

Title: Content Under Pressure  
Date: July 3, 2022  
Subject: Contentment is a component of true happiness.  
Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:6 - 10; Philippians 4:10 - 13

Introduction. Jean with part of the book “Tacky the Penguin.”

The penguin hunters wanted become rich, rich, rich. That’s a goal for many people, whether they have lots of money or have to search the couch cushions for coins so can buy a hamburger. The Bible presents a higher goal.

READ 1 Timothy 6:6 – 10.

The higher goal is godliness. Is it godliness alone to which contentment can be added or is it godliness paired with contentment? I'll let you slice and dice to see if it makes much difference. Godliness with contentment is great gain. This contrasts with the craved reward for financial gain for possessing godliness in v. 5. Some mistakenly viewed godliness as a way to get rich, rich, rich.

We need to get a handle on the meaning of godliness. It comes from being in a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Based on that connection it’s the desire and movement toward becoming godly, Godlike. Cults and false teachers try to turn it into becoming God or a god. Wrong course. Godliness refers to Christian character, to actively living a life and lifestyle pleasing to God out of an attitude of reverence and devotion to him.

Jerry Bridges wrote numerous books on the Christian life including *The Practice of Godliness*. In it he writes: “Devotion is not an activity; it is an attitude toward God. This attitude is composed of three essential elements: the fear of God, the love of God, the desire for God. Note that all three elements focus upon God. *The practice of godliness is an exercise or discipline that focuses upon God.* From this Godward attitude arises the character and conduct that we usually think of as godliness.”

William Law in *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* uses the word devotion to mean the entirety of godliness - all the actions and attitude: “Devotion signifies a life given, or devoted, to God. He therefore is the devout [godly] man who lives no longer to his own will, or the way and spirit of the world, but to the sole will of God; who considers God in everything, who serves God in everything, who makes all the parts of his common life parts of piety [godliness], by doing everything in the name of God, and under such rules as are conformable to his Glory.”

Godliness sets different priorities. Godliness with contentment counters the human condition of seeking and loving money. Instead, the charge is given in the 11 to pursue godliness along with other qualities that enhance the Christian life - righteousness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. "Pursue" indicates unrelenting, persevering effort.

We've been helping our daughter and family finish their basement. They made lots of purchases at Menard's which resulted in rebates because of the 11% off. They had more purchases to make but couldn't find a rebate worth several hundred dollars. They searched the kitchen counter where it had been at one time, the cupboards, asked Laynie who was almost 2 1/2 at that point if she took it and put it someplace as she was known to move things around, offered a reward to the child who found it, looked and looked and looked. Several weeks later it was discovered in a book disguised as a bookmark. Should have been in a Tacky book as those are read more often.

We need to hunt for those qualities including contentment.

One more verse from 1 Timothy. Read 1 Timothy 4:8.

We have a comparison involving another thing Americans are fanatics about -- trying to remain young forever and spending lots of money in the pursuit. There are benefits to physical training. It's good and helpful, but it has a limit. It can't reverse the dying process which will happen to all unless Jesus Christ comes back.

On the other hand, godliness has supreme value. It's valuable for all things. It has the promise of improving the quality of our lives now as it guides us to do what's right and prevents us from doing wrong. It also has value for the life to come where it will be fully unveiled.

Back to 1 Timothy 6. A major reason to be content is presented in V. 7. We brought nothing into the world - no bank accounts, no clothes, no food, no possessions, zip, zilch, nada - nothing but us. We'll exit the same way we entered - taking nothing out of the world, but us.

V. 8 presents a conclusion. If we have the necessities of life, we should be content. This has been phrased as a question: "If we cannot keep anything we accumulate in this life, then why pour all our energy into acquiring possessions beyond what we need?" (David Skiver, Disciples' Bible Study Series, March-May, 2004, P. 50).

Much of contentment relates to finances but isn't only related to finances. Contentment is to be in every aspect of life.

Read Philippians 4:10 – 13.

