

"Cultivating Contentment"

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My mother, who will be 90 years old in April, is someone who truly lives in the moment. She doesn't focus on the future, and, because of dementia, doesn't really remember much that happened five minutes ago. My mom, who, with some help lives very simply in her own house, is content and is never bored, because to her, time seems to go by very fast. Last year she told me, "More people should be like me. I am content because I don't worry about what will happen tomorrow and I cannot remember what happened yesterday."

Well, I think it is best that most people remember what happened yesterday. But I do think my mom is right that we should be more content. At least, I know I should be more content. Contentment does not show up on the traditional list of seven virtues, or in the nine fruits of the spirit list in Galatians 5. However, it is a very important quality for a Christian to have. It characterized the apostle Paul who says, **Philippians 4:12 I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation**, and then reminds us in **1 Timothy 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain**. This summer I read an article by a fellow named Blake Glosson that enabled me to think more clearly about contentment and I believe helped me to be more content.

This morning I want to share with you the things I am learning. Now, I did post this article on the Chisholm Baptist Church Family Facebook page six months ago, so if you read it, some of what I say may seem familiar. My hope is that God would use what I say to help each of us grow in contentment. Let's pause and pray that the Lord would cause that to happen.

Paul says, Philippians 4:12 that he "learned the secret of being content." We are not born with contentment. It is something we must learn. The Puritan, Jeremiah Burroughs, once wrote a book entitled, "The Rane of Jewel of Christian Contentment." Blake Glosson says, "Contentment is a rare jewel, but it is a rare jewel that any Christian can experiences, especially if we rid out lives of known killers of contentment." What are these killers that we need to combat? The book of Philippians points us to five, all happen to begin with the letter "C."

The **first** one is **Comparison**. When we are comparing ourselves to others, we are seldom content. Yet, it is such an easy trap in which to fall. That is especially true in our social media obsessed culture. On Facebook and other platforms, we read about other people who are getting promotions at work, going on exotic vacations, or buying a new ATV. Success in athletics and academics, or they just have beautiful, very photogenic grandchildren. These types of things can easily feed an envy that will poison our souls... unless we have learned to be content.

Paul explains his perspective in **Philippians 1:15-18 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry...out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. But what does it matter? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice**.

Folks, this is pretty remarkable. Paul rejoices that the gospel is being proclaimed, even if those doing the preaching have very bad motives. He certainly rejoices if those doing the preaching, are drawing bigger crowds, receiving larger offerings, or getting more publicity. Even though the other preachers were motivated by envy and rivalry, Paul is not going to fall into that trap. He is not going to compare himself to others. That enables him to rejoice and be content with the ministry to which God had called him.

C.S. Lewis once observed that most of us don't really want to be wealthy, successful, and good looking. Rather, we want to be wealthier, more successful, and better looking than others around us. But this kind of comparison is a dead end which always kills contentment. Even if you're the best-looking person in Chisholm, Minnesota, there will likely be someone in Hibbing who is better looking than you. And if you are the best-looking person in Minnesota, there may be someone better looking in Wisconsin. Comparison is a game that never ends and one you will never win.

If we want to find contentment, we have to get off the comparison treadmill. The best way to do

that, I believe, is to be like the apostle Paul, focus on what the Lord has called you to do. For me that involves being the pastor of Chisholm Baptist Church and serving the way the Lord desires. For you, it might be focusing on the three young individuals known as your children. It doesn't matter how another mom is raising her kids, you need to focus on being the best mom you can be, for those three children, at this time. When you do that there is no need to compare yourself to what someone else is doing, and it is more likely you will enjoy being content.

The **second** contentment killer is **Complaining**. In **Philippians 2:14** Paul says **Do everything without grumbling or complaining**. And **Philippians 4:16** he writes **in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God**.

Now it seems obvious that people who are content don't complain very often. Yet, I also believe that those who choose to not complain will be more content. All of us have experiences in life that are painful, disappointing and which cause us to long for something better. There is nothing wrong with those emotions. The question is what do we do with them? Do I turn away from the Lord in anger, or do I turn to Him for help? Do I decide God has failed me or is somehow no good? Or do I say, "Okay Lord, this is tough. Please help me understand how you intend to use it in my life."

