now you are trying to get the priesthood too. It is against the Lord that you and all your followers have banded together. Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?"

Aaron, of course, was the designated priest. They wanted his position. What I'd like you to do, if you have a Bible, is to underline in the Bible the phrase in verse 9, "isn't it enough for you."

Friend, let me ask you a personal question: where do you manifest discontentment in your life? Despite the many blessings of God on your life when do you regularly grumble and say, "Not enough?" Is it in your work? Are

you discontented on the job that God has given you even though you are working and making a salary and eating – it is not enough. Are you discontented in your marriage? Do you like to think back to the good old days, the days when you were single? Have you forgotten how much you wanted to escape singlehood? Are you discontented with being a Christian? Do you sometimes fantasize about the good old days before you were saved? Have you forgotten your misery? Is there one area in your life that you regularly grumble and complain about like the Israelites?

And of course a third source of major discontentment for 21st century Americans is our addiction to materialism. We truly believe as 21st century Christian Americans that we will find meaning, purpose, fulfillment, and satisfaction in life through acquiring more stuff, even though the Bible tells us over and over again: you cannot find more meaning, you cannot find more purpose, you cannot find more fulfillment, you will not find satisfaction in getting more stuff. Ecclesiastes 5:10 says this:

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Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.

Money and more stuff never satisfies the person who has it. Jesus himself told us that we can't find meaning in life; we can't find purpose in life through more stuff. Jesus said in Luke 12:15,

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Then Jesus said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

You won't find life, life worth living, satisfying, fulfilled, purposeful, meaningful life through acquiring more possessions. And if you need confirmation of God's Word, look at America today. Do you see a nation of contented people? Look at people you know, people in your workplace, in your classes, your roommates, friends, and family members. Look in the mirror. Do you see a nation of contented people? By any measurable standard, we Americans have infinitely more today materially than we had back in the 1950's. But are we really more contented? Are we really happier? Are we really living better lives?

Housing sizes have gone up. Back in the 1950's, a median new house size was 1100 square feet. Today the median new house is about 2400 square feet nationwide. Most homes in the 1950's had one bathroom. Now the most homes have 2½ bathrooms. Homes back in the 1950's virtually never had central air-conditioning. Most homes built since 1970 have central air and at least two-car attached garages.

But are we really more content? You know addiction counselors talk about the problem of tolerance. After a period of time drug abusers need greater and greater amounts of drugs to get the same high, or not even to get high but just to feel normal. Alcoholics need greater and greater amounts of alcohol just to cope. Sexual addicts need more and more deviant kinds of sex, and greater dosages of sex just to feel okay and to not feel agitated.

And I believe, friends, that we simply have no idea how addicted we Americans are and we Christian Americans are to material. We have no idea how much stuff we really believe that we need in order to be happy.

PHOTOS FROM *MATERIAL WORLD* BY PETER MENZEL AS EXAMPLES

And not only do we have more stuff than anyone else in the world, but we discontented Americans constantly demand bigger stuff. I mentioned houses before, but it goes beyond that into everything. A two-ton car is not nearly big enough. We need three-tons, four-tons, we need an SUV that requires two of its own parking spaces.

Have you noticed how much bigger sports equipment is now compared to the past? Tennis rackets: I remember playing tennis with one of these small wooden rackets. The heads on tennis rackets are now easily 3x larger in area than it was 20 years ago. Golf clubs: I mean the size of drivers is 3-4x larger than they used to be. People are swinging something that looks a 25 lb. sledgehammer. Look at the amount of equipment that hockey goalies wear now compared to 20-25 years ago. There's about one square inch left for the puck to go into the net. Look at the helmets that pro football players wear now compared to 20-25 years ago. These guys come on and look like Darth Vader.

If you want to see the growth of sports equipment, look at the growth of the size of baseball gloves. If you go back to the days of Ty Cobb, back in the early part of the 20th century, guys were wearing baseball gloves that looked like leather mittens. Now, guys wear baseball gloves that are the size peach barrels. Catchers' mitts are the size of bedroom pillows. And have you noticed how big bedroom pillows are now? Compared to where they were 20-30 years ago? And do you know *how many* pillows everyone requires on their bed? We have to unmake our bed every night in order to get in.

If you are a follower of Christ, let me ask you a question that perhaps no one has ever asked you before. When does your purchase or ownership of some luxury become a sin and an offense against God? One of the things that has dropped out of contemporary evangelical lists of sin is the sin of undue luxury. We evangelicals have pared our list of sins down to a very few things, mostly sexual sin: homosexuality, adultery, premarital sex, pornography use. These are sins and they do reveal great rebellion against God. But we virtually never mention sins that Christian writers in the past focused on. Sins like pride or vanity, or a

lack of modesty in dress. Many Christian women and men have no sense that they are offending God and sinning against other people through immodest dress.