These verses lead into Paul's appreciation for the Philippian church for sharing in his troubles and their financial gifts which enabled him to live and continue his ministry.

Contentment. What it isn't.

In ancient Greece there was a group of people known as Stoics. They had a snippet of truth, as is the case for false teachings. They taught that contentment was not a product of possessing a lot but in wanting a little. From there they veered off course. They aimed for self-sufficiency, endeavoring to be independent of and detached from people, things and circumstances. They sought to possess resources in themselves so they could meet every situation themselves. Any and every desire was wrong. Therefore, they sought to eliminate all desires, feelings and emotion until the person simply didn't care about himself, people or possessions and what happened to them. They had no use for love or caring. That's not contentment.

Contentment isn't opposed to things. It's opposed being possessed by things or obsessed with stuff. People who don't have much for possessions can be discontent because they deeply crave more. They're like the person who said they would love to have the chance to prove that money can't make them happy. Those who have a lot can be discontent because they worry about what to do with what they have or what will happen to it and them.

Contentment isn't fatalism, that what will be will be, whatever. It isn't believing God is in control of everything, so I just let whatever happens happen and not care. We are to care deeply about things even as Paul expressed earlier about his spiritual progress: READ Philippians 3:12 – 14.

Contentment isn't complacency, indifference, being satisfied with the way things are. It doesn't encourage laziness or justify a lack of hard work. It's sometimes thought that a person who is content is willing to be mired in drab and boring dullville.

Paul exerted himself. He was diligent as he fought against those who were false teachers. He wasn't content to allow the spread of false teaching. He worked hard physically as a tentmaker. He wasn't a slacker.

Contentment doesn't mean a person enjoys negative circumstances. The text doesn't say Paul liked the things that happened to him, experiences like: “prison, flogged severely, exposed to death again and again, five times received 39 lashes, three times beaten with rods, stoned once, shipwrecked three times, spent a night and day in the open sea, in danger from rivers, bandits, countrymen, Gentiles, and so on” (2 Corinthians 11:24 - 26). Those things weren't fun. Paul's point was he was independent of circumstances. He had inner peace, strength and joy whether he was imprisoned, suffered from poor health and had little finances or was free, in good health and had money.

Some of the cousins of discontent are dissatisfaction, greed, covetousness, jealousy, envy, continually striving for more, bitterness, resentment, complaining, grumbling, selfishness, and anxiety. Some other reasons people lack contentment is they don't get what they want when they want it and want how they want it.

Contentment. What it is

The background for the word contentment is “self-sufficient.” Followers of Jesus Christ look for sufficiency from another source.

Websters dictionary: “habitual satisfaction or mental ease and quietude to bring to the point where one is not disquieted or disturbed by desires even though not every wish is satisfied. To be satisfied with one's possessions, status or situation.” Chuck Swindoll: “feeling comfortable and secure with where you are and who you are” (Swindoll, Come Before Winter, P. 99).

Contentment isn't a natural quality. There's a process of learning. This is given twice in vv. 11 and 12 which means we “pay attention.”

It's like learning how to swim. Some kids take to it like fish. Others don't. When our kids took swimming lessons, the beginning instruction was outside of the pool. The teacher taught them how to move their arms and their legs, then how to do them at the same time. The second part was to get in the pool.

Some may be more naturally geared to being content. For others, not so much. We don't know if Paul had a natural bent toward being content. My guess is he didn't. Even if he had some tendency towards contentment, there's still a learning process for him and for us. Much of it comes as we're put in situations where contentment needs to be practiced.

By the time Paul wrote the book of Philippians, he'd known Jesus Christ as his Savior for over 25 years. He wrote this book while in a Roman prison waiting for hearing before the Emperor. It was a better prison than most as he was allowed to live in his own private house, yet he had guards.

As God directs Paul to write the letter, he remembers times when he had been well fed and he was content with that. There were times when he was hungry and he was content with that. There were times when he was well off and he was content with that. There are other times when Paul suffered from a lack of necessities and he could cope with that. He had not made food nor money his goal or his god. Circumstances weren't the determining factor about how he was going to believe, think or act.