Folks, contentment is not about having a peaceful, problem free life. It is not about living in some tranquil, serene setting where you can be oblivious to all the crazy stuff happening in the world. Remember Paul learned to be content in *any and every* situation.

He did not do this by being a positive thinker, ignoring unpleasant realities, focusing only on the good things in life. Rather he looked at everything, the good the bad, even the ugly, from the perspective of God's sovereign providence. Paul did not have some type of vague hope that things just would work out. He was confident God, **Ephesians 1:11 Works everything according to the purpose of His will** and that **Romans 8:28 That in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose**.

So rather than grumble and complain about situations he found unpleasant, Paul focused on how he might use whatever circumstances he faced to honor the Lord and serve other people. As long as he could do that, Paul was content. Yet, when we start grumbling, feeling sorry for ourselves, believing God has somehow let us down, we will never be content. Complaining will keep you from contentment.

The **third** contentment killer is **Contorting**. Yes, we are stretching a little bit to make it a "C" word. Yet, this point is both true and important. Contorting refers to trying to make something to be what it is not designed to be or do something it is not designed to do. This is something we as human beings often do.

I sometimes try to use a screwdriver handle to pound in a nail. The worst contorting, however, is when we try to treat something that is not God as a god. Paul refers to this in **Philippians 3:18-20 Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things**.

Food is a wonderful gift. The Lord wants us to enjoy it and be grateful for it. But it must never be worshipped. That is true whether you have an overflowing refrigerator or are not sure from where your next meal is coming. Remember, Jesus told Satan, **Matthew 4:4 "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."** If your stomach is your god, if you treat food or any earthly object as the most important thing, you have fallen into idolatry.

Tim Keller warns us that "Good things make the best idols, but they are horrible saviors." This is why contorting kills contentment. Any earthly thing or person that you make your ultimate hope, your savior, is going to let you down. It was never designed, never intended, to be that ultimate hope. It can never provide true purpose, unconditional love, real forgiveness or hope in the face of death. Only the Lord can do that. Anything else on which we rely will disappoint us and rob us of any contentment. There are many things we misuse and try to get more from than they can ever possibly give. Wealth and material things are obvious ones. They can never provide true happiness.

Yet, sometimes we treat a relationship as a god and savior. Some of you in this room may be unhappy with your spouse, and are discontent with life, because you expect more from that person than God intends. In fact, you are expecting things that only God can provide. Or it might be another family member or friend that you are treating as your “savior.” He or she will inevitably disappoint you. If we contort and try to make something or someone to be more than God intends it to be, we will never find true contentment.

The **fourth** contentment killer is **Complacency**, and its partner, Perfectionism. Some folks try to avoid contentment because they confuse it with complacency. How would you respond if asked, “Are you content with your prayer life? Are you content with how well you understand the Bible? Are you content with how many of your friends and family member are believers in Jesus?”

Most of us know there is always room for improvement in each of these aspects of our spiritual life, so we are inclined to say, “No, I am not content.” Yet, that is not really what the words mean. We need to remember the difference between contentment and complacency. I sometimes say, quoting Kraig Stolhammer, “We should always be content, but never complacent.” When we are complacent, we become stagnant. Gossen says, “Complacency is stagnancy without fulfillment, contentment is fulfillment without stagnancy.”

When it comes to spiritual growth there are ditches on each side of the road, one labeled “complacency,” the other side, “perfectionism.” Some folks think, “Hey, God loves and accepts me just the way I am. There is no reason for me to even try to grow in my Christian life. I am just fine the way I am.” That is complacency, a dangerous complacency that abuses God’s grace.

Other folks say, “Hey, it doesn’t matter how hard I work at it, I am never going to be the type of Christian I should be. There is no reason for me to even try to grow in my Christian life.” Both ditches keep us from growing spiritually. And both kill our contentment. We will miss out on the joy that comes from growing as a Christian and being secure in who we are as a child of God.