And we almost never talk about the sin of self-indulgence through excessive luxury. May I ask you to do this before God, if you are a Christian? May I ask you to ask God: “Do I have too much? Do I need to stop buying for my house? Do I need to stop buying clothes? Do I need to pause and keep ratcheting up the kind of car I drive or recreational equipment I own because you want me to do something else with the money you’ve given me? Do you want me to do something other than indulge myself again?” May I ask you to ask God more than once? May I ask you to pray more than once and say: “Lord God, will you bring me to spiritual maturity concerning the issue of possessions and luxury. Lord God, will you give me your heart and mind concerning possessions, my house, my kitchen, my clothes, my electronic equipment, computers? Will you give me your heart and mind?”

Friend, God has not said to you that you have the liberty to do whatever you want with your money because you tithe. All of your money belongs to the Lord. Why not ask God what he wants you to do with it?

Well, how can we become content in a culture of discontentment? In a world of comparisons, and “never enough,” in a country utterly addicted to materialism, how can we learn to become contented? The apostle Paul says in Phil. 4:11,

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I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

And then in verse 12,

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I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation...

In other words, I have learned how to live above my circumstances. I’ve learned to live despite my circumstances. I’ve learned to be independent of my circumstances. Even if my circumstances never change, I have learned to be content. Notice, the text does not command you to be content. Paul doesn’t simply write and say: In every situation, be content. Christian contentment is not a matter of simple obedience. It has to do with a learning process that God puts you through in the school of life. God wants to teach you the ABC’s of learning contentment.

You know, before anyone can write great poetry, they have to learn their ABC’s. After they learn their ABC’s, they begin to read simple books. You know, “See

Dick run. Run, Dick, run. Run, run, run. Go, Spot, go.” And then they begin to read literature. And then they learn how poets wrote in the past. And then they read poetry. And finally they are able to write poetry.

Before we learn the poetry of contentment, God puts us through the process of learning our ABC’s as Christians. It is not automatic that just because you accepted Christ into your life that you will automatically get this point of not having your circumstances master you. This is something you need to learn. So, what is the secret we need to learn? Phil. 4:13,

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I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

The key to contentment is to learn to find resource in God that enables you to be peaceful, to have a quiet spirit, to even be joyful, whatever your circumstance. The key to contentment is learning how to find resource in God who enables you to live a peaceful, even a joyful life, whatever your circumstances.

I’ve listed the secret in terms of A-B-C.

A – Acknowledge God’s providences in your life. Acknowledge God’s sovereignty over your life. Friend, do you believe that whatever happens to you in life has to first pass through the hands of God before it gets to you? Let me say that again, do you believe that whatever you have, whatever your gifts are, whatever your situation is, whatever your relationships are, whether you are deprived in an area, whether you suffer, whether you are unbelievably blessed, do you believe that whatever happens in your life first has to pass through the hands of God before it gets to you?

This is what the Bible teaches. Whether by God’s express will, or by God’s permissive will, nothing in heaven or on earth, or in hell happens unless God either sends it to you, or he allows it to come to you. Everything has to pass through the hands of God.

And the reason godly people in the past were able to be content despite terrible circumstances is that they acknowledged God’s providences. They acknowledged God’s sovereignty over their lives. And so they surrendered themselves in trust to the will of God.

David Brainerd, who was a wonderful, devout, godly young man in his 20’s, was a missionary to American Indians back in the early 1700’s. He suffered from horrible tuberculosis, hacking coughs, often times coughing up blood. When he was out in the wilderness, he suffered from great loneliness, hunger, and cold. He wrote this in his diary back in 1744: *My soul was sweetly resigned to God’s disposal of me in every regard and I saw that nothing had happened to me but what was best for me.*

My soul was sweetly resigned to God's disposal of me in every regard, and I saw that nothing had happened to me but what was best for me. He could even be content despite the disappointment of not seeing more converts. David Brainerd wrote about that saying, *It pleased God to leave me to be very dry and barren. But he is just and he has made my soul acquiesce in his will in this regard. God had helped me to say "amen" to him. Good is the will of the Lord.* Brainerd believed that God was at work in everything.

Listen, discontented one, grumbling one: Do you ever engage in the spiritual exercise of saying: "Lord, I've been so upset about my job situation, about my family. I've been grumbling and complaining about my health. I'm so discontented about my finances. I've grumbled, complained, groaned, and whined about the fact that you have not presently answered my prayers for the salvation of a loved one. But today, I choose to believe that you are in control of my life. Today I will choose to trust that you know what is best for me and for the kingdom. Like Joseph, I'm going to say maybe other people intended what happened to me for evil, but you intended it for good. You are good. Your will is good. And I will resign myself to your will."

Acknowledge God's providences. Practice surrender.