Paul was grateful for the gifts he received from people to help him support his ministry. He was thankful for people. He gave credit to God. He prayed for those in his life. He didn't complain about what he didn't have.

Some of us may be more disposed to being content. It makes no difference as all of us need to learn more about what contentment means and how to incorporate it into our lives. We're all engaged in God's Life University. One of the main courses is "Learning to See God's Perspective." Though it's an entry level first semester course, as with most teachings in Life University, it's a recurring subject - required each semester. Covered topics include "God's overall plan and purpose", "Eternal values seminar", and "the position of the self as it correlates to the idea and practice of service to others, specifically, how to be selfless and not be selfish." The text is God's Word as we study the Bible individually, listen to messages, are and involved in group learning. We see how characters, including Jesus, were content or discontented. There's a math component as in counting our blessings and what God has done for us in the past. In the practicum part, we gain field experience as we face various situations.

The secret is revealed in v. 13. There are misconceptions of what being able to do everything means. Some feel that whatever our minds can conceive and believe we'll be able to achieve. However, though I may envision myself as an NBA center, it ain't gonna happen. That's part of the problem in our world today. People feel that whatever goes on in their mind is to be their guide.

Also, it doesn't mean we can do whatever we feel like as in sin since everything includes everything, so therefore we can sin as a way of doing everything through him. That doesn't make sense.

A proper understanding of doing everything includes everything that is pleasing to God, facing the challenges of life, controlling desires, overcoming sin. The Amplified Bible offers added words to the translation and an interpretation: "I can do all things [which He has called me to do] through Him who strengthens *and*

empowers me [to fulfill His purpose—I am self-sufficient in Christ’s sufficiency; I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses me with inner strength and confident peace.]”

Contentment is based on connection with Jesus Christ and drawing strength from him. Paul is crystal clear he didn’t derive strength and sufficiency from his own being. It came from outside of him. He knew the Lord would provide the strength and all he considered necessary. Paul placed his trust in the Lord. God was still on the throne.

The application of contentment

“Be content whatever the circumstances.” It isn't the position of the Stoics who blamed God for everything. Paul understood God's grace was sufficient for him and that his power is made perfect in weakness. Paul testified to this after he talked about the thorn he had and begged God to take away. The Lord didn’t but reminded his servant he was always with him (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Paul was content through difficulty - in shipwrecks, being beaten by people. He also was content when things were quite comfortable in settings where people loved him and cared for him.

According to The Life Application Study Bible: “Most people want to feel good and avoid discomfort or pain. We may not get all that we want. By trusting in Christ, our attitudes and appetites can change from wanting everything to accepting his provision and power to live for him” (Life Application Study Bible textual note on Philippians 4:19).

It isn’t wrong to seek a better job, ask for a raise, get a bigger house or a newer car. It all depends on whether we're pursuing wealth or the Lord. And if the Lord blesses us and if we are being generous, we can buy some new things. We make sure we’re not being possessed by our possessions.

Contentment is based on the confidence that a loving Heavenly Father cares about us and has greater things in store for us than anything we can experience in this existence. This helps us be satisfied and give thanks in our circumstances, whether they are positive or negative.

Biblical scholar A. W. Pink: “Contentment is the product of a heart resting in God. It is the soul’s enjoyment of the peace that passes all understanding. Contentment is the outcome of my will being brought into subjection to the divine will. It is the blessed assurance that God does all things well and is even now making all things work together for my ultimate good. Contentment is only possible as we maintain the attitude of accepting everything that enters our lives as coming from the hand of him who is too wise to err and too loving to cause one of his children a needless tear. Our final word is this: real contentment is only possible by being in the presence of the Lord Jesus. Only by cultivating intimacy with the One who has never discontent, only by daily fellowship with him who always delighted in the Father's will, will we learn the secret of contentment.”