In **Philippians 3:12** Paul writes **Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.** The apostle is talking about something very important here. He says, I rest in my justification by faith. “Christ Jesus has made me his own.” His perfect righteousness is counted as mine. I am totally content knowing that is a truth that can never be changed. But I am not complacent, “I press on in the process of sanctification, growing to be more like Jesus, until one day I will experience that perfection that will come when I see Jesus face to face.” Always content, never complacent. That was Paul’s goal. It should be ours as well.

The **fifth** contentment killer is **Conceit**, and the sense of entitlement that comes when you think you are a notch about most people around you. This was the topic last Sunday, but we didn’t really spell out how self-righteousness, our feeling of moral superiority and confidence we are seldom wrong can destroy our contentment.

Contentment is full of gratitude, as you realize God has given you far more than you deserve. One of the puritans sat down to a very meager meal of a small loaf of bread and little mug of wine and prayed, “Father, I thank you for all the grace I received in Christ, plus these wonderful gifts as well.” Yet people full of conceit and entitlement are always convinced they should be getting more than they are. They think they deserve good things in life. Whatever struggles and troubles they encounter are almost always seen as someone else’s fault, either another person’s or God’s fault.

This is a common attitude among people who are not believers in Jesus. As we have noted, many folks don’t turn to the Lord Jesus because they are convinced they are good people, are doing just fine on their own, and don’t need any of that Jesus stuff. Yet, as we mentioned last week, Christian believers can fall into this trap of being self-righteous as well. In fact, the Pharisees remind us that religious people can take the prize when it comes to being conceited and feeling entitled. Over the years I have know a number of Christians, including some Baptists, who, despite their affection for the Hymn “Amazing Grace,” don’t see themselves as “wretches” whom the Lord has saved.

No, they think they are good people who, because of their good morals, hard work, and religious faithfulness, are somehow deserving of God's favor. And when they don't think they are experiencing that favor, they tend to be irritated. Folks, conceit leads to a lot of complaining and very little contentment.

How do we fight this conceit, especially when we see it in the mirror? **Philippians 2:3-8 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who...emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant...And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**

Folks, Jesus was the only person who deserved to be entitled, yet he gave up the riches that belonged to Him, so through that, His poverty, we might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9) Folks, two weeks ago Professor Timothee Davi was our harvest festival speaker. On Sunday afternoon he gave an outstanding message on Christian virtues. If you have not listened to it, you should go to our YouTube channel and do so. You can also find a link on the CBC Family Facebook page. And if you were here that afternoon, you might want to listen again.

Contentment is certainly a virtue we should want to cultivate in our lives, for the glory of God and our own joy. And I think Timothee's steps for developing virtue can be very helpful to us doing that. The first step involves contemplating the virtue. That is what we have been doing this morning. We've been thinking about contentment, and contemplating how certain attitudes and actions like comparing, complaining, contorting, complacency and conceit can kill our contentment and rob from the joy the Lord wants us to have.

So, friends I would encourage you to contemplate to what degree any of those contentment killers are in your life. Have you been comparing yourself to others? Do you find yourself complaining about situations or people around you? Are you contorting something or someone into being something more than God intended? Have you

fallen into the trap of complacency or maybe perfectionism? Or have you become conceited and started feeling entitled, thinking God owes you something?

If the answer to any of these questions is "Yes," then you should pray. Ask the Lord to help you to get rid of the contentment killer or killers from your life. Ask Him for wisdom on how you can get rid of them from your life. Prayerfully ponder that.

And then practice. Work on small little steps, small changes you can make that will lessen the comparison, complaining, contorting, complacency, or conceit in your life. Maybe you start by just keeping track of how often you are comparing yourself to someone else. Ask your spouse or another family member or friend to help you keep track of that. Maybe even fine yourself \$1 or \$.10 or \$10 every time you catch yourself comparing yourself to someone else. Give that money to a worthy Christian organization. Take time to remind yourself every morning that your goal is not to do what He has called someone else to do, but what He has called you to do, and then by God's grace, strive to do it.

Keep practicing. Then start taking big steps. And eventually, as Timothee said, by God's grace, contentment will become a habit in your life, it will begin to characterize who you are and how you live each day and enable you to grow in your love for God and other people. And that friends, is the goal of all virtues, and should be the goal of all believers in Jesus, including you.