B – Be grateful for God's provision: Practice thanksgiving. Dave Early, who is the pastor of New Life Church in Gahanna, wrote a wonderful little book on prayer that he titled *Prayer Odyssey: A Journey to Effective Prayer*. In his book he talks about the practice of thanksgiving. He says that he was called to a church member's house in the middle of the night by a husband who said: "Diane is in the closet with a cord around her neck. She says she's going to kill herself." Dave crawled out of bed and put on some clothes and drove over to their house. When he walked in, he said Diane was in the closet threatening suicide. Her husband, Mark, had lost his job. They had great financial pressures. They had four tiny children. It was more than she could bear. All she saw ahead of her was total hopelessness. She couldn't take it any longer.

Dave said he had been practicing the discipline of saying thanks for the month before. Every day he was taking time to make a list of things that he was thankful for. Deliberately, as a discipline choosing to say thanks, he walked up to the closet and he said: "Diane, I'll make you a deal. If we can't come up with 100 reasons for you to be thankful to God, then you can go ahead and kill yourself. But if we come up with a hundred reasons, you have to come out and talk to us."

So, from inside the closet she said: "I'm not thankful for anything. I just want to die." Dave said: "Not yet. Let's first try to come up with a hundred reasons to give thanks." Her husband, Mark, yelled into the closet: "Stacy, Katie, Lindsay, and Matthew!" naming their four children. "That's four reasons to be thankful!"

“And the fact that we live in a house and not an apartment. You said that last week. That’s five.” “Did you eat dinner tonight? Lots of people around the world went hungry.” She said: “Yes!” “That’s six.”

“Do you have a car?” Diane whispered from the closet: “I’m glad that grandma gave us that nice car.” “That’s seven.”

“How about the cat?” Diane said: “I love that stupid cat.” “That’s 8.”

“What about your parents? That’s 9 and 10. Your brother and sister? That’s 12. Plus your grandma, that’s 13.”

She said: “And my grandpa. That’s 14.”

Dave said: “Keep going.” Diane from inside the closet began to list things and she started to laugh and came out of the closet. They went around the house and began to touch different items in the house, photographs and memories. By the end of the evening she was rejoicing.

Grumbling one, complaining one, discontented Christian, anyone who is here, can I ask you to engage in this discipline? Over the next week, will you take just two minutes in the morning to speak to God and to specifically say “thank you” for certain things in your life? Two minutes each day. Before you ask God for anything, will you take two minutes to tell God what you are thankful for. That you are alive, your kids, your grandkids, a hot shower.

A - Acknowledge God’s providences: Practice surrender. B – Be grateful: practice thanksgiving.

And finally,

C – Connect with God’s person: Practice abiding. We human beings are not independent from of our circumstances. We live in the midst of our circumstances and we’re often mastered by our circumstances. Only God is independent of circumstances. Only God lives above circumstance. So Paul says: I have learned the secret of being content. I’ve learned the secret of living independent of circumstance. What is the secret?

SLIDE

Verse 13: I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

By connecting with the one who is above circumstance, who is independent of circumstance, who is not ruled by circumstance, I can share that capacity. Fill me, therefore, Lord, with your own person. Fill me, therefore, Lord, with your Spirit. Fill me, therefore, Lord, with your attitude. Help me to look at life with your mind?

The secret of contentment, discontented ones, is not gritting your teeth and trying harder. I'm just going to be content today. Contentment is more like coming up from under water after you've been holding your breath for a couple of minutes. Contentment is like breaking through to the surface and gasping for air. Oh, it feels so good.

Grumbling person, complaining person, stop holding your spiritual breath. Breathe in the presence of God. Welcome the Holy Spirit into areas that you've been grumbling about in the past, areas that you are discontented in, areas that you are frustrated about. Invite the person of the Holy Spirit to come into that area of your life. Take a deep breath and say: Holy Spirit, fill me now. Lord Jesus, give me your heart toward this person I'm competing with. Lord Jesus, fill me with your thankful, joyful heart. Lord Jesus, fill me with your peace that passes understanding. In places, Lord, that I've been keeping you out and at arm's length, I welcome you in. Connect deeply with the person of God. Practice abiding. Practice welcoming God in to your life.

Here is the precious gift reserved for the children of God: Contentment. Don't go through life without receiving this gift. Let's pray.

Where Is God When I'm Discontented?

Rich Nathan

August 14-15, 2004

Where Is God When Life Is Hard Series

Philippians 4:10-13

I. A Culture of Discontent

II. What Contentment Is Not

A. Resigning Ourselves To Our Circumstances

B. Complacency With Our Sin

III. Sources of Discontent

A. Unfavorable Comparisons (2 Cor. 12:10)

B. Unlimited Appetites – “Never Enough” (Gen. 3:1-8; 2 Sam. 12:7-9; Ex. 16:2,3; Num. 11:4-6; 16:8-11)

C. Unchecked Materialism (Eccl. 5:10; 1 Tim. 6:6-10)

IV. The ABC'S of Contentment (Phil. 4:11-13)

A. Acknowledge God's Providences: Practice Surrender

B. Be Grateful For God's Provision: Practice Thanksgiving

C. Connect With God's Person: Practice Abiding